THE ITINERARY
OF
LUDOVICO DI VARTHEMA
OF BOLOGNA
FROM 1502 TO 1508

EDITOR: N. M. PENZER, M.A., F.R.G.S.
THE ITINERARY

OF

Ludovico di Varthema of Bologna

from 1502 to 1508

AS

Translated from the Original Italian Edition

of 1510, by John Winter Jones, F.S.A.

in 1863 for the Hakluyt Society

WITH

A Discourse on Varthema

and his Travels in Southern Asia

by

SIR RICHARD CARNAC TEMPLE, BT.


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There are three points in the Eastern travels of the great Italian wanderer, Ludovico di Varthema, that give them an unusual interest. The first is their date between 1502 and 1508: that is to say, he was on his way over the East within four years of the opening of the sea-route to India by Vasco da Gama. Secondly, he travelled through the Arabian desert to Mecca and thence all over Yemen and Hadramaut, passing on to Hormuz and Persia as far as Shiraz, and afterwards all round the Indian coasts as far as Pulicat near Madras on the eastern part of it, including Ceylon in his journeys. From Pulicat he went across the Bay of Bengal to Bengal itself and Pegu, along the western coast of the Malay Peninsula to Mergui and Malacca and the Malay Archipelago, visiting Sumatra, Java, Banda, the Moluccas and "Borneo." Considering his period, it was an exceptionally hazardous and wonderful achievement. Thirdly, within fifty years of its accomplishment strong doubts were cast over the credibility of Varthema's accounts of it by another traveller of note, Garcia da Orta, a Spaniard in Portuguese employ. These doubts have ever since been expressed by scholar after scholar. For these reasons, Sir Richard Temple, who has had a long personal knowledge of much of the area traversed by Varthema, has examined his statements in detail, and has come to the conclusion that he has been maligned.

Another matter that has affected the value of Varthema's book on his travels is that it achieved a great success at once, passing from edition to edition in various languages. It had also a wide influence, as it preceded the accounts of Barbosa and other Portuguese travellers on their proceedings in India and the East. It was first published in Italian at Rome in 1510, and then in Latin in 1511, and from the Latin it was translated into delightful Elizabethan English by Richard Eden in 1577. But unfortunately it has not been possible to use Eden's book for the present edition, as the Latin rendering, and therefore his, varies greatly from the original Italian, and contains mistakes not to be found in Varthema's own work. Sir Richard Temple was therefore obliged
to set Eden's translation aside and adopt that of John Winter Jones made in 1863 from the original Italian edition of 1510.

This last translation was in the same year admirably edited for the Hakluyt Society by the great Arabic scholar, G. P. Badger, long resident at Aden, and the thanks of the present editor and publishers are due to that Society for the interest taken in their labours. But Badger's remarks are necessarily often out of date, and were made on much less information than is now available. So Sir Richard Temple, while using Badger's valuable notes as far as possible, has consequently gone his own way in remarking on Varthema's story.

Like many travellers of his date, he acquired a working knowledge of colloquial Arabic, deliberately setting himself to learn it, and he spent a year and a half on the West Coast of India in the neighbourhood of Calicut and Cochin as a factor of the Portuguese Vicerey, thus acquiring some acquaintance with Malayalam, the language of that region. He is fond of showing off his knowledge by giving numerous sentences in both Arabic and Malayalam, of course incorrectly in a haphazard Italian transliteration. As he has translated these sentences after a free fashion in every case, scholars in the above languages can make out the originals for themselves—Badger has given in correct form those that are quoted in Arabic—and so no attempt has been made in this edition to give the originals correctly in footnotes or otherwise. But the correct form of place and personal names and of individual words—and occasionally very brief explanations—have been added to the text in square brackets. No footnotes have been used, as it is hoped that the long "Discourse" at the commencement of the book will explain to the reader all the many difficulties in the text.

Certain geographical puzzles arise in perusing Varthema's pages. Among these is the term "the city of Banghilla," representing some town in Bengal. This has been used by other early writers, and has long been a source of scholarly dispute. However, as Varthema has in several other instances used the name of a country for a town in it which he visited—e.g. Coromandel (Coromandel) for Negapatam, and Tanaassari (Taaaserim) for Mergui, and so on—and as it is not of much consequence to decide in this volume which town it was in Bengal that he stayed at, the question of its identity has been left vague. But it has greatly exercised Badger, as it did Dames later on when editing Barbosa's Book. They both left long notes on it, and other scholars, European and Indian alike, have examined it at length without much practical result. Varthema also refers to "Capelian," another name that has roused controversy, but as without doubt it means the Ruby Mines District of Upper Burma, it has been left unsolved as a name. On the other hand, attempts have been made in the "Discourse" to settle such puzzles as the situation of Sarnau, Bornei, and "Eri." Other difficulties of a minor nature are numerous, but they have all been dealt with as they occur in the text.

Varthema's travels have naturally been discussed by many scholars, and their results have been considered in this edition of his book, but the works that have been principally used are, besides John Winter Jones's translation, the Amperceyle Society's reprint (1884) of Richard Eden's Navigation and Voyages of Lewis Westmacottus In the Year of our Lord 1503, G. P. Badger's edition for the Hakluyt Society of The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema, and Ch. Schefer's edition (1888) of J. Balarin de Racois's French translation "sous le roi Francois l'et" of Les Voyages de Ludovico di Varthema (Vol. Ix. of the Recueil de Voyages). Alberto Bacchi della Lega's edition, published at Bologna (1882), of Itinerario di Ludovico Varthema, nunemente posto in luce is a reprint without notes, published in Sceltum di Curiosità letterarie inedita o rare dal secolo XIII. al XVII.

Varthema's own division of his work into "books" and "chapters" is somewhat haphazard and confusing, so it has been ignored, and a straightforward arrangement with chapters has been substituted for the better convenience of the reader. But a list of his chapters has nevertheless been added for general information.

The Argoaut Press has been especially fortunate in again securing the valuable services of Sir Richard Temple, whose wide experience and personal knowledge of so much of the countries visited by Varthema greatly enhance the value of the present edition.

N. M. PENZER
VARTHEMA'S DIVISION OF HIS WORK
INTO BOOKS AND CHAPTERS

The First Chapter concerning Alexandria.
The Chapter concerning Cairo.
The Chapter concerning Aman and Menin.
The Chapter concerning Damascus.
The Second Chapter concerning the said Damascus.
The Chapter the Third concerning the Mamuleans in Damascus.

THE BOOK CONCERNING ARABIA DESERTA
The Chapter showing the route from Damascus to Mecca, wherein some Arabs are concerned. The Chapter concerning a mountain inhabited by Jews. The Chapter concerning where Mahomet and his companions were buried. The Chapter concerning the temple and sepulchre of Mahomet and his companions. The Chapter concerning the journey to go from Medina to Mecca. The Chapter showing how Mecca is constructed and why the Moors go to Mecca. The Chapter concerning the merchandize in Mecca. The Chapter concerning the pardoning in Mecca. The Chapter concerning the manner of the sacrifices in Mecca. The Chapter concerning the unicorn in the temple of Mecca, not very common in other places. The Chapter concerning some occurrences between Mecca and Zida, a port of Mecca. The Chapter concerning Zida, the port of Mecca, and of the Red Sea. The Chapter showing why the Red Sea is navigable.

THE SECOND BOOK OF ARABIA FELIX

VARTHEMA'S DIVISION OF HIS WORK

The Chapter concerning the Sultan of all the above-mentioned cities, and wherefore he is called by the name Sechamir. The Chapter concerning apes and some animals like lions, very hostile to man. Discourse touching some places in Ethiopia. The Chapter concerning Zela, a city of Ethiopia, and of the abundance of it, and concerning some animals of the said city, such as sheep and cow. The Chapter concerning Barba, an island of Ethiopia, and of its people.

THE BOOK CONCERNING PERSIA
The Chapter concerning Distoandierum, and Goa, and Giulfar, Lands of Meschet, a port of Persia. The Chapter concerningOrmus, a city and island of Persia, and how they get very large pearls at it by fishing. The Chapter concerning Eri in Casarata of Persia, and of its riches, and of the abundance of many things and especially of rhubarb. The Chapter concerning the river Eufra, which I believe to be the Euphrates. The Chapter concerning Sambragaste (as it is called), a very large city, like Cairo, and of the persecution by the Sohill.

THE FIRST BOOK CONCERNING INDIA
The Chapter concerning Combeia, a city of India, abounding in all things. The Chapter concerning the estate of the Sultan of the very noble city of Combeia. The Chapter concerning the manner of living and customs of the King of the Joghe. The Chapter concerning the city of Cevul, and its customs, and the bravery of its people. The Chapter concerning Dubbi, a city of India. The Chapter concerning Goga, an island of India, and the King of the same. The Chapter concerning Dacea, a very beautiful city of India, and of its many and various riches and jewels. The Chapter concerning the activity of the King in military affairs. The Chapter concerning Bathacala, a city of India, and of its fertility in many things, and especially in rice and sugar. The Chapter concerning Centacola, Onor and Mangoler, excellent districts of India. The Chapter concerning Canoner, a very great city in India. The Chapter concerning Bi negot, a very fertile city of Narsinga in India. The Chapter showing how elephants generate. The Chapter concerning Tornapatan, a city of India; and concerning Pandarani, a place one day distant; and concerning Capogolito, a similar district.

THE SECOND BOOK CONCERNING INDIA
The Chapter concerning Calicut, a very large city of India. The Chapter concerning the King of Calicut and the religion of the people. The Chapter concerning the manner of eating of the King of Calicut. The Chapter concerning the Brahmins, that is, the priests of Calicut.
X

VARTHAMA'S DIVISION OF HIS WORK

The Chapter concerning the pagans of Calicut, and of what classes they are.
The Chapter concerning the dress of the King and Queen and others of Calicut, and of their food.
The Chapter concerning the ceremonies which they perform after the death of the King.
The Chapter showing how the pagans sometimes exchange their wives.
The Chapter concerning the manner of living, and of the administration of justice among the pagans.
The Chapter concerning the mode of worship of the pagans.
The Chapter concerning the fighting of these people of Calicut.
The Chapter concerning the manner of navigating in Calicut.
The Chapter concerning the palace of the King of Calicut.
The Chapter concerning the spices which grow in that country of Calicut.
The Chapter concerning some fruits of Calicut.
The Chapter concerning the most fruitful trees in the world.
The Chapter concerning the practice they follow in growing rice.
The Chapter concerning the physicians who visit the sick in Calicut.
The Chapter concerning the bankers and money-changers.
The Chapter showing how the Polinar and Hiras feed their children.
The Chapter concerning the serpents, which are found in Calicut.
The Chapter concerning the lights of the King of Calicut.
The Chapter showing how a great number of people came to Calicut on the 31st of December to receive pardon.

THE THIRD BOOK CONCERNING INDIA

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The Chapter concerning Zulon, where jewels are produced.
The Chapter concerning Palkchett, a country of India.
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The Chapter concerning the ships which are used in Tarrassari.
The Chapter concerning the city of Baungella, and of its distance from Tarrassari.
The Chapter concerning some Christian merchants in Baungella.
The Chapter concerning Pego, a city of India.
The Chapter concerning the dress of the King of Pego above-mentioned.
The Chapter concerning the city of Melache, and the river Gua, otherwise Gange as I think, and of the inhumanity of the men.
The Chapter concerning the island of Sumatra, and concerning Pider, a city of Sumatra.

INTO BOOKS AND CHAPTERS

The Chapter concerning another sort of pepper, and concerning silk and benzoin, which are produced in the said city of Pider.
The Chapter concerning three sorts of aloes-wood.
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The Chapter concerning the island of Glava, of its faith, manner of living and customs, and the things which grow in the said island.
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The Chapter where, at mid-day, the sun casts a shadow in the island of Glava.

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The Chapter showing how I made myself a physician in Calicut.
The Chapter concerning the news of the ships of the Portuguese which came into Calicut.
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The Chapter concerning the flight from Calicut.
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THE ITINERARY
OF LUDOVICO DI VARTHHEMA IN SOUTHERN ASIA

DISCOURSE ON VARTHHEMA AND HIS TRAVELS

BY

SIR RICHARD GARNAC TEMPLE, Bt
DISCOURSE ON VARTHEMA AND HIS TRAVELS

As in the case of his contemporary the Portuguese Magellan, and as in that of the Englishman Drake, both of a later generation, the birthplace of Varthema is not exactly known. Indeed, as regards Varthema, it is not known at all, nor are any of the other facts about his personality so far discovered of any historical value. His name is variously spelt as Varthema and Barthema, both with and without the h, and all that can be said definitely about him is that he was an Italian gentleman and was eventually knighted by the Portuguese. Not even from his book can any clear information be gathered about his life before he started on his travels. He writes in one place, when he was in Calicut on the west coast of India, that “my father was a physician in my country,” but this was said in the course of conversation with a “Moorish” merchant, who had asked to see him when he was ill. Varthema proceeded to treat this unlucky man, as “that which I knew, I knew by the practice which he [my father] had taught me,” and in all truth his practice, as described by himself, was ignorant enough, but fortunately for him the patient recovered. It is therefore quite possible that the statement as to his father being a physician was untrue.

On another occasion, when in a very dangerous position, trying to escape from a caravan near Mecca, Varthema says to a “Moor,” or Muhammadan friend, “I am a Roman,” and when he added, “I was the most skilful maker of large mortars in the world” he was assisted to escape. Obviously, even less reliance can be placed on this statement, as the term Rûmî (Roman) would mean to a “Moor” any kind of European, most likely one from Asia Minor or Constantinople. On yet another occasion, however, when describing a sea-fight between Muhammadans and Portuguese off Cannanore, he incidentally remarks: “Truly I have found myself in some battles in my time, but I never saw any men more brave than the Portuguese.” Here he seems to be relating a fact, and it may be assumed that before he had started on his travels he had been a soldier by profession. Such an assumption is supported by the interest he displays in his book in military weapons and organization, and by the part he took during the Portuguese fights which occurred just before his return homewards from the west coast of India, as on that account the Viceroy, Dom Francisco d’Almeida, knighted him—an honour subsequently confirmed by Manoel of Portugal.

Lastly he remarks at Malacca: “If I had not had a wife and children I would have gone with them,” i.e. further east with some Oriental friends he had picked up in Bengal. This statement completes the facts
that have been ascertained about Varthema. It is not known where or when he died. He is usually described as “of Bologna,” because that is his own description of himself in the dedication of his book. But he has also been said to have been “of Rome,” because of the statement above quoted, or perhaps because the first edition of his book was printed in Rome.

THE BOOK

Varthema’s book was a great success. The copyright was secured to him for ten years by the Cardinal Chamberlain at the Court of Rome at the special mandate of Pope Julius II, and it soon began to run through various editions in several languages. The first was in Italian at Rome in 1510 and the second in 1517 also at Rome. The third was published in Venice in 1518 and the fourth in Milan in 1519. The fifth was also published in Milan in 1523 and the sixth and seventh in Venice in 1525, the latter being a close reprint of the third. It was produced in Latin in 1511 and other Latin editions followed in 1610 and 1611. A German edition appeared in 1515, followed by others in German in 1516, 1518, 1548, 1610 and 1615. In Spanish the book was printed in 1520, 1529, 1570 and 1576; in French in 1556; in Dutch in 1565, 1615 and 1655; and lastly in English there was a translation by Richard Eden in 1577, and it was noticed in Purchas His Pilgrimage in 1625. So Varthema reaped the reward which he hints that he hoped for—his name, though not his personal life, became widely known in Europe.

In 1863 John Winter Jones, Librarian of the British Museum, translated the original Italian edition of 1510 into English, and George Percy Badger, the well-known Orientalist and Arabic scholar, annotated the translation for the Hakluyt Society. This is the edition used for the text of the present volume. Since Badger’s edition, the great French scholar, Ch. Schefer, produced a valuable edition in French with many annotations in 1882. A translation into English was brought out in 1884, and another Italian edition was printed in 1885.

As early as 1550 García da Orta, a Spanish physician in Portuguese employ and writer on Indian drugs, threw doubts on the reliability of Varthema’s statements, which will be dealt with presently, and as these doubts have continued ever since on the faith of García’s statements, it is as well to say here something of him and his work. He was born about 1490 (or a few years later) at Elvas, near the Spanish frontier on the way to Badajos. He was patronized by the de Sousa family and studied at Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares in 1515-1525. From 1526 he was for some years a village doctor at Castello de Vide, near Elvas. In 1532 he was appointed lecturer in the Lisbon University. In 1534 he went out to India as physician with Martin Alfonso de Sousa, leaving the Tagus on 12 March, 1534, and reaching Goa in September. In India he became personally well acquainted with the countries bordering on the west coast. He was at Diu when it was ceded to the Portuguese and accompanied de Sousa from Kathiwār nearly to Ahmadābād. He acted as physician to Bahā’rī Nuṣāḥ Shāh at Ahmadābād. He accompanied de Sousa in a campaign from Cochín against the Zamorin, and in Geylon. This seems to be the extent of his personal knowledge of India and the East. He is believed to have died at Goa about 1570.

García had a house and a garden of many medicinal herbs at Goa and about 1554 he was granted a long lease of the Island of Bomia, which he sublets. After de Sousa left India, García was physician to the Viceroy Pedro Mascarenhas in 1554–1555. In 1558 he formed a friendship with the licentiate Dimas Bosque, who came to India with the Viceroy Constantino de Bragança, and it was probably owing to Bosque’s influence that his great work on the drugs and simples of India was undertaken. It was finished in the time of Francisco Coutinho (1560–1564), to whom it was dedicated, and was published at Goa on 10 April, 1563. The first edition, full of typographical errors, is very rare. A second was published at Goa. The title of the book was Colloquios dos simples e drogas de cousas medicinais da índia, composto pelo Doutor García da Orta. There was an epitome in Latin, in 1567, an Italian translation in 1582 and a French translation in 1619. An imperfect edition was printed by F. A. de Varhahen at Lisbon in 1872. In 1891 and again in 1895, the Conde de Felício published what is now the standard edition of García da Orta at Lisbon, and this was translated by Sir Clements Markham in 1895 and issued as Colloquies on the Simples and Drugs of India. This is the edition which has been used in this volume when discussing García’s animadversions on Varthema’s work.

ITS CREDIBILITY

It is right to commence the examination of Varthema’s travels with a note on the credibility of his statements, owing to the doubts just mentioned, which have been felt ever since the days of García da Orta, who wrote between 1538 and 1561, i.e. about 50 years after the date of Varthema’s book of travels. The importance of settling this doubt may be gauged from the following facts. If Varthema is entirely to be believed,
he was the first European to go to Mecca with a *hajj* (pilgrimage) caravan through the Arabian desert and to write an account of the pilgrimage, Schiltberger's travels there, c. 1455, being doubtful. He was also the first European to give an account of a journey to the Spice Islands beyond Java in the Malay Archipelago, and the first man to refer to the conditions of a voyage south of Java, and even south of Australia and Tasmania, long before those lands were discovered. The travels, which he describes as having been undertaken between 1562 and 1568—Vasco da Gama sighted Mount Delli on the south-west coast of India as late as 1498—may be divided into four parts: those in Arabia, those in Persia, those along the coasts of India and the Malay Peninsula, and those in the Malay Archipelago. No doubt has been cast on his accounts of Arabia and the west coast of India, but disbelief has been strongly expressed as to his having actually travelled, as he describes, in Persia, the east coast of India, and the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago. Two out of the three points in his travels of importance historically have, therefore, been held to be apocryphal—to the mind of the present writer wrongly.

The whole travel is clearly not only remarkable for the date—beginning of the sixteenth century—but also important, and Vartghina's accounts are straightforward. Further, despite obvious mistakes, they are wonderfully accurate. Yet he has been always set down as untrustworthy and a liar, because his *bome fidai* is doubted by the Spanish doctor of medicine, Garcia da Orta, who was himself another remarkable traveller not long after Vartghina. As already explained, Garcia went to India direct from Portugal to Goa in 1534 and is believed to have died at Goa about 1570. Between 1538 and 1541 he wrote a famous book on drugs, which was edited by the Conde de Escaulo in 1565 and translated by Sir Clements Markham in 1915. As above said, it is entitled *Colloquio dos simples e drogas de cousas medicinais da India*, composto pelo Doutor Garcia da Orta.

This book contains *inter alia* a colloquy (the ninth) between Garcia and one Ruano on *Benijy* (*Synax Benjou*). In the course of the discussion Ruano says: "I answer what a Milanese [Vartghina; 'Milanese' then meant any northern Italian] states... This author is Ludovico Vartmano, and he says that the best *benijy* of all comes from Malacca. Tell me whether this is true." To this Garcia replies: "You believe this Milanese, to whom I do not give credence... As for Ludovico Vartmano, I have spoken here and in Portugal with men who knew him in India, and said that he went about in the dress of a Moor, and that he returned to us and did penance for his sins. They told me that he never went beyond Calcut and Cochin, nor did we then frequent the seas which we now navigate. As for what he says about Sumatra, he never was there. It is true that the good kind [of *benijy*] is worth much in its own land. That which now comes is that which we call *Benijy de bonimas*. I did take this Ludovico, whom you quote, for a truthful man. But afterwards I looked into his book and found that he wrote in it what was false. For speaking ofOrmuz, he said that it was an island and one of the richest cities there could be, and that it had the softest water in the world. Yet in Ormuz there is no water but what is brackish, and all the provisions come from beyond the island, nor is it very good water that does come from outside. Also when this Ludovico speaks of Malacca he says that there is neither wood nor water. This is all false, for there is plenty of good water and abundance of wood. From this you will see how little he is to be trusted as regards anything in India. Then turning to what this Milanese says about the *Benijy* of Macedonia, I may say to you that it is possibly *storaux*. May God grant you salvation; for I have laboured to obtain knowledge, yet I have never heard of *storaux* coming from anywhere but Ethiopia, whence the myrrh also comes." It is on the faith of these statements that Vartghina has been put down as a liar and not worthy of credence. It will be seen from what follows that Garcia has made a mistake.

4 Vartghina returned to Italy in 1508, and at once published a quarto book, *Itinerario de Ludovico di Vartghina Bolognese*, nel anno MDX a di vi de Decembris. This work had a great success and was repeatedly re-issued and translated into many languages, amongst others at once into Latin by Madriganuus: *Ludovici Patritii Romani novum Itinerarium*, Mediolani octavo eodem. Juniar MDXI [25 Mai, 1511]. In 1577 Richard Eden produced in the most delightful English *The Navigation and Voyages of Lewis Wectonanoun*, translated out of Latine into English. Both the Latin and the English editions differ from the Italian, and contain mistakes which are not in Vartghina's own book. The most amusing error is perhaps the following. "The Thyrde Booke, Cap. 5. of Eden is entituled: 'Of Saint Bragant, a cite bigger than Babylon, and the kyng of Persia, named the Sophie.' But Vartghina's own book has "the chapter concerning Sambragante (as it is called) a very large city like Cairo, and of the persecution by the Sofia." The Sofia was Shah Isma'il as-Safi, the founder of the Safavi (Sophie, Sofia) dynasty of Persia, but the amusing mistake is in "Saint Bragant." Vartghina's Sambragante is a natural error for Samarkand, through Sambrakand. This the Latin translator improved by printing it "Sam Bragant," a term which Eden translated as "Saint Bragant," thus introducing a new Saint to the Calendar.