

Activity 7. Travels of Rabban Bar Sauma

Source: http://www.nestorian.org/history_of_rabban_bar_sawma_1.html, accessed June 7, 2010

Background: Rabban Bar Sauma (1220–1294) was an ethnic Turk and Christian Monk who traveled from China to Europe prior to the travels of Marco Polo in the service of the Chinese emperor. According to his journals, Rabban Bar Sauma met with the Roman Catholic Pope as well as the Kings of England and France.

Instructions: Read the edited excerpts from the journal written by Rabban Bar Sauma. Imagine you accompanied him on this trip. Write a letter to the Emperor of China describing what you saw and learned about the mysterious west. Learn more about Rabban Bar Sauma on the Internet and create a map illustrating his travels.

1. Rabban Bar Sauma set out on his journey with a number of excellent men from among the priests and deacons. He arrived at the territory of the Romans [Christians] on the borders of the Black Sea. After some days he arrived at the great city of Constantinople. Before they went into it he sent two young men to the Royal gate to make known there that an ambassador of King Arghon of Mongolia had come. Then the king commanded certain people to go forth to meet them, and to bring them in with pomp and honor.
2. Rabban Sauma landed at Naples; the name of its king was Charles II. The King of Aragon [Spain] conquered King Charles II and slew twelve thousand of his men and sunk their ships in the sea. Rabban Sauma and his companions sat upon the roof of the mansion in which they lived, and they admired the way in which the Franks waged war for they attacked none of the people except those who were actually combatants.
3. They went to the country of Paris to King Philippe IV. The king sent out a large company of men to meet them, and they brought them into the city with great honor and ceremony. The territories of the French king were in extent more than a month's journey.
4. They went forth from Paris, to go to the king of England at the city of Bordeaux. The people made haste and went to the king and informed him of their arrival and the king welcomed them gladly, and the people introduced them into his presence. King Edward gave us many gifts and money for the expenses of the road.
5. The Pope sent a messenger to Rabban Sauma and his companions bidding them to go to him. They set out for Rome and arrived there in fifteen days. When they arrived straightway Rabban Sauma went into the presence of Mar Papa, who was seated on his throne. And he drew nigh to the Pope, bowing down to the ground as he did so, and he kissed his feet and his hands, and he withdrew walking backwards, with his hands clasped on his breast. The Pope gave Rabban Sauma a small piece of the apparel of our Lord Christ, and a piece of the cape of my Lady Mary, and some small fragments of the bodies of the saints that were there.