MARCO POLO'S DESCRIPTION OF QUINSAI 1)

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Marco Polo was the son of a Venetian merchant, and with his father and uncle he spent the last quarter of the thirteenth century travelling or resident in Asia and two thirds of that time in China. In 1298, after his return to Europe, he caused to be written his famous book *Le Divisiment du Monde*. Of the 232 chapters of the book the longest is wholly devoted to the Chinese city of Quinsai, which also occupies a second much shorter chapter and part of a third, altogether about a twenty-fifth part of the whole book.

Quinsai has been correctly identified since the days of Martini (c. 1650) with Hang-chou 2), capital of Chê-chiang province and from 1139 till 1276 the makeshift but very splendid metropolis of the Southern Sung dynasty. When I say splendid, I have

1) A lecture given in London on 20 January 1936, in connexion with the International Exhibition of Chinese Art held in Burlington House.

2) There can be no doubt that Hang-chou is the place intended, but it is more difficult to be sure of the actual words which Quinsai was intended to transcribe. When Ramusio (writing c. 1557) says that the three maritime provinces of China north of Canton were Manzi, Zanton (Shantung), and Quinsai, and that the last was still the capital, he seems to imply that the Portuguese had already identified Quinsai as the transcription of *Ching shih* (*the capital*), an identification which long held the field unchallenged but has recently been disputed in favour either of Hang-chou itself or of *Hsing tsai*. But the question is unimportant for our present purpose.

T'oung Pao, XXXIII
Plan of Qutnai or Li-an from the Li an shih c. 1274 (ed. 1897)