Marco Polo
Mosaic Palazzo Tursi

Marco Polo and His Travels

"When a man is riding through this desert by night and for some reason -falling asleep or anything else -he gets separated from his companions and wants to rejoin them, he hears spirit voices talking to him as if they were his companions, sometimes even calling him by name. Often these voices lure him away from the path and he never finds it again, and many travelers have got lost and died because of this. Sometimes in the night travelers hear a noise like the clatter of a great company of riders away from the road; if they believe that these are some of their own company and head for the noise, they find themselves in deep trouble when daylight comes and they realize their mistake. There were some who, in crossing the desert, have been a host of men coming towards them and, suspecting that they were robbers, returning, they have gone hopelessly astray....Even by daylight men hear these spirit voices, and often you fancy you are listening to the strains of many instruments, especially drums, and the clash of arms. For this reason bands of travelers make a point of keeping very close together. Before they go to sleep they set up a sign pointing in the direction in which they have to travel, and round the necks of all their beasts they fasten little bells, so that by listening to the sound they may prevent them from straying off the path."

---- Marco Polo, *Travels*

Marco Polo (1254-1324), is probably the most famous Westerner traveled on the Silk Road. He excelled all the other travelers in his determination, his writing, and his influence. His journey through Asia lasted 24 years. He reached further than any of his predecessors, beyond Mongolia to China. He became a confidant of Kublai Khan (1214-1294). He traveled the whole of China and returned to tell the tale, which became the greatest travelogue.

The Polo Brothers

In 1260 two Venetian merchants arrived at Sudak, the Crimean port. The brothers Maffeo and Niccilo Polo went on to Surai, on the Volga river, where they traded for a year. Shortly after a civil war broke out between Barka and his cousin Hulagu, which made it impossible for the Polos to return with the same route as they came. They therefore decide to make a wide detour to the east to avoid the war and found themselves stranded for 3 years at Bukhara.

The marooned Polo brothers were abruptly rescued in Bukhara by the arrival of a VIP emissary from Hulagu Khan in the West. The Mongol ambassador persuaded the brothers that the Great Khan would be delighted to meet them for he had never seen any Latin and very much wanted to meet one. So they journeyed eastward. They left Bukhara, Samarkand, Kashgar, then came the murderous obstacle of the Gobi desert. Through the northern route they reached Turfan and Hami, then headed south-east to Dunhuang. Along the Hexi Corridor, they finally reached the new capital of the Great Khan, Bejing in 1266.

The Great Khan, Mangu's brother, Kublai, was indeed hospitable. He had set up his court at Beijing, which was not a Mongol encampment but an impressive city built by Kublai as his new capital after the Mongols took over China in 1264 and established Yuan dynasty (1264-1368). Kublai asked them all about their part of the world, the Pope and the Roman church. Niccolo and

Matteo, who spoke Turkic dialects perfectly, answered truthfully and clearly. The Polo brothers were well received in the Great Khan's capital.

One year later, the Great Khan sent them on their way with a letter in Turki addressed to Pope Clement IV asking the Pope to send him 100 learned men to teach his people about Christianity and Western science. He also asked the Pope to procure oil from the lamp at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

To make sure the brothers would be given every assistance on their travels, Kublai Khan presented them with a golden tablet (or *paiza* in Chinese, *gerege* in Mongolian) a foot long and three inches wide and inscribed with the words: "By the strength of the eternal Heaven, holy be the Khan's name. Let him that pays him not reverence be killed." The golden tablet was the special VIP passport, authorizing the travelers to receive throughout the Great Khan's dominions such horses, lodging, food and guides as they required. It took the Polos three full years to return home, in April 1269.

Although the Polo brothers blazed a trail of their own on their first journey to the East, they were not the first Europeans to visit the Mongols on their home ground. Before them Giovanni di Piano Carpini in 1245 and Guillaume de Rubrouck in 1253 had made the dangerously journey to Karakorum and returned safely; however the Polos traveled farther than Carpini and Rubrouck and reached China.

Marco Polo's Birth and Growing Up

According to one authority, the Polo family were great nobles originating on the coast of Dalmatia. Niccolo and Maffeo had established a trading outpost on the island of Curzola, off the coast of Dalmatia; it is not certain whether Marco Polo was born there or in Venice in 1254. The place Marco Polo grew up, Venice, was the center for commerce in the Mediterranean. Marco had the usual education of a young gentleman of his time. He had learned much of the classical authors, understood the texts of the Bible, and knew the basic theology of the Latin Church. He had a sound knowledge of commercial French as well as Italian. From his later history we can be sure of his interest in natural resources, in the ways of people, as well as strange and interesting plants and animals.

Marco Polo was only 6 years old when his father and uncle set out eastward on their first trip to Cathay (China). He was by then 15 years old when his father and his uncle returned to Venice and his mother had already passed away. He remained in Venice with his father and uncle for two more years and then three of them embarked the most couragous journey to Cathay the second time.

The Long and Difficult Journey to Cathay

At the end of year 1271, receiving letters and valuable gifts for the Great Khan from the new Pope Tedaldo (Gregory x), the Polos once more set out from Venice on their journey to the east. They took with them 17-year-old Marco Polo and two friars. The two friars hastily turned back after reaching a war zone, but the Polos carried on. They passed through Armenia, Persia, and Afghanistan, over the Pamirs, and all along the Silk Road to China.

Avoiding to travel the same route the Polos did 10 years ago, they made a wide swing to the north, first arriving to the southern Caucasus and the kingdom of Georgia. Then they journeyed along the regions parallel to the western shores of the Caspian Sea, reaching Tabriz and made their way south to Hormuz on the Persian Gulf. They intended to take the sea route to the Chinese port. From Hormuz, however, finding the ships "wretched affairs....only stitched together with twine made from the husk of the Indian nut", they decided to go overland to Cathay and continued eastwards. From Homurz to Kerman, passing Herat, Balkh, they arrived at Badakhshan, where Marco Polo convalesced from an illness and stayed there for a year. On the move again, they found themselves on "the highest place in the world, the Pamirs", with its name appeared in the history for the first time.

When the Polos arrived at the Taklamakan desert (or Taim Basin), this time they skirted around the desert on the southern route, passing through Yarkand, Khotan, Cherchen, and Lop-Nor. Marco's keen eye picked out the most notable peculiarities of each. At Yarkand, he described that the locals were extremely prone to goiter, which Marco blamed on the local drinking water. In the rivers of Pem province were found "stones called jasper and chalcedony in plenty" - a reference to jade. At Pem, *"when a woman's husband leaves her to go on a journey of more than 20 days, as soon as he has left, she takes another husband, and this she is fully entitled to do by local usage. And the men, wherever they go, take wives in the same way."* Cherchen was also a noted jade source.

It is the Gobi desert where Marco Polo left us the feeling of awe for the vastness of desert and its effects on those hardy enough to penetrate it: "*This desert is reported to be so long that it would take a year to go from end to end; and at the narrowest point it takes a month to cross it. It consists entirely of mountains and sands and valleys. There is nothing at all to eat."* Despite the dangers encountered during the Gobi crossing, Marco's account suggests that the route was safe and well established during Mongol's reign. After they left Gobi, the first major city they passed was Suchow (Dunhuang), in Tangut province, where Marco stayed for a year. Marco also noted the center of the asbestos industry in Uighuristan, with its capital Karakhoja; he added that the way to clean asbestos cloth was to throw it into a fire, and that a specimen was brought back from Cathay by the Polos and presented to the Pope.

The fact that Marco was not a historian did not stop him offering a long history about the Mongols. He provided a detailed account of the rise of Mongol and Great Khan's life and empire. He described the ceremonial of a Great Khan's funeral - anyone unfortunate enough to encounter the funeral cortege was put to death to serve their lord in the next world, Mangu Khan's corpse scoring over twenty thousand victims. He told of life on the steppes, of the felt-covered yurt drawn by oxen and camels, and of the household customs. What impressed Marco most was the way in which the women got on with the lion's share of the work: "*the men do not bother themselves about anything but hunting and warfare and falconry."* In term of marriage, Marco described that the Mongols practiced polygamy. A Mongol man could take as many wives as he liked. On the death of the head of the house the eldest son married his father's wives, but not his own mother. A man could also take on his brother's wives if they were widowed. Marco rounded off his account of Mongol's home life by mentioning that alcoholic standby which had impressed Rubrouck before him: *"They drink mare's milk subjected to a process that makes it like white wine and very good to drink. It is called koumiss"*

Marco's account of the Mongol's life is particularly interesting when compared to the tale of many wonders of Chinese civilization which he was soon to see for himself. Kublai Khan, though ruling with all the spender of an Emperor of China, never forgot where he had come from: it is said that he had had seeds of steppe grass sown in the courtyard of the Imperial Palace so that he could always be reminded of his Mongol homeland. During his long stay in Cathay and Marco had many conversations with Kublai, Marco must have come to appreciate the Great Khan's awareness of his Mongol origins, and the detail in which the Mongols are described in his book suggests that he was moved to make a close study of their ways.

Finally the long journey was nearly over and the Great Khan had been told of their approach. He sent out a royal escort to bring the travellers to his presence. In May 1275 the Polos arrived to the original capital of Kublai Khan at Shang-tu (then the summer residence), subsequently his winter palace at his capital, Cambaluc (Beijing).

By then it had been 3 and half years since they left Venice and they had traveled total of 5600 miles on the journey. Marco recalled it in detail on the greatest moment when he first met the Great Khan:

" They knelt before him and made obeisance with the utmost humility. The Great Khan bade them rise and received them honorably and entertained them with good cheer. He asked many questions about their condition and how they fared after their departure. The brothers assured him that they had indeed fared well, since they found him well and flourishing. Then they presented the privileges and letters which the Pope had sent, with which he was greatly pleased, and handed over the holy oil, which he received with joy and prized very highly. When the Great Khan saw Marco, who was then a young stripling, he asked who he was. 'Sir' said Messer Niccolo, 'he is my son and your liege man.' 'He is hearty welcome,' said the Khan. What need to make a long story of it? Great indeed were the mirth and merry-making with which the Great khan and all his Court welcomed the arrival of these emissaries. And they were well served and attended to in all their needs. They stayed at Court and had a place of honor above the other barons."

Years Serviced in Khan's Court

Marco, a gifted linguist and master of four languages, became a favorite with the khan and was appointed to high posts in his administration. He served at the Khan's court and was sent on a number of special missions in China, Burma and India. Many places which Marco saw were not seen again by Europeans until last century. Marco went on great length to describe Kublia's capital, ceremonies, hunting and public assistance, and they were all to be found on a much smaller scale in Europe. Marco Polo fell in love with the capital, which later became part of Beijing, then called Cambaluc or Khanbalig, meant 'city of the Khan.' This new city, built because astrologers predicted rebellion in the old one, was described as the most magnificent city in the world. He marveled the summer palace in particular. He described "the greatest palace that ever was". The walls were covered with gold and silver and the Hall was so large that it could easily dine 6,000 people. The palace was made of cane supported by 200 silk cords, which could be taken to pieces and transported easily when the Emperor moved. There too, the Khan kept a stud of 10,000 speckless white horses, whose milk was reserved for his family and for a tribe which had won a victory for Genghis Khan." fine marble Palace, the rooms of which are all gilt and painted with figures of men and beasts....all executed with such exquisite art that you regard

them with delight and astonishment." This description later inspired the English poet Coleridge to write his famous poem about Kublai Khan's "stately pleasure-dome" in Xanadu (or Shang-du).

However there were some phenomena which were totally new to him. The first we have already met, asbestos, but the other three beggared his imagination, and they were paper currency, coal and the imperial post.

The idea of paper substituting gold and silver was a total surprise even to the merchantile Polos. Marco attributed the success of paper money to Kublai stature as a ruler. *"With these pieces of paper they can buy anything and pay for anything. And I can tell you that the papers that reckon as ten bezants do not weight one."* Marco's expressions of wonder at "stones that burn like logs" show us how ignorant even a man of a leading Mediterranean sea-power could be in the 13th century. Coal was by no means unknown in Europe but was new to Marco:

"It is true that they have plenty of firewood, too. But the population is so enormous and there are so many bath-houses and baths constantly being heated, that it would be impossible to supply enough firewood, since there is no one who does not visit a bath-house at least 3 times a week and take a bath - in winter every day, if he can manage it. Every man of rank or means has his own bathroom in his house....so these stones, being very plentiful and very cheap, effect a great saving of wood."

Marco was equally impressed with the efficient communication system in the Mongol world. There were three main grades of dispatch, which may be rendered in modern terms as 'second class', 'first class', and 'On His Imperial Majesty's Service: Top Priority'. 'Second class' messages were carried by foot-runners, who had relay-stations three miles apart. Each messenger wore a special belt hung with small bells to announce his approach and ensure that his relief was out on the road and ready for a smooth takeover. This system enabled a message to cover the distance of a normal ten-day journey in 24 hours. At each three miles station a log was kept on the flow of messages and all the routes were patrolled by inspectors. 'First class' business was conveyed on horseback, with relay-stages of 25 miles. But the really important business of Kublai empire was carried by non-stop dispatch-riders carrying the special tablet with the sign of the gerfalcon. At the approach to each post-house the messenger would sound his horn; the ostlers would bring out a ready-saddled fresh horse, the messenger would transfer to it and gallop straight off. Marco affirmed that those courier horsemen could travel 250 or 300 miles in a day.

Marco Polo traveled a great deal in China. He was amazed with China's enormous power, great wealth, and complex social structure. China under the Yuan (The Mongol Empire) dynasty was a huge empire whose internal economy dwarfed that of Europe. He reported that iron manufacture was around 125,000 tons a year (a level not reached in Europe before the 18th century) and salt production was on a prodigious scale: 30,000 tons a year in one province alone. A canal-based transportation system linked China's huge cities and markets in a vast internal communication network in which paper money and credit facilities were highly developed. The citizens could purchase paperback books with paper money, eat rice from fine porcelain bowls and wear silk garments, lived in prosperous city that no European town could match.

Kublai Khan appointed Marco Polo as an official of the Privy Council in 1277 and for 3 years he was a tax inspector in Yangzhou, a city on the Grand Canal, northeast of Nanking. He also visited Karakorum and part of Siberia. Meanwhile his father and uncle took part in the assault on

the town of Siang Yang Fou, for which they designed and constructed siege engines. He frequently visited Hangzhou, another city very near Yangzhou. At one time Hangzhou was the capital of the Song dynasty and had a beautiful lakes and many canals, like Marco's hometown, Venice. Marco fell in love with it.

Coming Home

The Polos stayed in Khan's court for 17 years, acquiring great wealth in jewels and gold. They were anxious to be on the move since they feared that if Kublai - now in his late seventies - were to die, they might not be able to get their considerable fortune out of the country. The Kublai Khan reluctantly agreed to let them return after they escorted a Mongol princess Kokachin to marry to a Persian prince, Arghun.

Marco did not provide full account of his long journey home. The sea journey took 2 years during which 600 passengers and crewed died. Marco did not give much clue as to what went wrong on the trip, but there are some theories. Some think they may have died from scurvy, cholera or by drowning; others suggest the losses were caused by the hostile natives and pirate attacks. This dreadful sea voyage passed through the South China Sea to Sumatra and the Indian Ocean, and finally docked at Hormuz. There they learned that Arghun had died two years previously so the princess married to his son, prince Ghazan, instead. In Persia they also learned of the death of Kublai Khan. However his protection outlived him, for it was only by showing his golden tablet of authority that they were able to travel safely through the bandit-ridden interior. Marco admitted that the passports of golden tablets were powerful:

"Throughout his dominions the Polos were supplied with horses and provisions and everything needful.....I assure you for a fact that on many occasions they were given two hundred horsemen, sometimes more and sometimes less, according to the number needed to escort them and ensure their safe passage from one district to another."

From Trebizond on the Black Sea coast they went by sea, by way of Constantinople, to Venice, arriving home in the winter of 1295.

The Book, Life in Venice and Controversies

Three years after Marco returned to Venice, he commanded a galley in a war against the rival city of Genoa. He was captured during the fighting and spent a year in a Genoese prison - where one of his fellow-prisoners was a writer of romances named Rustichello of Pisa. It was only when prompted by Rustichello that Marco Polo dictated the story of his travels, known in his time as *The Description of the World* or *The Travels of Marco Polo*. His account of the wealth of Cathay (China), the might of the Mongol empire, and the exotic customs of India and Africa made his book the bestseller soon after. The book became one of the most popular books in medieval Europe and the impact of his book on the contemporary Europe was tremendous. It was known as *Il Milione,* The Million Lies, and Marco earned the nickname of Marco Milione because few believed that his stories were true and most Europeans dismissed the book as mere fable.

In the summer of 1299 a peace was concluded between Venice and Genoa, and after a year of captivity, Marco Polo was released from the prison and returned to Venice. He was married to Donata Badoer and had three daughters. He remained in Venice until his death in 1324, aged 70.

At his deathbed, he left the famous epitaph for the world: "I have only told the half of what I saw!" In Marco's will, he left his wife and three daughters substantial amount of money, though not an enormous fortune as Marco boasted. He also mentioned his servant, Peter, who came from the Mongols, was to set free. We also learned that 30 years after his return home, Marco still owned a quantity of cloths, valuable pieces, coverings, brocades of silk and gold, exactly like those mentioned several times in his book, together with other precious objects. Among them there was "golden tablet of command" that had been given him by the Great Khan on his departure from the Mongol capital.

Many people took his accounts with a grain of salt and some skeptics question the authenticity of his account. Many of his stories have been considered as fairytales: the strange oil in Baku and the monstrous birds which dropped elephants from a height and devoured their broken carcasses. His Travels made no mention about the Great Wall. While traveled extensively in China, Marco Polo never learned the Chinese language nor mentioned a number of articles which are part of everyday life, such as women's foot-binding, calligraphy, or tea. In additional, Marco Polo's name was never occurred in the Annals of the Empire (Yuan Shih), which recorded the names of foreign visitors far less important and illustrious than the three Venetians. So did Marco Polo ever go to China?

Contribution

Fiction or not, his Travels has captured readers through the centuries. Manuscript editions of his work ran into the hundreds within a century after his death. The book was recognized as the most important account of the world outside Europe that was available at the time. Today there are more than 80 manuscript copies in various versions and several languages around the world.

We see that Marco Polo was in every way a man of his time. He was quite capable of comprehending cultures completely alien in spirit to his own. Traversing thousands of miles, on horseback mostly, through uncharted deserts, over steep mountain passes, exposed to extreme weathers, to wild animals and very uncivilized tribesmen, Marco's book has become the most influential travelogue on the Silk Road ever written in a European language, and it paved the way for t he arrivals of thousands of Westerners in the centuries to come.

Today there are a school of experts conducting research and authentication of Marco Polo and his Travels. Much of what he wrote, which regarded with suspicion at medieval time was, confirmed by travelers of the 18th and 19th centuries. Marco Polo is receiving deeper respect than before because these marvelous characters and countries he described did actually exist. What's more interesting is that his book becomes great value to Chinese historians, as it helps them understand better some of the most important events of the 13th century, such as the siege of Hsiangyang, the massacre of Ch'angchou, and the attempted conquests of Japan. The extant Chinese sources on these events are not as comprehensive as Marco's book.

Although Marco Polo received little recognition from the geographers of his time, some of the information in his book was incorporated in some important maps of the later Middle Ages, such as the Catalan World Map of 1375, and in the next century it was read with great interest by Henry the Navigator and by Columbus. His system of measuring distances by days' journey has turned out for later generations of explorers to be remarkably accurate. According to Henry Yule, the great geographer: "He was the first traveler to trace a route across the whole longitude of

Asia, naming and describing kingdom after kingdom.....". Today topographers have called his work the precursor of scientific geography.

However Marco Polo's best achievement is best said with his own words in his own book:

" I believe it was God's will that we should come back, so that men might know the things that are in the world, since, as we have said in the first chapter of this book, no other man, Christian or Saracen, Mongol or pagan, has explored so much of the world as Messer Marco, son of Messer Niccolo Polo, great and noble citizen of the city of Venice."

Silkroad foundation 1997-2000

Illuminations on the Manuscripts of Rusticien de Pise (Rustichello da Pisa)

Patricia M. Gathercole *Italica*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Dec., 1967), pp. 400-408 Published by: American Association of Teachers of Italian

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Cycnos | Volume 24 n°1 *Vladimir Nabokov, Annotating vs Interpreting Nabokov-*

Monica Manolescu :

“Verbal Adventures in the Inky Jungle”: Marco Polo and John Mandeville in Vladimir Nabokov’s *The Gift*

Abstract

This paper seeks to examine a particular facet of Nabokov’s authorial presence, namely the kinship between the figures of the author and the explorer. The act of exploration emerges as a powerful topos in Nabokov’s fiction and drama, generally triggered by the fascination for the blank spot that still awaits a name. Mirroring the foundational gesture of the explorer, the author draws the cartography of a new fictional world and endows it with a nominal identity.

I would like to argue that one of the possible sources for the unstable pronominal behavior typical of *The Gift* can be found in Marco Polo’s *Description of the World*, a text produced jointly by Marco Polo and a professional scribe, Rusticello di Pisa. John Mandeville’s *Travels*, with their source appropriation and mystification, also seem to provide a relevant textual model.

Texte intégral

1 This paper deals with the place and role of Marco Polo and John Mandeville in Nabokov’s last Russian novel, *The Gift*, and with the literary models they seem to provide for the novel’s protagonist, Fyodor Godounov-Cherdyntsev. The prudent verb “seem” in the previous sentence renders the idea of a putative source on which this paper would like to focus, together with the difficulty of talking about something that only seems to exist, but in the existence of which the Nabokovian critic strongly, fiercely wants to believe. Starting from my personal intertextual explorations and speculations related mainly to the figure of Marco Polo and, secondarily, Mandeville in *The Gift*, I would like to address a more general question having to do with the ways in which critical discourse is tempted to move on from annotation to interpretation when it investigates Nabokov’s intertextual practices. This is of course a general question in literary studies, famously discussed by Umberto Eco in *The Limits of Interpretation*, and it is always a fruitful question: how far can the reader stray from a visible intertext in order to establish more subtle, complex and ultimately far-fetched links between the two texts? How far can one go once one has clutched the inviolable shade of an intertext (as Kinbote puts it, quoting Matthew Arnold), an intertext in which one sees not “flimsy nonsense, but a web of sense” (Nabokov, *Pale Fire* 63)?

2 In the case of Nabokov’s fiction, critical discourse has sometimes started from details (chronological, intertextual or other) in order to build wholescale interpretations.1 “The detail is all”, so Nabokov used to proclaim, and the details in his texts are a good point to start a discussion on annotation and interpretation because of the patterns they form, because of the constellations of meaning they build. To the (re)reader, patterns of details may become mirages

leading him astray, but the detour they create is an exciting one because of the opening effects it creates, because of the new light it sheds on the text. My discussion of Marco Polo and Mandeville in *The Gift* is precisely an example of such a pursuit of mirages. However, mirages have an intrinsic beauty and there is always a great deal of enthusiasm involved in literary research and in the discovery of landmarks, of signs leading to Nabokov's sources and to the ways he used sources. This paper is both a celebration of intertextual investigations and a convoluted question: to what extent should one trust one's intuition of patterns of echoing relations between Nabokov's texts and the texts he alludes to without losing what Eco calls "hermeneutic common sense" (Eco 133), that sensible faculty which keeps the reader or critic on the right track, if such a thing exists?

3 Nabokov's interest in explorers and naturalists, particularly in *The Gift*, has been studied in great detail by Dieter E. Zimmer and Sabine Hartmann in a paper published in *Nabokov Studies* in 2003, which uncovers an impressive amount of intertextual references present in chapter 2 of *The Gift*, the chapter which deals with Fyodor's abortive biography of his famous father (Hartmann and Zimmer, "The Amazing Music of Truth"). Dieter E. Zimmer has also recently published a beautiful book on the Asian travels in *The Gift* (Zimmer, *Nabokov reist im Traum in das Innere Asiens*). Thus, the dense structure of references and allusions that Fyodor builds when talking about his father and appropriating his travels has become transparent, with whole quotes and episodes being traced back to famous or obscure sources.

4 Nabokov's fascination with geographical exploration is closely linked to his proficiency as an entomologist longing, like Pilgram in "The Aurelian", to stand "waist-deep in lush grass" and "net the rarest butterflies of distant countries" (Nabokov, "The Aurelian" 252). In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov refers to "the terra-incognita blanks map makers of old used to call 'sleeping beauties'" (Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* 136). Undiscovered and unnamed spaces seen as sleeping beauties await the kiss of naming, of representation, of writing. It is through this magic encounter that fairy tales are born, and for Nabokov great novels are great fairy tales. The sleeping beauties attract not only the naturalist, but also the writer, for whom the discovery of a new world is, essentially, the invention of this new world. Writing and exploration are inseparable, since their common goal is to name the nameless:

The writer is the first man to map it [*the new world of the book*] and to name the natural objects it contains. Those berries there are edible. That speckled creature that bolted across my path might be tamed. That lake between those trees will be called lake Opal or, more artistically, Dishwater Lake. That mist is a mountain – and that mountain must be conquered. Up a trackless slope climbs the master artist, and at the top, on a windy ridge, whom do you think he meets? The panting and happy reader, and there they spontaneously embrace and are linked forever if the book lasts forever. (Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature* 2)

5 In chapter 2 of *The Gift*, the naturalist-explorer and the writer correspond to two separate figures, that of the father, an eminent entomologist, author of a certain number of "fabulous voyages" (Nabokov, *The Gift* 15), and that of the son, who had always stayed behind and had been imbued with the magic of his father's stories and with the foreign language of entomology. After having failed with his first volume of poetry, Fyodor starts writing a biography of his father. The biography is a referential genre, but "the amazing music of truth" (Nabokov, *The Gift* 121) that Fyodor hears in his father's writings and in the writings of the naturalists he worships becomes, for the novice, a siren's song luring him away from the sacred goal of objectivity.

Writing the father's biography turns into a series of verbal adventures (Nabokov, *The Gift* 139) in an inky jungle (Nabokov, *The Gift* 138), in a dark and chaotic world of rough drafts, reading notes and recollections. The faithful biographer slowly projects himself into the story, with a change in pronouns signaling a treacherous shift in perspective. From a more or less neutral "he", focusing on the father, the narrator adopts a plural "we" (a collective pronoun, actually an expansion of the first person, a disguised "I", an amplified first person), and then an insolent "I" who claims to have discovered an unknown moth (*G*, 123), thus usurping the father's place and thus claiming the privilege of naming. The heterodiegetic narrator, the narrative outsider, slowly becomes an autodiegetic narrator at the very center of the narrative, telling his own story instead of his father's story. This is a classical scenario in a biographer's life, since every biographer is a divided character, both a submissive servant and a rebellious subject. Several explanations of the pronominal fluctuations in *The Gift* have been given. Julian W. Connolly has interpreted them as signs of Fyodor's struggle for authorial emancipation, as indications of the clash between self and other, between Fyodor the character and Fyodor the author (Connolly 196-219).2 Nassim Berdjis has argued that it is the lack of distance between the writer and his material, the ardent proximity of the subject matter that prompts the biographer to project himself into the father's story (Berdjis 200).

6 This is where Marco Polo's mirages come in. A different understanding of the pronominal fluctuations in *The Gift* can possibly be traced back to Marco Polo's *The Description of the World*, a major intertext, overtly mentioned several times in the novel. A miniature of Marco Polo leaving Venice which decorates the father's desk functions as a magical visual stimulus provoking Fyodor's vision of his father's travels, the emergence of his visionary voice following closely the progress of the paternal caravans.3 In chapter 2 of *The Gift*, Nabokov certainly relied on existing texts, which are clearly identifiable thanks to numberless echoes, hints, traces, but at the same time the highly elaborate intertextual construction of the father's biography is bathed in invention, marred or transfigured by fabulation, since Fyodor's artistic project of faithfulness to authority and gigantic, weighty, manly models fails and a playful usurpation replaces it. The beauty and the complexity of chapter 2 of *The Gift* lie precisely in the ambiguous encounter between skilful, lucid documentation and ardent subjectivity, between a yearning for influence and the birth of an original, insolent voice.

7 When taking a close look at Marco Polo's *The Description of the World*, one is struck by pronominal inconsistencies that remind one of those in Nabokov's *The Gift*, inconsistencies which, in the case of *The Description of the World*, stem from the double paternity of the text. As a matter of fact, Marco Polo's famous book was not written by the Venetian merchant. In 1298, in a prison in Genoa where he was detained at the end of a war opposing Venice and Genoa, Marco Polo dictated the story of his travels to a professional scribe, Rustic(h)ello of Pisa, an Italian writer who had already composed a certain number of Round Table epic poems in French and who signed his works as "maître Rusticien de Pise". *The Description of the World* is written in French by two Italian authors, therefore the work is claimed both by Italian and French literatures. Rusticello acknowledges from the very beginning the distinct roles he and Polo play in the production of the text. Marco Polo is the eyewitness and the explorer, whereas Rusticello is the methodical teller (although his "method" is highly idiosyncratic), who records the oral information and translates Marco's Venetian dialect into the French language he was familiar with:

Pour savoir l'entière vérité sur les différentes contrées du monde, prenez ce livre et lisez-le: vous y trouverez les grandes merveilles de la Grande Arménie, de la Perse, des Tartares, de l'Inde et de bien d'autres pays, comme notre livre vous les contera méthodiquement, merveilles que messire Marco Polo, savant et illustre citoyen de Venise, raconte pour les avoir vues. Il y a un certain nombre de choses qu'il n'a pas vues, mais qu'il a entendues de gens absolument sûrs. Aussi donnerons-nous les choses vues pour vues et les entendues pour entendues afin que notre livre soit sincère, sans le moindre mensonge. Que chacun qui entendra lire ce livre ou le lira lui fasse confiance parce qu'il ne s'agit que de choses vraies. Car je vous fais savoir que, depuis que Notre-Seigneur a créé Adam notre premier père, il n'y a eu personne en aucune race qui parcourût et connût autant des différentes terres du monde que ce messire Marco Polo. Aussi a-t-il pensé que ce serait grand dommage qu'il ne fît mettre par écrit ce qu'il avait vu et entendu de sûr, afin que les gens qui ne l'ont ni vu ni entendu le connussent grâce à ce livre – et j'ajoute qu'il est resté bien vingt-six ans à s'informer dans ces différentes terres – et ce livre, comme il était dans la prison de Gênes, il l'a fait mettre en bon ordre par messire Rusticien, Pisan, qui était dans cette même prison en l'année de l'incarnation du Christ, 1298. (Marco Polo, *La Description du monde* 50-51)

8 The book is defined as "our book", Marco Polo's and Rusticello's, a shared textual space with a narrator who is ample enough to include the scribe. With a certain awkward elegance, Rusticello introduces himself in the vast space of 1st person plural pronoun ("nous") or hides himself in the impersonality of the French pronoun "on", to such an extent that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the two figures. The subject-matter of the book is defined by the scribe as "nostre matiere" or "our subject-matter" (Marco Polo, *La Description du monde* 264-265) and, at times, the narrative act oscillates between the 1st person singular and plural: "Nous vous avons parlé de la Petite Arménie, je vous parlerai de la Turquie" (Marco Polo, *La Description du monde* 76-77). Gradually, the space of the voyage itself and the space of the narrative (with its forward and backward movements from one topic to the other) are superimposed, with the effect of a total blurring of boundaries between the act of travelling and the act of telling:

Mais laissons ces gens-là! Nous ne vous parlerons pas de l'Inde maintenant, mais en temps en lieu, et nous reviendrons au nord pour parler du pays et retournerons par une autre route à la cité mentionnée plus haut de Kerman parce que, dans ces contrées dont je veux vous parler, on ne peut aller qu'à partir de la cité de Kerman. (Marco Polo, *La Description du monde* 112-113)

9 In spite of this constant hesitation and mingling of "on", "je" and "nous", the scribe never seems to openly appropriate the feats of the merchant in his own name – he only claims a common narrative substance and a collaborative narrative act, visible everywhere in the mottled pronominal landscape of *The Description of the World*, totally indifferent to the use of homogeneous norms of designating the narrator and the hero. Nevertheless, these pronominal fluctuations ultimately create the impression that Rusticello intrudes upon and gains control of Marco's journey itself, not only of its verbal, narrative content. The scribe's shamelessness should not be exaggerated, since he is not the radical and ruthless appropriator of another hero's glory, but simply a careless and incoherent writer who sometimes gets carried away in the exotic whirls of a marvellous trip narrated to him in the narrowness of a prison cell.

10 This phenomenon of the uncertain subject, hesitating between "I" and "we" (for the narrator), between "he" and "we" (for the hero of the narrative), is highly unusual in medieval texts. These

pronominal oscillations were extremely annoying to editors and authors of critical editions of *The Description of the World*. According to Henri Cordier, author of a monumental edition based on Henry Yule's English translation, the erratic pronominal slippages together with the markers of oral style necessarily have to be erased from any serious translation and critical edition of the book:

There is in the style, apart from grammar or vocabulary, a rude angularity, a rough dramatism like that of oral narrative; there is a want of proportion in the style of different parts, now over curt, now diffuse and wordy, with at times a hammering reiteration; […] a frequent change in the spelling of the proper names, even when recurring within a few lines, as if caught by ear only; *a literal following to and fro of the hesitations of the narrator; a more general use of the third person in speaking of the Traveller, but an occasional lapse into the first*. All these characteristics are strikingly indicative of the unrevised product of dictation, and many of them would necessarily disappear either in translation or in a revised copy.4 (italics mine, Yule-Cordier, *The Travels of Marco Polo* 84)

11 By imposing a uniform, orderly, rigid model of style and narrative, the irritated editor misses the rich and versatile spontaneity of Marco Polo and Rusticello's book. By wishing to preserve its content, he sacrifices its form, as if the two could be dissociated. When discussing late medieval exploration texts, Stephen Greenblatt identifies a certain propensity towards fragmentariness, discontinuity, heterogeneity due to the gradual discovery of an unknown world, to its surprises and unexpected wonders. Fyodor's biography of his father clearly displays this feature as well:

Compared to the luminous universal histories of the early Middle Ages, the chronicles of exploration seem uncertain of their bearings, disorganized, fragmentary. Their strength lies not in a vision of the Holy Spirit's gradual expansion through the world but in the shock of the unfamiliar, the provocation of an intense curiosity, the local excitement of discontinuous wonders. Hence they present the world not in a stately and harmonious order but in a succession of brief encounters, random experiences, isolated anecdotes of the unanticipated. (Greenblatt 2)

12 It is worth noting that three other major chronicles of exploration of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance, in the European and in the Arab world, follow exactly the same pattern of collaboration between a professional scribe and an explorer who has returned from a long journey beyond the familiar boundaries of the known world: the 14th century friar Odoric of Pordenone, the 15th century Venetian merchant Niccolo di Conti, the 14th century Muslim traveler Ibn Batuta, all dictated or described their travels to another person, playing the secretary. However, in these cases there is no obvious sign of the scribe's interference, contrary to *The Description of the World*, where Rusticello's watermark cannot be missed. Nevertheless, the scribes are invariably proud of their enterprise, conscious of the importance of their task, of the historic act of committing the traveler's tale to paper. As the Arab scribe of Ibn Batuta lyrically argues in the introduction to the main text, without his help, "the pearl of these extraordinary travels would have forever remained in the drowsy obscurity of their shells" (*Voyages d'Ibn Batouta* 11-12). This kind of collaboration is supposedly at the center of *Pale Fire*, where Kinbote wishes to establish "a secret compact" between himself, the possessor of the Zemblan theme, and Shade, "the fireside poet": "I mesmerized him with it, I saturated him with my vision, I pressed upon him, with a drunkard's wild generosity, all that I was helpless myself to put into verse" (Nabokov, *Pale Fire* 80). This is certainly not the case in *The Gift*, since the father is an

accomplished writer himself, author of several learned volumes and no Kinbotian wild generosity is involved.

13 Fyodor chooses his forefathers, or, as Borges famously argues in "Kafka and His Precursors", he creates his forefathers, but the models he wishes to follow are already examples of elaborate mystification – a strange case of faithfulness to unfaithfulness. Alexander Dolinin, in the notes to the Sympozium edition, has already emphasized the fact that Pushkin's works that Fyodor quotes, *The Captain's Daughter*, *Maria Shoning* and *A Journey to Arzrum*, already display a great deal of freedom in the treatment of literary and historical sources (Nabokov, *Dar* 664). *The Description of the World* seems to offer another example of playful treatment of a given material, with a distinct approach, narrative and pronominal in nature due to Rusticello's intrusions. Gérard Genette, in *Palimpsests*, makes a distinction between intertextuality defined as co-presence – text A is present in text B – and hypertextuality defined as derivation – text A is not effectively present in text B, but B is derived from A (Genette 8-13). *The Description of the World* can therefore be seen as both a visible intertext, quoted and alluded to several times in chapter 2 of *The Gift*, and as a veiled hypotext, as a model of this chapter's narrative and pronominal strategies.

14 Nabokov's excellent knowledge of French medieval literature, which he studied at Cambridge, certainly made him sensitive to Rusticello's appropriation practices and gave him access to the original text. This leads us to another medieval text written in French, John Mandeville's *Travels*, a more delicate case in *The Gift*, much more of a mirage and a problem than *The Description of the World*. It is worth pointing out that the name "Mandevil" appears in *Pale Fire*, where it designates the two cousins Mirador and Radomir, as well as two place names, Mandevil Forest and Mt. Mandevil.

15 Marco Polo and Mandeville were the most revered exploration authors of the 14th and 15th centuries. When Christopher Columbus embarked upon his 1492 voyage of discovery, he was carrying these two books along, since they played a major role in the mental shaping of his expectations. As Dieter E. Zimmer suggests, it is not clear whether Mandeville's *Travels* are indeed a source of *The Gift*. Only one episode could be traced back to Mandeville's *Travels*, the drumlike roar Fyodor hears in a Tibetan gorge, but this is rather a canonical topos which can also be found in Odoric of Pordenone and Marco Polo (Hartmann and Zimmer 66). The medieval culture of repetition, of collective, continuous writing, impervious to modern notions of originality and individual authorship complicates the task of the contemporary reader, eager to clarify the status of one particular text in the intertextual framework of the novel.

16 Even if there is no unmistakable sign of Mandeville's direct presence in *The Gift*, one cannot help identifying striking similarities between Fyodor's biography of his father and the writings of the author whom we call John Mandeville. The notion of hypertextuality (derivation) appears once again to be more appropriate than the notion of intertextual presence. The Mandeville connection is therefore caught somewhere between the blinding clarity of obviousness and the shady illusions of an impalpable object. Solid intuitions and impressions replace solid proofs. Instead of referring to textual evidence, to unmistakable intertexts, it is only possible to evoke the influence of a type of approach, a hypertextual, derivative practice.

17 Mandeville's text, dating from 1370, is a remarkable case of literary forgery, with an authorial persona who dramatizes himself as the author of a certain number of travels borrowed from a

wealth of different sources, mainly Marco Polo, Odoric of Pordenone, William of Boldensele and medieval lore in general. Paradoxically, Mandeville's *Travels* were more successful in popularizing the geographical and encyclopedic knowledge of medieval explorers than all his sources put together. Some critics consider Mandeville a postmodern author *avant la lettre*, an unfounded opinion, as Greenblatt argues, since the meaning of authorship in the 14th century was undoubtedly not the same as today (Greenblatt 165). Fyodor certainly does not go all the way in the construction of an explorer identity. He quickly dissipates the illusion of his personal participation in an Asian expedition and at the end of chapter 2 he abandons his text, lamenting the "secondary poetization" and the dilution to which he submits his material. He extricates himself from the inky jungle he himself created, condemning his biography as a series of vain, useless "verbal adventures" (Nabokov, *The Gift* 139).

18 Interestingly, according to some scholars, Marco Polo himself is a Mandeville-figure, an impostor and an *artifex* who never went to China but only used sources produced by other, genuine, travelers to build up his Asian narrative. Significant omissions are identified in *The Description of the World*, which a traveler through China would not have missed: no references to the Great Wall, to green tea or to the bandaged feet of Chinese women, no mention at all of Marco Polo and his family in the Chinese archives of the time (Wood). An obvious conclusion is that every traveler in an unknown land, every traveler who has awakened a "sleeping beauty" is necessarily a liar in the eyes of his readers. Paradoxically, such scholars deem Marco Polo's blanks and omissions to be signs of imposture, whereas some of his contemporaries called his book *Il Milione* for its exaggerations, embellishments, and shameless hyperboles. Poised somewhere between "not enough" and "too much", the traveler's credibility (and implicitly, his book's) is at stake in both cases. Nabokov's *The Gift* reflects on this twofold contradictory drive towards excess and omission in *The Description of the World* when Fyodor quotes a legend about Marco Polo's death:

In the twenties of the fourteenth century when the great explorer was dying, his friends gathered by his bedside and implored him to reject what in his book had seemed incredible to them – to water down its miracles by means of judicious deletions; but he responded that he had not recounted even a half of what he had in fact seen. (Nabokov, *The Gift* 124-125)

19 By discarding notions such as completeness/incompleteness and verisimilitude, Marco Polo stresses the mysterious and ineffable plenitude of a trip that cannot possibly be exhausted by any narrative act.

20 Arguably, one can identify Mandevillian fits of mystification in *The Gift*, as well as Marcopolian, or rather, Rusticellian fits of mastery. Rusticello, the now forgotten scribe, and Mandeville, the self-styled traveler, are eminently Nabokovian figures, with their propensity to control, if not the actual space of exploration, which is inaccessible to them, at least the textual space of the narrative. Having said all this, having pointed out the Rusticello-Fyodor kinship, and, secondarily, Mandeville's appropriation of sources, having, in a word, anchored Fyodor in a medieval family of mystifiers, liars and manipulators, I feel I myself have got lost in the inky jungle of *The Gift* and have diluted the text with my own fancies, simply because there is no unmistakable sign of Rusticello and Mandeville in *The Gift*. Since annotation failed, I strayed into the space of speculative annotation, of tempting, irresistible, fanciful annotation. It is sometimes difficult to indulge in the intertextual analysis of Nabokov's fiction without a slight feeling of discomfort, without being afraid of insisting on inconclusive allusions, while missing

other, deliberately foregrounded allusions. Nabokov's intertextual strategies form one of the most exciting and rewarding objects of critical study, but they are also potentially slippery and misleading objects. As Brian Boyd suggests in "*Pierre*, or the Ambiguities of Allusion" (on the presence, or rather the absence of Melville's *Pierre* in *Ada*), "Nabokov may distort or disguise allusions, but he also repeats and even insists on his key allusions and he makes each word count" (Boyd, "*Pierre*" 8).

21 Sadly, Rusticello and Mandeville are only intuitively there, they are a presence-absence, insubstantial, impalpable, yet their "inviolable shades" seem to tower above the narrative. Such intertextual presences-absences in Nabokov, which are somehow dubious or tenuous, devoid of strong, clear "pointers", become mirages which are exhilarating objects of intellectual chase. They are precious despite their seeming emptiness and this paper intends to be an apology of such exuberant examples, which uncover the creative dimension of annotation and open up the space of interpretation. The world of Nabokov studies and our own reading experience would be much more gray and boring without such speculative annotations.

22 I am well aware of the fact that I am performing a strange, self-destructive act, both defending a personal point of view on the pronominal play in *The Gift* and questioning it at the same time. This double movement illustrates a common stance of the critic and rereader. What prevails, in the end, is the celebration of these Marcopolian and Mandevillian intertextual mirages, which are true to the spirit of the text, even if they fail to be true to its letter.

Notes de bas de page numériques

1 The best example is provided by the chronological inaccuracy in *Lolita*, which has led a certain number of critics to question the reality of Humbert's trip to Coalmont and of Quilty's murder. From this perspective, the second part of the novel is seriously undermined by a series of incoherent dates. For a detailed analysis of this theory and for a refutal, see Brian Boyd, "'Even Homais Nods': Nabokov's Fallibility, Or, How to Revise *Lolita*".

2 For a similar interpretation see Alexandrov, 129.

3 This miniature brings together St. Petersburg, Venice and Asia in a single spatial knot. Similarly, Berlin, Venice, Russia and China meet in the poems Fyodor composes when waiting for Zina's arrival in the mysterious darkness of the Berlin night: "Waiting for her arrival. She was always late – and always came by another road than he. Thus it transpired that even Berlin could be mysterious. Within the linden's bloom the streetlight winks. A dark and honeyed hush envelops us. Across the curb one's passing shadow slinks: across a stump a sable ripples thus. The night sky melts to peach beyond that gate. There water gleams, there Venice vaguely shows. Look at that street – it runs to China straight, and yonder star above the Volga glows! Oh, swear to me to put in dreams your trust, and to believe in fantasy alone, and never let your soul in prison rust, nor stretch you arm and say: a wall of stone" (Nabokov, *The Gift* 176-177).

4 Since the editor formulates such strong opinions on the absolute necessity of revising the original text, his edition is not reliable when one wishes to investigate the oral style of the narrative or its collaborative nature. In this case, it is imperative to examine the original French text. An excellent bilingual edition is that of Pierre-Yves Badel quoted above. Henri Cordier openly describes his editorial method as one of clear dissociation between manner and matter:

"To adopt that Text [*the original French text*] with all its awkwardness and tautologies, as the absolute subject of translation, would have been a mistake. […] The process of abridgement in this text […] has been on the whole judiciously executed, getting rid of the intolerable prolixities of manner which belong to many parts of the Original Dictation, but as a general rule preserving the matter" (Yule-Cordier, *The Travels of Marco Polo* 41).

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Pour citer cet article

Monica Manolescu, « "Verbal Adventures in the Inky Jungle": Marco Polo and John Mandeville in Vladimir Nabokov's *The Gift* », paru dans *Cycnos*, Volume 24 n°1, mis en ligne le 20 mars 2008, URL : http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/index.html?id=1060.

Marco Polo (1254-1324) is regarded as one of the world's greatest and most influential travelers. He set off on a journey to the East at the age of seventeen with his uncle and father as part of a diplomatic mission for Pope Gregory X. After a three-and-a-half-year overland journey through present day Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and China he met the great Kublai Khan who took a liking to the young man and used him as an emissary for 20 years. [Sources: Mike Edwards, National Geographic, May 2001, June 2001, July 2001]

Marco Polo was not the first European to venture to China. The friars mentioned earlier arrived in Asia before him. But to Marco Polo's credit his journey was longer (24 years), more extensive (through China and much of Asia) and far richer in experiences (on many missions he was the personnel emissary of Kublai Khan) than the journeys of other European travelers.

Marco Polo took advantage of the brief window of opportunity to travel to the East provided by the Mongol conquests. He was able to travel throughout Asia at a time when the Mongols controlled much of the region. After the Mongol empire collapsed not long after Marco Polo's journey travel between the East and West was all but impossible.

Marco Polo's descriptions of his travels opened up Asia as a new world to Europeans and generated a fascination with the East. As for Marco Polo himself he probably would have ended up as a footnote in history where it not for his cellmate in a Genoan prison, who wrote about Marco Polo's adventures after Marco Polo was captured during a naval battle between Venice and Genoa (Genoa fought with Venice for control of the trade routes to the East).

Websites and Resources

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Links in this Website: SILK ROAD factsanddetails.com ; MARITIME SILK ROAD; SILK ROAD CARAVANS; SILK ROAD CAMELS; SILK ROAD HISTORY AND EXPLORERS; MARCO POLO; MARCO POLO IN CHINA; CHINESE EXPLORATION AND ZHENG HE; EARLY EUROPEANS IN CHINA; SILK IN CHINA; YUAN (MONGOL) DYNASTY (1215-1368) MING DYNASTY (1368-1644)

Good Websites and Sources on the Silk Road: Silk Road Seattle washington.edu/silkroad ; Silk Road Foundation silk-road.com ; Wikipedia Wikipedia ; Silk Road History ess.uci.edu ; Silk Road Atlas depts.washington.edu ; History of Silk Road ess.uci.edu ; Old World Trade Routes ciolek.com ; Travel Photos studyrussian.com ; Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road Project silkroadproject.org ; Silk Road Society travelthesilkroad.org ; Silk Road Travelerssilk-road.com ; International Dunhuang Project idp.bl.uk ; Camel Trains in the Desert chinavista.com ; China Page chinapage.org ; Ancient China Life Ancient China Life **Books:** *The Silk Road* (Odyssey Guides); *Marco Polo: A Photographer's Journey* by Mike Yamashita (White Star, 2002). **Television show:** *Silk Road 2005*, a 10-episode production by China's CCTV and Japan's NHK, with music by Yo Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble. The original series was shown in 1980s.

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Versions of Marco Polo's Account

Marco Polo's account his travels was originally called *Description of the World*, but is now known as *The Travels of Marco Polo*. The book was widely translated and circulated and became a medieval version of a bestseller. The account covers Marco Polo's 24 years of travels (17 of them in China). In Italy his book is known by the name *Il Millione,* a reference to its million tall tales.

Marco Polo's cell mate and the man who wrote the book was a romance writer named Rustichello known for his stories about chivalrous knights. The book was probably written in 1298. Rustichello made some additions and changes. Early editions were copied and translated by hand by monks. They no doubt made some additions and changes too. About 150 versions of the text remain today, The version thought to be closest to the original is one translated from a 14th century copy in the Biblioteque Nationale in Paris.

Marco Polo reveals little about himself but provides information on places he visited such as China and places he didn't visit like Japan. He listed things he saw on sale in markets; wrote about the customs he observed and events he witnessed. He wrote frequently about alcohol and mentioned local moonshine and wines made from rice, dates, gram, palm sap and mare's milk. It is not known whether Marco Polo kept a journal and but some of the description are so rich in details it seems likely they came from a journal.

See Marco Polo's Discoveries in China.

Impact of Marco Polo's Journey

Marco Polo's travel accounts made a large impression on European readers for centuries after his journey was over. Christopher Columbus and many other explorers were inspired by Marco Polo's descriptions of Asian riches and set out to explore the region themselves. His accounts along with reports from the Crusaders encouraged trade between East and West.

Marco Polo introduced places such Japan, the Pamirs and Java to Europe. Mapmakers added Japan or Java to their maps even though Marco Polo and no known European had ever been there.

The notion that Marco Polo introduced pasta (derived from noodles) and ravioli (derived from dumplings) to Italy and Europe is largely a myth. Noodles at least already existed in Italy. Ice milk and fruit appeared in Italy in the 14th century and may have been introduced from China by Marco Polo, who reportedly brought recipes for ice-cream-like chilled milk deserts from China.

Marco Polo's Exaggerations, Omissions and Lies

Marco Polo often reported hearsay and had a tendency to stretch the truth. He wrote of enormous p'eng birds, or gryphons, from Madagascar, for example, that were large enough to consume elephants as well as men with dog features. Some of his accounts were outright lies. In one section, he relates how the Polos helped the Mongols capture the southern city of Xiangyang from the Southern Song dynasty by introducing the Mongols to catapults. It turns out the Mongols already had catapults and the city fell two years before the Polos arrived in China.

Some historians have suggested that Marco Polo never went to China and that his adventures were based on accounts that he heard while working at his family's trading outposts on the Black Sea and in Constantinople. These historians base their argument on: 1) the fact that Rustichello was a fiction writer who probably embellished the account; 2) that Marco Polo failed to describe the Great Wall of China, chopsticks, tea, calligraphy or the binding of women's feet; 3) that the things he described—paper money, porcelain—were well known to travelers who came to Constantinople and other trading areas; and 4) that Marco Polo wasn't mentioned at all in the extensive Chinese archives between 1271 and 1295 even though he described himself as a personal emissary of Kublai Khan.

Historians that contend that Marco Polo's journey probably did take place argue: 1) that tea and chopsticks were so commonplace perhaps Marco Polo failed to mention them because he was so used to them; 2) that foot binding was something practiced mainly by upper class women who rarely left their homes so Marco Polo didn't see them; 3) that the Great Wall as we know it today for the most part was built after Marco Polo's death (in his time it was decaying mud bricks) and walls around towns and cities were as common in Europe as they were in China; and 4) that documents that may have mentioned Marco Polo probably were destroyed (many Mongol documents after the Mongols were ousted from China).

Marco Polo's Credibility

Mike Edwards, the author the three-part National Geographic series about Marco Polo, wrote in Smithsonian magazine, ""Like others who examined his writings closely, I am dismayed by his omissions and floored by his whoppers, But I am ultimately convinced of his essential truthfulness, Why? For one thing his itineraries, as laid out by the sequence of the book chapters, are fundamentally accurate, whether he's crossing Central Asia or central China. Where did he acquire that geographical knowledge if he didn't make the these journeys himself?"

"I believe Polo kept a journal during his travels...Having followed his tracks, I know firsthand that he got many things right, such as both lapis lazuli and rubies are found in the Badakshan region of Afghanistan: in China's southwest a minority people eat raw flesh; people in Sumatra and Sri Lanka make a joy juice from fermented palm tree sap...Polo also produced an report on Hindu customs." One version of his narrarive said he brought back "writings and memoranda."

Some exaggerations were not necessarily Marco Polo's fault. Some versions of his travel log say that the walls surrounding Kubali Khan's palace are four miles long while other versions say walls were 32 miles long—discrepancies that appeared long after Marco Polo died. Other famous "historical" works are also filled with exaggerations an lies. Herodotus described gold-digging

ants in India and winged snakes in Egypt. Sir Walter Raleigh told tales of gold-strewn El Dorado in Latin American.

Some think that Rustichelo of Pisa, the man credited with writing Marco Polo's adventures, was the the source of the tall tales such a the battle between Kublai Khan and Prester John, a mythical Christian figure better known in Europe than the East. He had written some romantic stories about King Arthur and early Christian figures.

Marco Polo's Early Life

Little is known about Marco Polo's early life. It is known that he was born in Venice; that his father was traveling during his youth; that his mother died before his father returned and that Marco was raised by a relative. What education he received is unknown. He probably received some training in navigation and trading. It seem plausable, also, that he developed some street sense growing up in the alleys of Venice among sailors, traders, moneylenders and prostitutes.

When Marco Polo was coming of age Venice was the dominant trading and military power in the Mediterranean. In Marco's time merchants in Venice were looking more and more towards the East for new markets and were establishing networks to these markets.

Marco Polo's father, Nicoló, and uncle, Maffeo, were Venetian traders with trading houses in Constantinople in Asia Minor and Soldaia on the Crimea peninsula in the Black Sea. They specialized in the sale of gems stones and jewelry.

Travel's by Marco Polo's Father and Uncle

In 1260, when Marco Polo was just six, his father and uncle set out from their merchant colony in the Crimea to sell jewels in the lower Volga and stayed a year there at the camp of a Mongol Khan. Some Mongol traders escorted them eastward and introduced them to Kublai Khan.

The Polos traveled deep into the Mongol empire. They journeyed across the steppes of what is now southern Russia and Kazakhstan and stayed for three years in Bukhara (Uzbekistan) and arrived at Kublai Khan court, perhaps in Shangdu (Xanadu), not so far from Beijing., six years after they set off.

Kublai Khan had never met people from southern Europe before. He welcomed the two Venetians with open arms. The Polos remained in his court for four years. They reported that Kublai Khan was a man of "great intelligence and wide-ranging interests" and said he asked them many questions about life in Europe.

Kublai Khan asked the Polo brothers to be his emissary to the Pope; to retrieve some oil from the lamp at the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, considered a potion for the soul; and to recruit one hundred missionaries "educated in all Seven Arts," who would argue the merits of their religion in the khan's court. Kublai Khan reportedly said if there case was convincing he was willing to covert his subjects to Christianity.

In 1269, when Marco Polo was just 15, his father and uncle returned from their nine-year journey. They told fantastic stories about their experiences. No one believed them. Pope Gregory denied the Great Khan's request and sent only two Dominican friars.

Marco Polo's Journey to the East

Marco Polo traveled 7,500 miles on his famous journey from Italy to China. He accompanied Nicoló and Maffeo on their second journey back to the East. Marco Polo was 17 when their journey began in 1271.

Marco Polo and his father and uncle traveled from Venice to the Middle East by boat and then traveled overland to Baghdad and then Ormuz on the Persian Gulf. Instead of taking the more well-traveled sea route through the Arabian Sea to India, they headed north across present-day Iran to Afghanistan.

After Afghanistan the Polos crossed the Pamirs in present-day Tajikistan. From the Pamirs the Polos followed to the Silk Road caravan route through western China. After a three-and-a-half year journey the Polos arrived at the court of he Great Khan when Marco Polo was 21. Delays were caused by rain, snow, swollen rivers, and illnesses. Time was taken off to rest, trade and restock.

Marco Polo Returns to Venice

The Polos returned to Venice in 1295 after 24 years. According to a story that first appeared in the 1500s, the Polo family had long given them up for dead. When they appeared no one recognized them and they gave off "a certain indescribable smack of the Tartar both in air and scent." The memories of the relatives were quickly revived when the shabby wanderers ripped open their grubby clothes, and watched "vast quantities of rubies, diamonds, and emeralds spill out." The Polos were then affectionately embraced, and treated to a lavish banquet, filled with music and stories.

When the Polos arrived, Venice was engaged in a naval conflict with Genoa. Marco Polo somehow became involved in the conflict and was captured by the Genoese about a year after his return and imprisoned. The details of his war record, his capture and prison life are not known. He was released in 1299.

Marco Polo's book was published while he was alive and became a bestseller in a world that was largely illiterate. Marco Polo became a celebrity. The book was translated into many languages. The first known printed edition appeared in Nuremburg in 1477.

After being released from prison Marco Polo moved into a mansion in the Rialto business district of Venice. He was about 45 at this time. He married and had three daughters and died in 1224 at the age of about 70. His house in Venice was destroyed by fire in 1596. In Venice he is known today as "Million." Some say this is a reference to his wealth. Other say it refers to his exaggerations." Even in his time there were those that wanted him to confess that everything he reported was hoax. Marco Polo reportedly replied, "I did not write half of what I saw."

Text Sources: New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Times of London, National Geographic, The New Yorker, Time, Newsweek, Reuters, AP, Lonely Planet Guides, Compton's Encyclopedia and various books and other publications.

Marco Polo, from myth to man

01:00 AM EDT on Sunday, October 21, 2007

MARCO POLO: From Venice to Xanadu,

by Laurence Bergreen (Knopf. 415 pages. $28.95).

BY TONY LEWIS
Special to the Journal

Marco Polo is one of those historical characters who seem half real, half mythological. Like Attila or Alexander, or other larger-than-life figures we've known since junior high school, familiarity has led to blurring and even disbelief, turning what was once startlingly real into the likes of Paul Bunyan.

In Marco Polo: from Venice to Xanadu, Laurence Bergreen rescues his hero from this benign neglect and snaps the picture into sharp focus. In his recounting of these epic travels, Polo seems for us — as he once seemed for most of the known world — a real traveler with an appetite to match the grand sweep of his journey through Europe and across Asia.

Bergreen's account, however, is more than just a retelling of the "Travels" and a re-historicizing of its central character. Marco Polo is a new take on Polo, a postmodern re-imagining that brings him to the land of the Mongols as a European and then follows him back home a quarter of a century later to Venice as a quasi-Asian.

This refashioning of his hero makes for fascinating reading. Unlike Wonderland's Alice, who steps through the looking glass as a proper young Victorian and returns entirely unchanged, Bergreen's Polo undergoes a slow, half reluctant transformation from Euro-centered Christian to someone "as eclectic as his mentor Kublai Khan in matters of faith" and with a belief system "as inclusive and porous as that of the Mongols."

In other words, in this reading of Marco Polo's travels, the hero undergoes the kind of change that the best travel writers always claim to have undergone — D.H. Lawrence in Sardinia, Henry Miller in Greece, Bruce Chatwin in Patagonia.

Polo, however, didn't actually write his "Travels." He narrated them to one Rustichello of Pisa, with whom he shared a jail cell after being captured at sea by the Genoese years after returning from Asia. Bergreen distinguishes between the romanticizing Rustichello and Polo, filtering the account through the lens of modern scholarship; what's left seems carefully tested and credible.

And what a story it is. Bergreen's Polo starts out as a "pious" young man, tagging along with father and uncle on their trading mission along what would become known as the Silk Road, and then matures, sexually, psychologically, emotionally. Taken with women he meets en route, startled by dress, food, climate, tried by mountains, steppes, deserts, he blossoms intellectually, rejecting alien notions and then trying them on for size and gradually liking the fit.

Unlike others who had traveled east before him, Marco Polo, Bergreen writes, "did not simply describe the Mongol way of life, he lived it," at times seeing himself as a Mongol. Little wonder, then, that he considered Kublai Khan "the greatest leader in history."

In Bergreen's account of Polo's life, we find a hero tailor-made for these perilous times — courageous, global, open, and respectful of all that is different.

MARCO POLO: From Venice to Xanadu,

POLO, MARCO

(1254-1324), Venetian merchant and traveler (b. Venice or Curzola, 1254; d. Venice, 8 January 1324), whose travel accounts gained worldwide fame and whose description of the countries he visited between 1271 and 1298 represents a primary geographical and historical source concerning Asia during the Mongol domination.

POLO, MARCO, Venetian merchant and traveler (b. Venice or Curzola, 1254; d. Venice, 8 January 1324), whose travel accounts gained worldwide fame and whose description of the countries he visited between 1271 and 1298 represents a primary geographical and historical source concerning Asia during the Mongol domination.

On a previous journey Marco's father Niccolò and his uncle Maffeo, both of whom were also merchants, had reached China, departing from *Soldanie* (Soldaya/Sudak) in the Crimea in 1261. En route they met Berke, the khan of the Golden Horde (q.v.) in 1262 and proceeded on to Bukhara (*Baccara*), where they remained for three years, finally reaching China, whence they returned in 1269 (Polo, 1928, sec. II-X; 1938, I, pp. 74-80; 1975, sec. 2-9; 1999, pp. 113-14; 2001, pp. 119-25). At the end of 1271, Niccolò, Maffeo, and Marco embarked at Acre for the East and they met Qubilai in his summer seat at K'ai-ping-fu in Northern China in 1275 (Polo, 1928, sec. XI-XIX; 1938, I, pp. 82-93; 1975, sec. 10-18; 1999, pp. 116-21; 2001, pp. 125-35). During the meeting with the khan they gave him a letter from Pope Gregory X (Tebaldo Visconti, 1271-76), and then went on to Khanbaliq (Beijing). Seventeen years later, in 1291, they left China by sea from Zaytun (Quanzhou), traveling via the Persian Gulf and Tabriz. By 1295 they were in Venice. In 1298, Marco Polo was captured by the Genoese in Curzola (Korčula) and imprisoned in Genoa where he met Rustichello da Pisa who wrote out Marco Polo's memoirs in French. The text was probably not completed, due to the sudden separation of Marco Polo and Rustichello. This early version is lost, and the actual knowledge of the evidence furnished by Marco Polo is based on later manuscripts of the text in different languages. The *Description of the World* is preserved in French and Franco-Italian (*Devisement du Monde* or *Livre des Merveilles du monde*), in Tuscan, and Venetian Italian (*Meraviglie del Mondo* or *Milione,* this latter title being derived from a surname of the family, "*Emilione*": Szczesniak, 1960; Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 625-26), in Latin and in other languages. (For the textual problems see Charignon, 1924-26; Iwamura, 1949; Jackson, 1998, pp. 84-86; Pelliot, 1959-73; Polo, 1865; 1928; 1938, I, pp. 41-55 and II; 1975, intr.; 1998; 1999, pp. 23-110; Ramusio, 1559, pp. 2-60; Ramusio, 1980; Roques, 1955; Watanabe, 1986, pp. 3-63; 2001, pp. 9-115; 2003, pp. IX-XL.) In 1299 Marco Polo returned to Venice, where he died in 1324.

The *Description of the World* is not a conventional travel account, but rather a list of the countries visited (and, in some cases, not visited; for a plan of Asia in Polo's text see Hambis, 1955). The first part of the text gives an itinerary of his travels through Asia to the court of Qubilay, to whom the main part of the text is devoted. The last chapters, which include some sections on India and Africa (countries that Marco Polo does not appear to have visited himself

and the descriptions of which are thus at second hand), are followed by a short description of the return journey, and a short conclusion.

The *Description of the World* was a success from very early on, and the text was well known and widely circulated during the Renaissance. Ramusio's edition can be considered one of the finest expressions of the scholarly activity of this period (Ramusio, 1559; 1980). The success of the work is further shown by the production of illuminated manuscripts containing depictions of episodes from the *Description of the World* (Wittkower, 1957; Polo, 1999b). Among the numerous analyses of the text made by modern scholars, the seminal research of Pelliot (1959-73) should be mentioned for its substantial contribution to the solution of various onomastic and topographic questions related to Polo's account. Recently Jackson (1998) has reopened the debate concerning the authenticity of *Description of the World*, examining the doubts raised by Chritchley (1992) and Wood (1995; for a general bibliographical survey see Piemontese, 1982, I, pp. 137-40; Watanabe, 1986).

While much of the information furnished by Marco Polo is focused on China and the Far East, much space is also devoted in the text to Persia, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The information on Persia has been studied by Franchi (1941) and Gabriel (1963, q.v.), that on the Pamirs and Afghanistan by Lentz (1933), and that on the Silk Road by Drège (1976). Other scholars have used the work of Marco Polo to shed light on pre-Islamic sites (Invernizzi, 2005, pp. 78-79), on which Polo's information is, however, meager. During the 20th century, the *Description of the World* had considerable success in Persia, Piemontese listing more than twenty works and translations of it that appeared there between 1949 and 1996 (Piemontese, 2003, pp. 234-36).

Among the motivations behind Marco Polo's journey to Persia and Central Asia, diplomatic activity was certainly important, even if the details are now not always easy to ascertain. After the death in 1286 of Queen Bolōgan Ḵātun (q.v., Bolgana/Bolgara), who was the wife of the Il-khanid rulers Abaqa (Abaga) and Arḡun (Argo/Argon), Marco Polo was charged by Qubilay in 1291 to accompany the new princess of the Baya□ut lineage, *Cocacin* (Kökejin), to Persia. By the time of their arrival, however, Arḡun was dead and his successor Gayḵātu (q.v., Acatu) had taken power (Polo, 1938, I, pp. 87-93; 1975, sec. 16-17). While this episode appears to be confirmed by Persian sources (Cleaves, 1976), Marco Polo himself is not mentioned. Moreover, he is also absent from other Oriental sources and it has been shown that the Chinese name of *Polo* and the Mongol and Persian names *Bolod/Pulād* refer not to Marco Polo but to another person (Allsen, 1994; 2001, pp. 60-61).

The Benedetto edition of the *Description of the World* is the only one that gives evidence about the languages spoken by Marco (Polo, 1928, sec. XVI, 2-5; 1938, I, p. 16). Linguistic evidence allows us to assume that Marco Polo knew Persian and Mongol, which he was also able to read in the Arabic-Persian and Uighur scripts. He probably used a Persian translator for Chinese, and it is possible that he was able to read the □*p*□*ags-pa* scripts that were adopted by the Mongols (note of Cardona in Polo, 1975, pp. 650-51).

The *Description of the World* makes frequent use of literary traditions, as in the case of the conquest of Baghdad (*Baudac/Baudas/Baudaca*) by Hulagu (*Ulau/Alau*/*Alchom/Altu*), and the killing of the last caliph al-Mosta□ṣem (1258), to which are added legendary elements such as the description of the caliph dying of starvation in front of his treasury, a fact that seems to be an adaptation of classical traditions, unsupported by contemporary Arabic sources (Polo, 1928, sec.

XXV; 1975, sec. 24, and note on pp. 574-76; 1999, pp. 126-27; 2001, pp. 141-43). Marco Polo narrates another legendary event, said to have occurred in Baghdad in 1275, when a sovereign, erroneously defined as the caliph, challenged the Christians to join two mountains together. The miracle was accomplished by God in response to the prayers of a cobbler. As Monneret de Villard demonstrated (1948, pp. 84-86), this legend was probably an adaptation of a legend attributed to the Fatimid caliph al-Mo□ezz (953-75) or other later members of the Egyptian dynasty (Polo, 1928, sec. XXVI-XXIX; 1955, pp. 29-35; 1975, sec. 26-29; 1999, pp. 128-30; 2001, pp. 143-49). Various chapters of the *Description of the World* are dedicated to the the *Viel de la Montaigne*/*Veglio della Montagna*, "the Old Man of the Mountain," the *šayḵ al-jabal* of the Islamic sources (Polo, 1938, I, pp. 128-32; 1975, sec. 39-42; 1999, pp. 138-40; 2001, pp. 166-69; Nowell 1947), *Alaodin* (□Alā-al-Din Moḥammad) who was the seventh Grand Master of the Isma□ilis of Alamut called *Assassins/Assassini*/*Harcassis/Hasisins*, a term probably derived by the word *ḥašīš/ḥašīšiyin*, although this etymology remains controversial (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 52-55). The country of the members of the sect is called *Milect/Mulect/Mulehet/Milice*, a corruption of the word *molḥed* "heretic," mistakenly applied by Marco Polo to the region (Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 785-87). The description given by Marco Polo of the marvelous garden where □Alā-al-Din Moḥammad and the Isma□ilis lived, and of the activities of the Grand Master, are practically identical with those of Oderico da Pordenone (Wyngaert, 1929, pp. 488-89). Polo also describes the destruction of Alamut by Hulagu.

Not all of Marco Polo's description rests on legend, for several of the episodes he relates concerning the Mongols seem historically reliable. Even if he includes the tradition of Prester John (Polo, 1928, sec. CX; 1975, sec. 64-67, 108 and note pp. 696-701; 1999, p. 156), echoing previous descriptions (see Beckingham, Hamilton, 1996; Doresse, 1953; Nowell, 1953; Rachelwitz, 1972; Richard, 1957; 2005), he also furnishes a careful history of the line of Čengiz Khan (q.v.), including a discussion of the customs and the religion of the Mongols (Polo, 1975, sec. 68-69). The descriptions of the wars of the Il-khanids Abaqa (*Abaca/Abaga*) and Arḡun (*Argo/Argon*) with the Chagatay lord Qaidu (*Caidu*) and of the open conflict between Qaidu and Qubilay are useful sources for these events (for this historical evidence, see Biran, 1997, pp. 54-57). Polo also refers to the Princess *Aigiaruc/Aigiarne*, a name that is identified by Pelliot as Ay-Yaruq, probably a surname of the princess Qutulun (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, p. 15). There are extensive descriptions in Polo's text of the conflicts between Arḡun and Aḥmad Tegüder, called *Acamat soldan* or, in the Tuscan version, simply *Soldano* (Aḥmad Solṭān). These events occupy various chapters (Polo, 1928, sec. CCVI-CCXIV; 1938, I, pp. 456-67; 1975, sec. 196-203) where Polo relates the conversion of Aḥmad and his death at the hands of Arḡun. Polo states also that Arḡun died from poison. Another figure who appears in Polo's account is *Milichi* (*malek*), who was the "vicar" of Aḥmad (about him, see Pelliot, who identified him as Alīnāq (killed in 1284: Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 29-30). Marco Polo also describes the descendants of Jöči, including *Conci/Canci* (Qoniči) who ruled in the domains of Ordu (Polo, 1928, sec. CCXVIII; 1975, sec. 204). He names the founder of the Golden Horde *Sain/Frai* from his epithet *Sayin-Khan*, "the good Khan," which title was in fact used for Batu, though Marco Polo believed that this name referred to the father of Batu, and not to Batu himself (*Bacui/Patu*; Polo, 1975, sec. 208; Pelliot, 1959-73, II, p. 327). Among the successors of Batu, Polo mentions *Barga/Barca* (Berke) who defeated Hulagu around 1262, a fact that is reported by Polo (1938, I, pp. 478-83; 1975, sec. 209, see also notes pp. 556-57). The Franco-Italian version of the text also includes some chapters

dedicated to Toqtai, the fifth son of Mцngke Timur, who is absent from other versions (Polo, 1928, sec. CCXXX-CCXXXXIII).

Other data attest to the religious interests of Polo, such as the parts dedicated to the three Magi (Polo, 1938, I, pp. 112-15; 1975, sec. 30-31; Monneret de Villard, 1952, pp. 81-86), where Marco Polo gives important information about the town of Sāve (*Saba*), a place where a King of the Magi was buried, information which appears to be confirmed by various contemporary Oriental sources such as the Syriac *Diatasseron*, translated into Persian between 1265 and 1295 (Messina, 1951, p. 22). Polo here refers, interestingly, to fire-worship, which was introduced, according to him, by the Magi themselves (Polo, 1975, sec. 31; 1999, pp. 130-31; 2001, pp. 152-53). Fire temples are described by Marco Polo in other regions such as Yazd and Isfahan, and in a village near Kāšān called *Cala Ataperistan* (Pers. *Qal□a-ye āteš-parastān*) "The castle of the fire worshipers" (Jackson, 1905).

Polo also gives information on the Christians and the Muslims. He notes the presence of Nestorians (*Nestorini/Nestarini*) and Jacobites (*Iacopetti/Iacopit*) in Mosul and Tabriz, and refers to Nestorians in Central Asia and China. The Ramusio edition, based on a lost manuscript, is the only one to introduce a description of the monastery dedicated to Bar Sauma near Tabriz (Polo, 1938, I, p. 105; see Borbone, 2000). Marco Polo shows a certain hostility towards the Muslims, frequently called *Saracini*, but also described as adherents to the faith of *Macomet/Macometto* (Moḥammad). This hostility probably derived more from the political situation (the Mongols, allied with the West, had just been defeated by the Mamluks at □Ayn Jālut in 1260) than from religious motivations (Olschki, 1960, pp. 232-52).

The more substantial information furnished by the *Descriptions of the World* is not related to historical events but rather to the geography of the regions Marco Polo visited during his stays in Persia and Central Asia. Polo talks of *Trepisonde/Trapisonde* (Trabzon) and Armenia (*Ermenie/ Erminia/ Hermenie/Arminia*), divided into Lesser and Greater Armenia, the former ruled by a king who dwelt in the city of *Sebastala/Blasius/Sevasto* (Sivas; see Polo, 1928, p. 14; 1938, I, p. 93, Polo, 1955, p. 21; see for Sivas instead of Sis, the capital of the Cilician Kingdom, Pelliot 1959-73, I, p. 97; for *Le Conie/Chomo* [Konya] and *Caserie/Cesare* [Kayseri] in other versions see Polo, 1999, p. 123; 2001, p. 137). The region was subject to the Great Khan (*i.e.* the Il-khanids). The region of modern Turkey is called *Turcomanie/Turcomania* (the land of the Turkmen) by Polo, while a large part of Anatolia was included in Greater Armenia, whose capital was *Arç ingan/Arzinga* (Erzincan), a center famous for its textiles, such as *bucherame/boquerant*, taken, probably inaccurately, to mean a textile in the style of Bukhara (*boḵāri*; Polo, 1955, p. 22 and note p. 351; 1975, note on pp. 566-68; 2001, pp. 136-37) and *bambagia*. The inhabitants of Erzincan were Christians. They were mainly Armenians and subjects of the Tatars (i.e. the Il-khanids; Polo, 1938, I, p. 96). Two other towns of the region were *Argiron/Arçiron* (Erzurum) and *Arçiçi/Arzici/Darçiçi* (Arčeč, in Polo from the Ar. Arjiš) on the northeast shore of Lake Van. In connection with Greater Armenia, Polo introduces the legend of Noah's Ark. He describes Mosul, where the population was Christian (Polo, 1928, sec. XXII; 1938, I, p. 97; 1975, sec. 21).

The next chapter is dedicated to Georgia (*Giorgianie/Giorgens/Jorganie/Zorzania*), whose king was called *David* (*Davidre* or *David Melic* < Ar. *malek*), probably David V (r. 1249-69), son of Queen Russudan. Polo relates that all the kings of that province were born with the mark of an eagle on their right shoulder. The Georgians were valiant warriors, and they were Christians.

Polo alludes to the Iron Gate (< Pers. *Darband/Darband-e Āhanin*) made by Alexander the Great (Polo, 1975, sec. 22; 1999, pp. 124-25; 2001, pp. 138-40; for other versions see Pelliot, 1938, I, p. 98) and adds that, in the account in the *Book of Alexander* (Polo's reference here to a version of the *Alexander Romance* is generally considered an interpolation by Rustichello; see Polo, 1975, note p. 534), Alexander shut the Tatars within the mountains, but that the reference was to the *Comain* (Cumans, see above), because there were no Tatars at the time of Alexander. Polo also mentions a monastery dedicated to St. Leonard (probably a Dominican house) and gives important information about the Caspian Sea, called *Gel* or *Chelan* "*Geluchelan*" (from Gilān > *Mer de Ghel*, see Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 733-35; Polo 1928, sec. XXIII; 1975, sec. 22; 2001, p. 140), where the Genoese sailed. The presence of the Genoese here is confirmed by other sources (Richard, 1970).

Marco Polo divides Persia into eight regions which he calls "realms" (*reami*): *Causom/Casum/Casibin* (Qazvin), *Distan* or *Cordistan* (Kordestān, but also Dehestān?); *Lor* (Lorestān); *Cielstan/Culstan* (probably Šulestān; Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 263-64); *Ispaan/Istain/Istanit/yspaan* (Isfahan; for other variants see Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 752-53); *Çiraç/Zerazi* (Shiraz; see other variants in Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 609-10); *Anchora/Crocara/Soncara/Soncaran*, the kingdom of the Šabānkāra□i, south of the great salt lake and east of Shiraz (Pelliot, 1959-73, II, p. 837); and *Tunocain* (Tun-o-Qāyen, a name formed by two towns of the Kohestān; see the variants in Pelliot, 1959-73, II, p. 863; see Polo 1999, pp. 131-32), near the enigmatic *Arbre seul/Arbor sol/Albaro Solo/Albero del sole* where Alexander fought Darius (Polo, 1928, sec. XXXIII; 1938, I, pp. 116-33; 1975, sec. 39; 2001, pp. 150-52). This "Dry [Lone] Tree" has been variously interpreted as being connected to various mythical or real trees (see Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 628-37). A more recent interpretation, that of Piemontese (1997, pp. 149-50), identifies it with the *šul* (the *Cydonia indica*), a sort of Indian quince. In any case the *Albaro Solo* seems to be located in Khorasan, and the mention of it in the *Descriptions of the World* probably represents different traditions, in particular one preserved by the tradition of the *Alexander Romance* (see the note in Polo, 1975, pp. 532-33). The eighth realm is described by Polo as a country full of horses where silks and brocades were worked.

One chapter in the *Descriptions of the World* is devoted to various towns: *Tauris/Toris* (Tabriz), capital of the Il-khanid Empire between 1265 and 1304, is considered one of the main towns of *Yrac/Irac* which Marco Polo misinterprets as an expanded □Erāq-e □Ajam (Polo, 1928, sec. XXX; 1975, sec. 25; 1999, p. 127; 2001, pp. 149-50). The people of this town traded with India and other countries, and produced silk fabrics and brocades. Latin, Armenian, Nestorian, Jacobite, and Georgian merchants were active there. The town was surrounded by beautiful gardens, even if the population was evil and disloyal. *Iasdi/Iadis/Jasoy* (Yazd) was a beautiful town where silk and brocades were worked (Polo, 1928, sec. XXXIV; 1975, sec. 33; 2001, p. 155). Turquoise (*turchesche*) was extracted in great quantities from the mountains of Kerman (*Creman*) and was worked there. The people of Kerman also specialized in the production of iron and steel, and prepared arms and harness for the knights. The women worked silk and gold. In this country the art of falconry was particularly developed. In Yazd and Kerman, Marco observed some onagers, which he calls "wild asses" (Polo, 1928, sec. XXXV; 1975, sec. 34; 1999, pp. 152-53; 2001, pp. 155-57). The village of *Camadi* or *Camandi* (Qamādin), a suburb near Jiroft, in the realm of *Reobales* (Rudbār?), was famous for dates and other fruits (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, p. 139), and it was here that animals such as donkeys and rams with their typical fat tails could be found. The local population built walls of earth to defend themselves. They sold

slaves and were under King *Nogodar*, identified as a chief of the *Carans/Carans/Charaunas/Caraonas /Scherani*, the Qaraunas (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 183-96; II, p. 792) about whom Marco Polo gives information in various parts of his text (Polo, 1928, sec. XXXVI; 1938, I, pp. 120-22; 1975, sec. 8, 35, 114-15; 2001, pp. 158-59; see also Aubin, 1969). To escape from them Marco Polo takes refuge in the castle of *Canosalmi/Ganasalim* (probably *Qanāt-e Šāh: Pelliot, 1959-73, I, p. 158).

Marco Polo also reached *Cormos/Cremosa/Formosa* (Hormoz), were he observed merchants from India trading in textiles, ivory, and other goods. The king of this country was called *Reumeda Iacomat/Ruccomod Iacamata*,possibly a transliteration of Rokn-al-Din Aḥmad [for Maḥmud] who reigned there for thirty-five years until 1278 (see Aubin, 1953). Hormoz produced dates, wine, and spices. The boats made there were not of good quality and to be at sea in them was very dangerous. The deserts in Asia were also dangerous, and Marco Polo described the difficulties a traveler could meet there. One of the deserts divided Kerman from *Cobinam/Cobiam/ Gobiam* (Kubanān), a place where tutty (*toutie/tuzia/tutia*, < Pers. *tutiyā*) was produced and where there was a furnace used for its production according to Marco Polo, whose information furnishes one of the earliest pieces of evidence on this activity there (Allan, 1979, pp. 40-41; Polo, 1938, I, p. 127; 1999, p. 137; 2001, p. 164). In Kubanān he also observed the manufacturing of iron and steel.

In what is now Afghanistan, Marco Polo describes *Sapurgan/Sopurgan/Supunga/Sipurgan/Espurgam*, identified by Benedetto (Polo, 1928, sec. XLIV; 1938, I, pp. 133-34; 1975, sec. 43; 1999, p. 140; 2003, p. 1) as Šebergān, north of Mazar-e Sharif, as a country full of trees and delicious melons. He observed the destruction wrought by the Mongols in *Balc/Balac/Baldach* (Balkh) and noted that the people of this town lived in fortresses in the mountains. It was in Balkh that Alexander had married the daughter of Darius (Polo, 1938, I, pp. 134-35; 1975, sec. 44; 1999, p. 141; 2003, pp. 2). The castle of *Taican/Tahican*, noted by Polo as a good market for fodder, was identified by Pelliot (1959-73, II, pp. 842-43; see also Lentz, 1932, p. 8) as Taliqan. Here the mountains were of salt. The same chapter (Polo, 1975, sec. 45; 1999, pp. 141-42; 2003, pp. 4-6) includes a mention of *Scasem*/*Scassem*, which Lentz (1932, pp. 10-12) and Pelliot (1959-73, II, pp. 826-27) have identified as Iškāšm (Sikašīm in *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam*, see Minorsky, 1982, p. 121, nr. 14), a town on the south-west slopes of the Pamirs (see also the comments about another Iškāšm in the notes to Polo, 1975, pp. 716-17).

The *Description of the World* mentions Badaḵšān several times (*Badasciam/Balascam/ Balassam*; Polo, 1928, sec. XLVII, L; 1938, I, pp. 136-39; 1975, sec. 46, 47, 49; 2003, pp. 4-6), where the kings were descended from Alexander the Great and the daughter of Darius. For this reason the kings of this dynasty were called *Zulcarnei* (from the Qurʾānic epithet of Alexander *Ḏu'l-qarnayn* and the tradition concerning Rōšanag and her daughter Stateira, see Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 615-16). Very expensive rubies (*balais/balasci* < *badaḵšī*, "stones from Badakhshān"; Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 63-65; Polo, 1975, note p. 551), as well as the best *azul/azzurro* (lapis lazuli, < Pers. *lājvard*) in the world, and silver were mined here. Badakhshān was a cold country where it was possible to find very good horses. The population produced oil from nuts and were good warriors. The women wore trousers because they had large buttocks and people liked them when they were fat. *Pascian/Bastian* (*Pasciai* in Polo, 1928, sec. XXXVI, 35; XLVIII, 1; 1999, p. 143; 2003, p. 6) is variously interpreted. It seems to be the Pashai, south of the Hindukush

(Lentz, 1933, pp. 16-17). Here, the population, which spoke its own language (*pašayī*, see Morgenstierne, 1967, pp. 1-4), was of dark complexion and were idolaters. In their ears they wore gold and silver earrings set with precious stones. This land was near Kashmir (*Chesciemur/ Chesmir/Chesimun/Thesimur/Kesimur*), another land of idolaters (Polo, 1928, sec. XLIX; 1938, I, pp. 139-49; 1975, sec. 48; 1999, 144; 2003, p. 7). The Lord of Badakhshān also governed the *Vocan* (Wakhan) in the Pamirs, which was inhabited by Muslims who spoke their own language (for the *wakhi* language see Pakhalina, 1966, pp. 398-418). Marco Polo claimed that the mountain here was the highest in the world, alluding to one of the peaks of the Pamirs. Here there was a great and beautiful river and good pastures. As Cardona noted (in Polo, 1975, pp. 753-54) the description of this valley appears similar to that given by Edrīsī (1987, II, p. 204; also Lentz, 1933, pp. 17-20). Moving eastward, away from the Pamirs, Marco Polo described *Belor*/*Balor/Bolor*, a country identified by Pelliot as the *Bulur* of *Ḥudūd al-□ lām* (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 90-91; Minorsky 1982, p. 369). It is the area of Balur or Balurestān, which includes the valleys of Chitral, Yasin, and Gilgit. Polo noted that the people of this region too were idolaters.

Kaxgar (Kashgar: *Cascar/Casar/Calsar*) was inhabited by Muslims. It was a great market for international trade, and the town was also inhabited by Nestorian Christians. The people of this region spoke their own language (Polo, 1928, sec. XL; 1975, sec. 50; 2003, pp. 9-10; Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 196-214). In Samarqand (*Samarcam/Sammarcham/Samartan*) too, Muslims and Christians lived together. Marco Polo states that Chaḡatay (*Gigata/Chagatai/Agatai/ Ciagati/Agati*), the son of Čengiz Khan, who was the lord of this region, became Christian, and for this reason a great church dedicated to St. John the Baptist was built in this town (Polo, 1928, sec. LII; 1938, I, pp. 143-46; 1975, sec. 51; 1999, p. 146; 2003; pp. 10-12). Pelliot, like other scholars, argues that Chaḡatay was never a Christian (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 250-54), and that the story of the church, with the stone and the column that supported the church, together with the dispute between Muslims and Christians, is a legend. Moreover, contrary to his usual practice, Marco Polo gives no information concerning the town and its products. This might indicate that Marco Polo was, in fact, never in Samarqand. Yarkant (Yarkand, Shache: *Carcam/Iarchan/Yarcan*; Polo, 1928, sec. LII, LIII; 1938, I, p. 146; 1975, sec. 52; 1999, pp. 146-47; 2003, p. 12; Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 876-85), had a Christian and Muslim population, whereas Hotan (Khotan, *Cotam/Cotan/Cothan*) is described as inhabited only by Muslims. This seems unlikely, given the fact that the region had been invaded by Küčlüg, a bitter opponent of Islam, and by Čengiz Khan shortly before the period which Marco Polo was describing (Polo, 1928, sec. LIV; 1975, sec. 53; Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 408-25; 1999, p. 147; 2003, p. 147). In the same region as Hotan, Marco Polo describes a place called *Pein/Pem/Peiu*, which is perhaps modern-day Uzuntatrı between Keriya and Dandan Uilik (Polo, 1928, sec. LV; 1975, sec. 54, and note p. 688; Pelliot, 1959-73, II, p. 801; 1999, p. 147), and *Ciarcian* (Čärčän), a post house between Keriya and Lop Nur (Lop Nor: Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 261-62). This region, called *Lop*, together with its capital Ruoqiang (Charkhlik; see Pelliot, 1959-73, II, p. 170) was the last stop before the Lop Nur desert, and the route into what is now the province of Gansu (Kansu) in China.

Various Persian linguistic and historical influences are evident in the section of *The Description of the World* dedicated to China. The use of words such as *Fafur/Facfur* (Pers. *faḡfur*), used by Arab and Persian historians for the Sung emperor, seems clearly to reflect the adoption by Marco Polo of a Muslim tradition (Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 652-61). The name Catai

(*Alcatay/Cata/Catai*) used by Marco Polo for Northern China stretching to the Huang Ho derives from the Arabic transcription of the world *Qitai (>Ar., Pers. *Ḵaṭā*/*Ḵaṭāy*), referring to the Kitan tribes who migrated to the West and were known in the Islamic world as Qara Khitay (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 216-29). A Persian influence appears in some topographical names, such as *Taianfu* (T'ai-yüan-fu in Shanxi/Shansi), which reflects the transcriptions of the name given by Rašid-al-Din (*Tāyanfu* and *Tāyvanfu*; see Blochet, 1911, II, 181, 214; and Pelliot 1959-73, II, p. 842), and *Acbalec Mangi/Anbalet Mangi* (Aq Baleq) which came from the Persian construction *Aqbaleq-e Manzī*, probably Hanzhong (Han-chung) on the Han river (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 7-8). *Pianfu* (P'ing-yang-fu in Shanxi), seems to be derived from the Persian (*Tung Ping Fu* in Rašid-al-Din; Blochet, 1911, II, p. 181; Pelliot, 1959-73, II, p. 803). For a river in *Canbalu* (Beijing, Peking) Polo employs the term *Pulisanghyn/Pulizanghiz* (< Pers. *Pul-e sangīn*), probably using the Persian name for the river Sang-kan (Pelliot, 1959-73, II, p. 812; Polo, 1975, sec. 104, note p. 701; 1999, p. 189). Persian influence is also evident in ethnic names, such as *Çardandan/Ardandan*, from the Persian *zar-dandān* "golden tooth (teeth)," which is the exact translation of the Chinese *Chin-ch'ih* used for a population of southern China (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 603-6; Polo, 1975, sec. 119).

Marco Polo also appears to use references to Muslim traditions in his account of India. He gives, for example, the legend of the tomb of Adam on the highest mountain of Sri Lanka (Ceylon: *Seilla/Seilan*), which is referred to in sources such Qazvini or Demašqi (Polo, 1975, sec. 174; Ferrand, 1913-14, pp. 307, 378; about Polo in India see Sastri, 1957). The same traditions may be connected with his reference to the bird *Ruc* (*roḵ or roḵḵ* in Muslim literature), mentioned in Madagascar (Polo, 1975, sec. 21).

On his account of his return journey, which appears in the last part of *The Description of the World*, Marco Polo gives a description of Aden (*Aden/Adan/Adam*) which, like that of Šir (*Scier/ Escier/Esier*), Dhofar (*Dufar/Defur/Dofar*) and Kalat (*Calatu/Calata*), seems to be based on second-hand information (Polo, 1975, sec. 190-93). From Hormoz, he passes on to *Gran Turchie/Grande Turchia* "Great Turkey" which corresponds to the *ulus* of Chaḡatay (Turkistan), governed at this time by Qaidu (Polo, 1975, sec. 195).

Marco Polo lists the provinces of the Golden Horde domains, conquered by Batu (see above): *Rossia* (Russia); *Cumania/Comanie*/*Comania*, the land of the Kipchaq (Cumans), known by the Byzantines as *Kymanoi* (Polo, 1975, note p. 601); *Alains/Alani/Alanai*, the lands of the Alans (Ossetes; also *As* or *Asi* in Rubrouck, Wyngaert, 1929, p. 89; Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 16-25); *Lac/ Lacca* (Dagestan/Daghestan; Pelliot, 1959-73, II, p. 760); *Mengiar/Megia*/ (Hungary < *Magyar*, see the question in Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 777-78, Polo, 1975, note pp. 663-65); *Çiç/Ziziri/Zirziri*, a name that may be related to the Eastern Circassians (*Jik*; Pelliot1959-73, I, pp. 606-8; Deeters 1958); *Gucia/Gutia/Scozia*, Crimea, which was inhabited by Goths (See Wyngaert, 1929, p. 170; Pelliot, 1959-73, II, p. 743) and *Gazarie/Gasaria*, the "land of the Khazars," modern Crimea (Polo, 1975, sec. 208).

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July 28, 2008

(Michele Bernardini)

Originally Published: July 28, 2008

Last Updated: July 28, 2008

POLO, MARCO **- Encyclopædia Iranica | Articles**

In 1298, ***Marco Polo*** was captured by the Genoese in Curzola (Korčula) and imprisoned in Genoa where he met ***Rustichello*** da Pisa who wrote out ***Marco Polo's ...***
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Journal of World History 10.1 (1999) 220-223

Karl J. Schmidt - Did *Marco Polo* Go to China? (review) - Journal ...

The ghostwriter, a Pisan romance writer named *Rustichello*, shared a Genoese prison cell in 1298 with *Marco Polo*; it was to him that Polo ostensibly dictated **...**
muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_world.../10.1schmidt.htm

F. Wood's*Did Marco Polo Go To China?*

A Critical Appraisal by I. de Rachewiltz

In her book Did Marco Polo Go To China? (first published by Secker & Warburg, London, in 1995), Dr Frances Wood claims that Marco did not go to China and that he 'probably never travelled much further than the family's trading post on the Black Sea and in Constantinople'.

F.W.'s thesis, leading to the above conclusion, is based on a number of principal arguments and a few secondary ones as props. It should be mentioned that most of these arguments have been 'aired' by various writers since the beginning of the 19th century, but were never taken seriously by Polan scholars.

The principal arguments impugning Marco's credibility are the following:

1. Marco's itinerary is untrustworthy because of lack of coherence, because it is impersonal and in several instances actually incorrect as to dates, distances and events;

2. The geographical and proper names mentioned by Marco in his book are not given in their Mongolian or Chinese form (as we would expect), but in their Persian form. This seems to confirm a theory put forth many years ago by the German sinologist H. Franke that Marco may have used a Persian source on China;

3. Marco fails to mention many important aspects of Chinese life and material culture. Among these notable omissions are: a) the Chinese writing system; b) books and printing; c) tea and tea drinking; d) porcelain; e) the Chinese custom of footbinding; and f) cormorant fishing;

4. Marco is incorrect in his description of certain landmarks in cities like Peking (e.g., the so-called Marco Polo Bridge, which he erroneously describes as having twenty-four arches instead of eleven or thirteen);

5. Marco ignores the existence of the Great Wall. According to F.W. 'the omission of the Wall in the Description of the World is telling';

6. Marco claims that he, his father Nicolò and uncle Maffeo were present at the siege of Hsiang-yang (the important Sung stronghold in Hu-pei) by the Mongols, and that, in their capacity of mangonel experts, they were actually instrumental in bringing about its

surrender. This claim is patently false since the siege of Hsiang-yang ended in January 1273, and the three Polos reached north China only in 1274/5;

7. Marco states that he was for three years governor of the important city and trade-post of Yang-chou in Chiang-su. However, no gazetteer of Yang-chou mentions him; therefore, this too appears to be another unsubstantiated claim;

8. Neither Marco nor his father and uncle are mentioned in any Chinese source of the period. This is strange since Marco specifically claims that during his seventeen years in Mongol-ruled China he was constantly sent on special missions by Khubilai Khan in different parts of the empire; he must, therefore, have held an important position, and his name should be recorded somewhere.

To strengthen the case against Marco, F.W. adduces the following secondary arguments:

1. Marco's book is not written like a real travelogue, but rather as an 'armchair guidebook' for merchants, like Pegolotti's Pratica della Mercatura;

2. Stories, such as the famous account of Marco's return to the West accompanying the Mongol princess Kökechin to Persia to marry the Il-khan Arghun, 'could have been borrowed from another source';

3. Rustichello of Pisa's role in editing Marco's work is ambiguous: it is difficult to say what, in the book, is Marco's own contribution and Rustichello's (or other editors') later additions;

4. Contrary to popular belief, Marco did not introduce spaghetti and ice-cream to the West;

5. Marco's claim that his father and uncle were the first 'Latins', i.e. Western Europeans, ever seen by Khubilai Khan is incorrect since we know that they had been preceded by at least one Frankish embassy;

6. Marco's references to the golden tablets of authority which he, his father and his uncle received from Khubilai Khan are confused and therefore unreliable as evidence of Marco's journey. So is also a reference to one of these tablets in the (surviving) inventory of his possessions; and the will of Marco's uncle Maffeo of 1310 suggests some 'jiggery-pokery' by Marco over one of the tablets.

From the above, F.W. infers that while Marco's father and uncle may have undertaken the dangerous journey to the Mongol court (witness the golden tablets they brought back), there is no evidence that Marco did. She suggests a scenario whereby Marco tried to steal their glory by writing himself into the story while in prison in Genoa - something that is possibly related to the family dispute recorded in the will of 1310.

F.W.'s final conclusion, however, is that on the available evidence Marco could have gained the information found in his book partly from his father and uncle who had been to the East, and partly from the knowledge of farther Asia collected by the family's commercial houses in the Crimea and Constantinople, with the additional help of Persian guidebooks, maps, etc. available to him. He himself need not have set foot much beyond those trading posts.

All F.W.'s arguments have been discussed in detail and refuted in Igor de Rachewiltz's review-article 'Marco Polo Went to China' in Zentralasiatische Studien 27 (1997), pp. 34-92. The main thrust of the above review is to focus attention on the internal evidence provided by Marco's work and contemporary documents, as well as on the evidence provided by the Chinese and Persian sources; and to point out the numerous contradictions and superficial (and often incorrect) interpretations in F.W.'s arguments that vitiate her thesis. The following points are especially relevant[1]:

1. In order to explain Marco's 'failings' and the shortcomings of his book, one must first understand the nature of the former and the character of the latter. Marco was not a professional writer, in fact he was not a writer at all. His knowledge of the written language was probably limited to the basic vocabulary and stereotyped formulae of the mercatura, for he left Venice as a young lad and spent much of his adult life in foreign lands. He was a keen observer, but lacking in imagination. The personal element in the narrative does not come through because it is simply not there, having been relegated and disposed of in the Prologue of the book, the title of which is The Description of the World, not My Life & Travels. The description of places and peoples is what matters, and Marco's involvement in them is purely incidental. If the geography and chronology of The Description of the World at times lack coherence and precision it is because the individual episodes that Marco relates are far more important than strict adherence to topographical and chronological accuracy. The result is that while the main events described and the names are generally correct, the details are not. We must not overlook a) the fact that it may not have been possible to check many of the details, especially concerning figures (distances, quantities, etc.) after Marco's return to Venice; and b) we must also take into account factors like lapses of memory and blurred recollections concerning things seen or done, or heard many years before; c) Marco's own biases in the choice of matters to relate; d) an obvious tendency to exaggerate his role; and e) the mediaeval man's tendency to fill in gaps in knowledge with wild statements and tales of marvels. Had Marco had access to written sources like 'Persian guidebooks', he would have been able to avoid some of his most glaring mistakes, such as that concerning the bridge in Peking or the exact situation of a town in China. Marco's book is not a report commissioned by the authorities (or meant for them) like the well-known accounts of John of Pian di Carpine and William of Rubruck; nor is it a merchant's guide to Asia like Pegolotti's book. Although Marco's 'mercantile' remarks are frequent, the style, structure and organization of his book are completely different from Pegolotti's work, as the Polan scholar Leonardo Olschki has shown. And, contrary to what F.W. claims, Marco's itinerary does not lack coherence and adheres until the very last chapters to the order set out in the Prologue, as J. Critchley, another Polan scholar, has amply demonstrated. The occasional 'undisciplined' way in which Marco tells his story is precisely due to the fact that the author lacked the constraints of a diarist, a chronicler or a compiler of a travel or commercial guide.

[1] Most of the arguments presented in this paper are discussed in detail (with supporting references) in my review article in Zentralasiatische Studien 27 (1997). A short list of Additions and Corrections appeared in Zentralasiatische Studien 28 (1998), p. 177. Bibliographical and other references for the additional arguments included in the present paper are given in the following notes. Many of the criticisms I make have already been made by other reviewers and commentators in the past years, but not (to my knowledge) in a thorough and systematic way.

2. During his seventeen years in Mongol-ruled China, Marco did not 'mix' with the Chinese, he never learned their language and was not interested in their ancient culture. He moved among the many foreign communities already established there before the Mongol invasion and greatly enlarged thanks to the Mongol government multiethnic policy. There was then (second half of the 13th c.) a vast number of Persian and Turkic-speaking Central and Western Asians, Arabs, Alans from the Caucasus, as well as traders, clerics and adventurers from various European countries, Italy in particular, owing to the commercial activity of Venice, Genoa and Pisa. The lingua franca of these 'Westerners' in China at the time was Persian. This was, indeed, not only the dominant foreign language, but also the 'official' foreign language until the Ming period, as shown by Huang Shih-chien of Hang-chou University. Chinese was the language of the subjects, and Mongolian (and, to a lesser extent, Turkic) the language of the rulers - a huge social and cultural gulf separating the native subjects from their foreign masters. At the bottom of the scale were the Chinese scholars, i.e. the keepers and transmitters of China's tradition and culture. The foreigners of various extractions who had settled in the country formed a sort of intermediate structure or class with close links to the top, however, and purely mercantile and/or administrative relations with the Chinese (as petty-officials, tax collectors, etc.). The three Polos belonged to this multiethnic society and most, if not all, of their business was transacted in Persian (as well as Italian, of course, with their countrymen). The fact that Marco employs the Persian and Turkic forms of geographical and proper names, and of various terms for official titles, objects, etc., is exactly what we would expect of him and should therefore not surprise us. As for the many outlandish forms of names and terms that we encounter in his book, these are often due simply to textual corruptions and scribal errors, as shown by P. Pelliot's meticulous reconstructions.

3. Marco's indifference to things Chinese in general, and to the finer products of their ancient culture in particular, goes a long way to explain some of the 'notable omissions' that we find so puzzling: a) Marco makes only a cursory remark on the Chinese language and dialects, and on a single system of writing ('one manner of letters'). He mentions the (printed) Chinese paper money but, like Ibn Battùta and Odoric of Pordenone, does not comment on the script; b) he does not mention Chinese books - which were really a closed book to him! - and book-printing. However, the printing process involved in the production of the banknotes which he describes is essentially the same as that used for printing books, the only difference being that what Marco calls 'a seal' is, in reality, a 'printing block'. Clearly, the complex Chinese system of writing, and the fine points of printing, only interested travellers who were more educated and literary-minded than was either Marco or Odoric. And, again, we must not forget that we are in the 13th century, when the vast majority of Marco's contemporaries were illiterate; c) tea drinking was a custom spread mainly among the Chinese, too trivial an item to have made an impression on Marco. Neither Odoric nor Ibn Battùta mention it in their travelogues - and none of them speaks of chopsticks either, obviously for the same reason; d) pace F.W. (who contradicts herself here) porcelain and porcelain-making are described by Marco; e) the curious and notorious custom of footbinding is ignored by Marco, as it is also by Ibn Battùta. Since Marco had no close contact with Chinese society and only a very superficial interest in its customs, it would have been difficult for him to investigate this practice, confined as it was to a stratum of society alien to him and one largely removed

from the public eye; f) cormorant fishing, which is noted by Odoric but not by Ibn Battùta, is likewise omitted from Marco's narrative, no doubt through oversight.

4 & 5. Whereas Marco's incorrect description of the famous bridge in Peking can be simply explained through either a faulty recollection on his part of the exact number of arches, or an early scribal error, the same could not be said of his total silence on the Great Wall. But the fact is that the Wall, as we know it, did not exist in Marco's time. As shown by A.N. Waldron, the magnificent Wall we see today is the fortification built or re-built by the Ming government in the 16th and 17th centuries. Before the Ming there were only a series of ramparts, erected in different periods and made of pounded earth reinforced with wooden stakes or bundled twigs. At no stage was there a continuous 'line', only discontinuous walls, differently placed and shifting position from dynasty to dynasty. What remained unchanged throughout the centuries was the literary fiction of the 'Long Wall' built by the Ch'in emperor Shih-huang in the 3rd century B.C., i.e. the 'myth' of the Great Wall which is still alive and well today in China and in Europe. There is no mention of the Great Wall as a material reality in the Chinese sources of the 13th century. Indeed, in the great Ming cartographic work Kuang-yü t'u, which had six editions between ca. 1555 and 1579, the Great Wall appears for the first time only in the 1579 edition.[2] This means that until 1579 the Chinese geographers themselves had ignored the existence of the Wall. No wonder Marco failed to notice it!

6. To explain away Marco's absurd claim that he, his father and uncle had been present at the siege of Hsiang-yang, we have only two options: a) plain boasting on his part, in the near-certain knowledge that he could get away with it; and b) Rustichello or a later editor invented the story to give credit to the Polos, the text being amended accordingly. I am in favour of (b) because this claim is not found in an important and related group of MSS., as already noted by A.C. Moule.

7. Marco's claim that he held the governorship of Yang-chou for three years is an exaggeration to say the least. There is no reason to disbelieve his statement that he resided in that city, and for a lengthy period. After all, Yang-chou was a thriving commercial centre and wealthy Italian merchants were established there in the 13th-14th century (the Yilioni family from Genoa).[3] But Marco was certainly never the governor of that city, although he may have held a temporary position of authority there as inspector or court appointed commissioner - a position that he, or Rustichello, later magnified.

8. It is true that no mention of Marco, his father and uncle has yet been discovered in the Chinese sources of the period. However, we do not know what Marco's name was in Chinese (if he ever had one), nor in Mongolian for that matter, in spite of his claim that at court he was simply called 'Master Marc Pol'. The Mongols often gave nicknames to

[2] The six editions in question are those of ca. 1555, 1558, 1561, 1566, 1572 and 1579. A seventh edition was published in the Ch'ing period under the Chia-ch'ing emperor (1799). See W. Fuchs, The "Mongol Atlas" of China by Chu Ssu-pen and the Kuang-yü-t'u, Monumenta Serica Monograph VIII, Peiping, 1946, pp. 15-24. The reference to the Great Wall is on p. 21.

[3] On the Genoese Yilioni (= Ilioni) family, see R.S. Lopez, 'Trafegando in partibus Catagii: altri genovesi in Cina nel Trecento', in Su e giù per la storia di Genova, Genoa, 1975, pp. 184-5. Cf. L. Petech, Selected Papers on Asian History, Is. M.E.O.: Serie Orientale Roma LX, Rome, 1988, pp. 168-9. I wish to thank Prof. L. Petech of Rome for kindly supplying the references cited in nn. 2 and 3. (The statement concerning the 'Vilioni' family of Venice in my article 'Marco Polo Went to China', p. 40, must be amended accordingly.)

> people in their employment and these would have been phonetically transliterated into Chinese. We can only guess and so far we have not been successful in tracing him. Personally, I think that Marco is totally ignored by the Chinese sources, as were so many other foreign personages who resided in, or visited China. Neither John of Montecorvino, the first Catholic Archbishop of Peking (and a contemporary of Marco), nor the famous roving friar Odoric of Pordenone, nor John of Marignolli, the head of an important Papal embassy to the last Mongol ruler of China, get any mention in the Chinese sources. I believe that Marco's name is not included in any Chinese official source because he did not have a truly 'official' position. We can gather from his own account that he was sent by Khubilai Khan on 'special' missions and that he reported to him personally. Clearly, he did not belong among the rank and file of the Mongol administration, and must have acted as a special court agent, inspector, or ad hoc investigator on assignments requiring tact and diplomacy. Interesting theories have been put forward as to what agencies operating in China and in the wider Mongol empire he may have been inspecting specifically, but this area of Marco's activities remains largely speculative. In any event, the fact that he is not mentioned in the Chinese sources should not surprise us unduly, for such is the case of other, possibly more exalted, individuals at the time.[4]

With regard to F.W.'s secondary arguments, most of them, as shown in my review article, are based on misinterpretations of the original sources. The entire section on spaghetti, ravioli and ice-cream is, of course, irrelevant since Marco never claims that he was responsible for their introduction to the West. In fact, Marco does not mention spaghetti or ravioli in his book, but speaks only of 'lasagne' (as a staple food of the Mongols and the Chinese), a term incorrectly rendered as 'vermicelli' and 'noodles' by a series of English translators who were evidently not very conversant with the different types of pasta. They alone are responsible for the legend of Marco's involvement in the noodle migration - a legend which never spread outside English-speaking countries.[5]

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[4] In a letter to me of 5 August 1998, Prof. G. Stary of Venice wrote: 'It is no wonder that the Chinese sources are silent on Marco Polo. Similar cases can be quoted regarding the activity of the Jesuits at the Ch'ing court. You will recall the famous report of [Fr. Ferdinand] Verbiest [1623-88] on K'ang-hsi's journey to Manchuria in 1682: a foreigner accompanying the emperor - something sensational, but only in Europe and for the Europeans! Kao Shih-ch'i [1645-1703], who was close to the emperor and likewise accompanied him on that tour, makes no mention of Verbiest's presence in his diary [the Hu-ts'ung tung-hsün jih-lu] although this was an extraordinary or at least unusual event in the circumstances. No mention either of Verbiest's presence in the Shih-lu and Chi-chü-chu: in both these works Verbiest is mentioned but only because he had been conferred an honorific title in Peking!...One has the impression that for the Chinese/Mongols/Manchus, the few Europeans who resided in China were so insignificant as to be hardly worth mentioning in their official documents. It is we who, as usual, overestimate ourselves ...'. (My translation - I.R.) Perhaps the best illustration of the eastern and western attitudes towards such cultural 'encounters' is the report on the papal embassy to the Mongol court led by John of Marignolli in 1342. Whereas Marignolli's report contains a detailed and florid description of the audience with Emperor Toghon Temür (Shun-ti, r. 1333-67), the Chinese annals merely record the gift of 'a remarkable horse' from the Kingdom of the Franks, describing its unusual physical features. Such was the impression that this equine wonder made on the emperor that the court painter Chou Lang was commissioned to make a portrait of it and the leading academician was instructed to compose an 'Ode to the Heavenly Horse' in its honour. No mention, however, even in passing of the pope, his envoy and the aim of the embassy. See I. de Rachewiltz, Papal Envoys to the Great Khans, Faber & Faber, London, 1971, pp. 193-5.

[5] For the history of noodles in Central and East Asia, see P.D. Buell, E.N. Anderson and C. Perry, A Soup for the Qan: Chinese Dietary Medicine of the Mongol Era as Seen in Hu Szu-hui's Yin-shan Cheng-yao, Kegan Paul International, London, 1998, pp. 617-38 (forthcoming). Cf. also by the same author, 'Mongol Empire and Turkicization: the Evidence of Food and Foodways', in R. Amitai-Preiss and D.O. Morgan (eds), The Mongol

Two items in this class of arguments that are played down and distorted by F.W. are, on the other hand, of prime concern to us because they conclusively prove that Marco was in China. I refer to the story concerning Princess Kökechin's voyage to Persia and the 'mystery' surrounding the golden tablets of authority.

In the first place it should be mentioned that Khubilai Khan's embassy to his grand-nephew the Il-khan Arghun, Mongol ruler of Persia, in 1290, is not recorded in the official history of the Yüan dynasty. The embassy was to escort Princess Kökechin to Arghun to be his wife. Furthermore, Kökechin is nowhere mentioned in the Chinese sources. This mission, involving an internal family arrangement between the two courts and fraught with dangers owing to the long voyage in perilous waters, was obviously considered of a private and delicate nature and, therefore, not to be officially recorded. However, material arrangements had to be made, and Khubilai Khan in April-May 1290 issued a directive to the effect that the three envoys Ulutai, Abishkha and Khoje were to go to Prince Arghun by way of 'Ma'bar' (i.e. the Coromandel Coast) and that certain arrangements had to be made concerning the rations and provisions for the voyage. From this document we also learn that the mission was preparing to sail from Ch'üan-chou in Fu-chien in September of that year. There is no hint of the purpose of the mission and of course no mention of Kökechin. The directive in Chinese has miraculously survived by being quoted, together with other administrative documents of that period, in the great 15th-century encyclopaedia Yung-lo ta-tien. This very short document buried in one of the surviving volumes of the encyclopaedia was discovered by the Chinese scholar Yang Chih-chiu, who published it in 1941.

In his book Marco gives a detailed account of the embassy, of the adventurous voyage to Persia, and of the delivery of Princess Kökechin to Arghun's son Ghasan (Arghun had died in the meantime). Marco gives the names of the three envoys as Oulatai, Apusca and Coja, and informs us that only Coja survived the two and a half year long voyage. The Polos had joined the embassy in China as a means of returning home; they were (so Marco relates) entrusted by Khubilai with an unspecified mission to the Pope and the kings of Europe, as well as with the care of the royal bride, the latter claim very much open to doubt.

The Persian historian Rashìd al-Dìn, writing a few years after these events, gives a brief account of the arrival in Abhar (near Kazvin) of Khoja and 'a party of envoys' who had been sent by Khubilai, with the bride sought by Arghun in the person of Lady Kökechin, in the spring or early summer of 1293. Rashìd al-Dìn's brief notice confirms Marco's account in its essentials, including the name of the surviving envoy Khoja, now leading the party. He makes no mention of the three 'Franks' who, after delivering the bride to Ghasan, had resumed their journey to Venice via Trebizond and Constantinople. The three Polos were obviously an adjunct to Khubilai's embassy to the Il-khan and would have been included among the 'party of envoys' referred to by Rashìd. Marco's account is of vital importance in testing the veracity of his book, for:

1. He could not have learned about this mission from either the Chinese or Persian written sources, as the former do not mention it (and, in any case, Marco could not read Chinese), and the only Persian source that mentions it was not completed until 1310-11;

Empire and its Legacy, Brill, Leiden-Boston-Köln, 1999, pp. 209ff.

2. He must have been well acquainted with the three envoys, whose names appear only in an internal administrative document in Chinese concerning rations and provisions. Had Marco not been personally acquainted with them, it is most unlikely that he would have been able to record their names so accurately, and in the correct sequence, solely from second-hand oral information;

3. Marco says that two of the three envoys died during the voyage and only the third, Coja/Khoja, survived. Rashìd al-Dìn confirms this fact indirectly by mentioning Khoja in his account;

4. It is, in fact, thanks to Marco's own account that we can reconcile the partial references in the Chinese and Persian sources and thus complete the picture. At the same time this is also a test of the veracity of the story since the basic facts and the chronology corroborate each other.

Pelliot, one of the leading Polan scholars, wrote that Marco's very detailed account about the sending of the embassy to Arghun 'is to be entirely trusted', and Yang Chih-chiu, certainly the leading Polan scholar in China today, regards the entire Kökechin episode as the definitive proof that Marco was in China.[6] Indeed, the likelihood of Marco's reconstructing the whole episode in Genoa (from memory) or in Venice (from notes) on the basis of second-hand information that he had previously obtained from an unknown informant in the Crimea or in Constantinople is so remote as to be safely dismissed.

But there is more. We know that in a conversation with the famous physician and astrologer Petrus de Abano (1250-1316) which took place some time before 1303, Marco made certain astronomical observations, illustrating them with a sketch in his own hand. These observations, together with Marco's drawing, are reproduced in Petrus' work Conciliator (published in 1303), but are not found in Marco's book. Through a close analysis of these observations and of data found in the latter, J. Jensen has conclusively shown in an article published in 1997 that Marco went to Sumatra and that he must have done so by way of the South China Sea. His conclusion in answer to F.W.'s question is 'Yes, Marco Polo did go to China'.[7]

Last, but not least, the vexed question of the golden tablets of the Great Khan, i.e. of the tablets of authority. These were given as laissez-passer by Khubilai to the Polos to facilitate their journeys. They were usually oblong, made of gold or silver, and about 30x9cm. The gold paizas (as they are usually called from their Chinese name, p'ai-tzu) were in the shape of a tiger or a gerfalcon at the top, or were just plain. They are described in detail by Marco who also notes the ones he, his father and uncle were granted in the course of their travels. In F.W.'s book there is an attempt at confusing the issue and downplaying the role of the paizas by casting doubts on their number and by connecting them with some dubious business dealings involving Marco and his relatives.

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[6] Paul Pelliot (1878-1945), the leading French sinologist and savant who devoted much of his life to the study of Marco Polo's Description of the World and related problems, and whose commentary to the text was published posthumously in 1959-63, never doubted the authenticity of Marco's account. See his Notes on Marco Polo, I-II, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1959-63, passim. The same can be said of Prof. Yang Chih-chiu and other leading Polan scholars in China.

[7] See J. Jensen, 'The World's Most Diligent Observer', *Asiatische Studien. Études Asiatiques* 51.3 (1997), pp. 719-26.

There is, however, no doubt about the total number of paizas received at various times by the three Polos: they were seven, as a careful reading of the book will reveal. There was also no 'jiggery-pokery' over these gold tablets and no family dispute, as I have shown in my review article: they are all products of F.W.'s misreading of the original documents and of her fertile imagination. But having led the reader into a maze of doubts and uncertainties about both the tablets' record and the part they played in an imaginary family quarrel, she ably steers him/her away from the one vital bit of information concerning these precious (in more ways than one) laissez-passer. The evidence in question is contained in the will of Marco's uncle Maffeo dated 6 February 1310 in which there is a reference to certain arrangements concerning a jewel and 'the three tablets of gold which were from the magnificent Chan of the Tartars'. As a corollary to this revealing piece of evidence we have the list of Marco's possessions made after his death in 1324. One of the items in this list is 'a large gold tablet of command'. We do not know what happened to the rest of the paizas (they were probably melted), but at least one of them was still in existence in Marco's household in 1324. The provenance of the former is clearly stated in the will, a document whose authenticity is not in question: they came from the 'magnificent Chan of the Tartars', i.e. from Khubilai Khan himself.

Now, assuming that only Marco's father and uncle had gone to the Mongol court as suggested by F.W., they would have received one tablet each for their return journey. Then how do we account for the third one? And why should Maffeo (not Marco!) gratuitously lie about their provenance in his last will and testament.

F.W.'s thesis is so full of holes as to be untenable from whichever angle we look at it. One of its cornerstones is the 'Persian guidebook' hypothesis extrapolated from a casual remark made several decades ago by H. Franke. In a letter to me dated 28 July 1998, Professor Franke writes: 'Yesterday I received your article ... on F. Wood's misleading book on Marco Polo. I am pleased that you pointed out how she misquoted what I had said, very provisionally, in 1965. I think that you have definitely laid to rest her theory.'

There are, of course, still unresolved problems relating to the manuscript tradition of Marco's text, and the precise role of Rustichello and others in editing the same. Scholars in several countries are investigating these problems at present and we must wait for the results of their research. This is highly specialized work, and I do not think that F.W. can take much comfort for her theory (or theories) from the data published so far on the subject by B. Wehr of Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, and others.

In conclusion, an examination of F.W.'s book reveals once more the fundamental weakness of the argumentum e silentio. Marco's book, with its immense wealth of information, speaks for itself. Had Marco, as F.W. claims, obtained so much varied and detailed intelligence about most of 13th-century Asia (including, beside China, Iraq, Persia, Central Asia, Mongolia, continental Southeast Asia, Java, Sumatra, Malacca, the Nicobar Islands, Ceylon, Southern India and the coasts and islands of the Indian Sea) - not to speak of his insider's description of the Mongol court - without actually going there, this in itself would have been an even greater feat than that of compiling a genuine eyewitness account of the magnitude of The Description of the World. But, as we have seen, this was not the case: Marco was there all right.

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