

MARCO POLO AND HIS BOOK

BY

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ANNUAL ITALIAN LECTURE
of the
BRITISH ACADEMY
1934

FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE
BRITISH ACADEMY. VOLUME XX
LONDON : HUMPHREY MILFORD
AMEN HOUSE, E.C.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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Read 31 October 1934

THE outstanding geographical event of the thirteenth century was the discovery of the overland route to the Far East. The silk of China had long been known to the West, but the route by which it travelled was unknown, for European merchants had not ventured beyond certain Asiatic ports, whither the silk, like other Oriental wares, was conveyed by caravan.

It was an Italian, Plano Carpini, who first penetrated to the court of the Great Khan of the Mongols in 1245, and it was another Italian, Marco Polo, who at the end of the same century gave to the world the first full account of China in a Western language and 'created Asia for the European mind'. People were now to learn that a distant land which they imagined full of desert solitudes and strange monsters actually had a highly developed civilization of its own. In the fourteenth century further news of the Far East was brought or sent to Europe by other Italians, notably by Odoric of Pordenone, Marignolli, and John of Monte Corvino.

It was the sudden invasion of Central Europe by the armed hordes sent out by Chinghiz Khan at the beginning of the thirteenth century that gave the Western world its first introduction to the people of the Far East, and had it not been for this invasion Europe would no doubt have long continued to remain ignorant of China.

By 1240 the Mongol armies had reached Hungary and Upper Silesia, and no combination of European princes was able to withstand their advance. The whole of Europe was seized with the Mongol terror, and Matthew Paris, writing at St. Albans under the year 1238, tells us that for

fear of the Mongols the fishermen of Gotland and Friesland did not dare to cross the North Sea to load their boats at Yarmouth, and that consequently herrings were so cheap and abundant in England that forty or fifty were sold for a piece of silver even in places far inland.

In 1241, after defeating the troops of Poland, Moravia, and Silesia under Duke Henry II of Silesia near Liegnitz, the Mongols withdrew even more unexpectedly than they had arrived, purposely destroying everything in their path to show that they were retiring of their own free will.¹ Fear was now replaced by curiosity, and men began to wonder whether the Mongols might not be a possible ally against the Saracens, i.e. the Mamluks of Egypt, who alone of the powers of Islam had withstood the Mongol invader. The strange legend of Prester John, an all-powerful monarch possessed of fabulous wealth, both king and Christian priest, had been current in Europe for nearly a hundred years; his kingdom had never been located, and it was thought that he possibly reigned in the distant land of the Mongols.

It was such hopes and beliefs, no doubt, that led Pope Innocent IV to send Plano Carpini,² an Italian Franciscan, to visit the Great Khan in Mongolia. He set out in 1245, and in 1247 he returned with discouraging letters from Küyük Khan, whose investiture he had witnessed. Plano Carpini was then nearly sixty years of age and very stout. Insufficiently clothed and badly nourished, he had to make the three months' journey from the Volga to Central Mongolia at the rapid pace of the Mongolian ponies.

¹ Some writers have suggested that this Mongolian army under Subutai withdrew because news had been received of the death of the Great Khan Ögedei, and that this event rendered necessary his presence at Karakorum. However, the battle of Liegnitz took place on 9 April 1241, and the death of Ögedei did not occur till 11 December. Subutai after the battle of Liegnitz joined Batu in Hungary, and both generals returned to Mongolia in the following year.

² The travels of Plano Carpini, William of Rubruck, and Odoric of Pordenone have all been published by the Hakluyt Society.

This mission was followed by another, that of William of Rubruck, a native of French Flanders, also a Franciscan, who carried letters from St. Louis of France to Mängü Khan.¹

Another Italian, John of Monte Corvino, at the age of fifty penetrated into southern China just as the Polos were returning to Venice, with the object of preaching the Gospel to the Chinese, including the Nestorians, whom he regarded as little better than pagans. The Pope, at length realizing the fine work he was doing, made him Archbishop of Peking with patriarchal authority; churches were established in various other cities; and Roman Catholicism was spread under the immediate patronage of the Great Khan. Many accounts of the work of Archbishop John have been preserved in letters written from Cathay. He died in 1328.

Another Italian, Friar Odoric of Pordenone, whose travels have been reprinted many times, set out for Peking in 1316, returned to Europe at the beginning of 1330, and died in 1331. His book is comparatively small in compass, but is full of interesting details, and it is remarkable that he mentions many customs among the Chinese which are not referred to by Marco Polo, such as the binding of women's feet, allowing the finger-nails to grow long, and fishing with cormorants.

Marco Polo's journey to the Mongol court was due almost to an accident. His father and uncle, who were Venetian merchants, had already in 1260 found their way to the court of Kubilai Khan only because the disturbed state of the Near East made it impossible for them to follow their usual route home from the Crimea. Kubilai received them well, and entreated them to go back to Italy and to return to him bringing a hundred Christian priests—for

¹ He was in Palestine with St. Louis, King of France, in 1251, and it was this king who sent him on his journey, which took place between 1253 and 1255. His book ranks in interest very close to that of Marco Polo.

the Mongols were always willing to give Christianity a hearing. After many delays they set out on their second journey in 1271 accompanied by the youthful Marco Polo, but by only two priests, whose courage failed them when they had travelled but a short distance.

The Polos started from Acre in November 1271, and it is possible that while there they may have met Edward I of England and Rustichello, who were both in Acre at that time. I shall refer later to Rustichello. The Polos proceeded to Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, with a view to going to China by sea, but they abandoned this plan for various reasons, and continued their journey across Persia in a north-easterly direction. Their route from Acre to Hormuz lay through Kaisariya, Sivas, Erzinjan, Erzerum, north of Lake Van, Tabriz, Sava, Kashan, Yezd, and Kerman.

I mention these details because Yule¹ and others held the view that the Polos passed through Mosul and Baghdad. Mr. Penzer² has, I think, given good reasons for doubting this, and I myself find it hard to believe that Marco could have given such meagre accounts of these two cities had he himself seen them. Mosul especially must have called forth his admiration, for this city, which lies along the right bank of the Tigris, is one of the most lovely in the East. The waters of this river are here of Mediterranean blue, and the view of the city from the bridge is a sight never to be forgotten. No traveller, of course, in those days could have guessed that the mounds which lie on the opposite bank cover the once great city of Nineveh. Baghdad at the end of the thirteenth century was probably not looking its best, and the Tigris, which flows through it, is here the colour of mud. The city itself had in 1258 been almost destroyed, but not entirely, by Hulagu, who wished to retain

¹ *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, edited by Sir Henry Yule, and revised by Henri Cordier, 3 vols., third edition, London, 1926.

² *The Most Noble and Famous Travels of Marco Polo*, edited by N. M. Penzer, Argonaut Press, London, 1929.

it for himself and had even restored some of the Abbasid buildings.

From Hormuz the Polos proceeded by way of Sava, Kashan, Yezd, Kerman, Tabas, Tun, Kain, Herat, Balkh, across the Pamirs to Kashghar, thence via Yarkand, Khotan, Lop Nor and Tun-huang (Shachau) to Kaipingfu, the summer residence of the Great Khan.

The elder Polos no doubt returned to China because they had promised to do so, though their failure to secure the hundred priests might reasonably have exempted them from their promise. They could scarcely have foreseen that on their return the Great Khan would wish to keep them in his kingdom indefinitely. They actually remained in China seventeen years. We do not know whether during this time the two elder Polos had any fixed occupation, but it is certain that Marco was in the service of Kubilai and that he at any rate entertained very little hope of ever returning to Europe.

The accident which eventually enabled them to leave China was the request on the part of Arghun, the Mongol Il-Khan of Persia, for a Chinese bride. The Tartar envoys who had come on this mission refused to return overland on account of the disturbed state of Central Asia, and, having decided to return by sea, they begged Kubilai to allow the three Polos, as belonging to a maritime race, to accompany them. Their return journey by sea lay through the Straits of Singapore and Malacca; skirting the Nicobars they touched southern Ceylon, Cape Comorin, the western coast of India, Mekran, and finally Hormuz. The voyage took over two years, and over six hundred of the company perished on the way, but fortunately not their precious charge. When they finally arrived in Persia in 1294 they learned that Arghun had died three years previously, and so they married the Chinese princess to his son Ghazan. Instead of returning to China, as they had no doubt assured Kubilai they would, the Polos now found their way back to Italy via Trebizond and the Black Sea.

It was in the year 1295 that the Polos returned to Venice. We next hear of Marco in 1298 as a prisoner in Genoa, from which it may be presumed that he took part in the Battle of Curzola, which was fought on 7 September of that year, and that he was among the prisoners who arrived in Genoa on 16 October.

THE BOOK

According to Ramusio¹ it was mainly in order to save himself the trouble of continually repeating his adventures to his fellow prisoners and the local gentry of Genoa that Marco Polo first thought of making a book. It seems certain that the original version which he drew up in Genoa was considerably longer and fuller in detail than any single version that has hitherto been discovered.

Now, with regard to the compilation of Marco's Book, it is quite obvious that no man could possess a memory sufficiently strong to enable him to recall so many strange names and facts extending over a period of twenty-four years. It is perfectly clear from many passages in his Book that he was in the habit of keeping notes: he tells us, for example, that he was sent on various missions by Kubilai Khan and that on his return he furnished reports which delighted the Emperor, and it is more than likely that he preserved copies of these reports. We cannot, of course, say whether he also kept notes on matters which would be of interest to European readers, who in those days knew nothing at all about China. In the first *proemio* of Ramusio's edition, to which I shall refer again later, we read that had Marco Polo imagined that he would ever be permitted to leave China he would have kept a far more elaborate journal; and seeing that it was a mere accident that eventually gave the Polos an opportunity of leaving the country, in the circumstances one wonders why he kept one at all. But we can well imagine Marco passing some of the long voyage to Persia in writing a journal.

¹ *Navigazioni et Viaggi*, Venice, 1559, vol. ii, p. 7.

The contents of the Book may be divided into four more or less distinct categories.

First of all there is the account of the first journey made by Marco's father and uncle to Kubilai's summer residence in Mongolia and their return to Venice. This narrative he of course received from his father and uncle. Not all of their narrative was included in this part of Marco's Book, for he probably derived from the same source his account of Russia and of those parts of Central Asia which were visited by the Polos on their first journey but not on the second.

Secondly, we have a geographical description of as much as Marco knew of the world lying between the Black Sea, the China Sea, and the Indian Ocean. Thanks to the researches of scholars we have to-day a fairly clear notion of the routes Marco actually followed, and of the places he described from hearsay but could not himself have visited. There can, I think, be little doubt that none of the Polos ever set foot in Mosul, Baghdad, Aden, or Abyssinia.¹ It must be remembered that Marco's object was to describe the wonders of the then unknown world, and not to lay claim to have been everywhere himself. The title of the earliest French version of his Book is *Le Divisament dou Monde*. It has been well observed by Benedetto that 'Marco Polo wished to give to Europe a comprehensive picture of the Asiatic world; to make the occidentals realize that beyond the steppes and the mountainous regions a wonderful and intense life was palpitating, where they had hitherto imagined only solitude and monsters. . . . This book is a synthesis, an inventory of the wealth of the Orient.'

Thirdly, we find scattered throughout the work Marco Polo's personal adventures and his relations with the Mongol Emperor.

Fourthly, there are the historical narratives connected with the rise and growth of the Mongol Empire. These

¹ See Postscript at end, p. 27.

details must obviously have been based on notes taken on the spot by Marco either from books or from his learned Chinese friends.

Let us now return to the prison in Genoa, where Marco is said to have drawn up his Book with the help of others. It naturally suggests itself that the citizens of Venice must have been quite as anxious as those of Genoa to hear everything that Marco had to say, but no mention is made of his attempting to do for the Venetians what he did for the Genoese. Marco arrived in Genoa with the rest of the prisoners on 16 October 1298, and yet we are expected to believe that in the short interval between that date and his release from prison in July 1299 he had composed the whole of his Book. Unfortunately we do not know how soon after his return to Venice Marco Polo put to sea, or what he was doing between his return to Venice in 1295 and his setting out in a galley to fight the Genoese. I suggest that during those three years he spent much time in telling his adventures and in reviewing and adding to his notes. By 1298 he possibly had already the plan of a book in his mind.

Now according to the opening chapter of the oldest French version (the Geographic Text) he employed a writer of Arthurian romances named Rustichello of Pisa, his fellow prisoner, to remodel (*retraire*) his narrative, and according to Ramusio, for this purpose he sent to Venice for the notes and memoranda which he had brought with him from the East. If it is permissible to suppose that Marco Polo, before setting out to fight the Genoese, had made a more or less complete draft of his Book in his own Venetian dialect, the notes he is said to have received from Venice may have included not only the materials he had brought from China but this draft of his narrative, which Rustichello presumably proceeded to translate into his own peculiar French, without making changes in its structure.

In talking to those of his fellow prisoners who were not Venetians or to the local Genoese who visited him in prison

Marco may have found difficulty in making himself understood, and Yule suggested that Marco the Venetian and Rustichello the Pisan communicated with each other in a kind of pidgin French, just as two Chinese from different provinces talk in pidgin English. Rustichello's written French is poor stuff, but it is certainly more like French than the jargon in which Marco Polo recounted his adventures. At that period Latin was the literary language *par excellence*, and the only vulgar dialect which had attained any literary dignity in Europe was French. An Italian *volgare* was on the point of being established by Dante, but Brunetto Latini, his master, spoke of French as *la parleur la plus delitable*, and wrote his *Tesoro* in that language.

Marco Polo had spent twenty-four years in the East, for the most part in China. Ramusio believed that on his return to Venice Marco had lost the habit of his own vernacular, and had become as much a foreigner in speech as he and his father and uncle had become in appearance and dress. Had he been a solitary wanderer during all those years it is conceivable that he should have forgotten his mother tongue, but it seems unlikely that these three strangers in a strange land should have conversed with each other in any language but their own Venetian. Had Marco Polo written his Book without external help he would no doubt have written in the Venetian dialect.

It has not, I think, ever been suggested that there may have come out of the prison in Genoa more than one original of Marco Polo's Book. Why should not others have done what Rustichello did? If he changed Marco Polo's notes into Franco-Italian some other fellow prisoner might have reproduced them in Latin or some Italian *volgare*.

Let us then picture Marco Polo with his Venetian rough draft before him, surrounded by fellow prisoners and visitors, who, anxious to take down as much as they understood of his story, each wrote in the language that suited him best. Such a situation would surely account for the similarities and discrepancies of the various versions. There

are, however, strong arguments against such a theory, the most notable of which is the outstanding authority of the Geographic Text. Moreover, the discrepancies in the text of various early manuscripts are easily accounted for by the carelessness of scribes.

The same thing happened in the case of the Report of Odoric of Pordenone, and Yule suggested 'that the practice in multiplying copies of such works was not to attempt verbal transcription, but merely to read over a clause, and then write down its gist in such language as came uppermost. Yet why (he adds) should a practice have applied to these narratives different from that which applied to the multiplication of the classics?'¹

Supposing Marco Polo's rough draft in Venetian Italian were already completed, the work which remained for Rustichello was to change Marco's language into his own romantic French much flavoured with Italian. On his own account he can only have added, as Benedetto says, 'formule di transizione, battute di dialogo, moduli descrittivi di battaglie, facilmente riconoscibili alla loro fissità convenzionale. La sua inerzia creativa di fronte alla stesura di Marco si rivela chiaramente là dove l'opera è rimasta un semplice abbozzo.' This last sentence, which I take to mean that Rustichello employed little creative energy when dealing with Marco's model, seems to bear out the theory that Marco had prepared a text of his own. We may therefore suppose either that Marco dictated his Book, or that he handed to Rustichello his own complete rough draft in the Venetian dialect. Everything seems to point to the latter alternative. We must always bear in mind that Marco was writing a description of Asia and not merely a book of travels.

Ramusio tells us that within a few months of the appearance of the original (which he believed to have been in Latin) 'all Italy was full of copies and translations into "our

¹ No one ever dreamt of mis-spelling Latin, but it took many centuries to standardize English spelling—and now it is proposed by some to change it all again!

vernacular", so greatly was this history desired and longed for by all'. This was no doubt the case, but it is strange that within so incredibly short a space of time the original and any complete copies that might have been made of it had been supplanted by translated, distorted, and abridged versions. Surely it would be easier to account for the discrepancies among the manuscripts, the rareness of Rustichello's version, Ramusio's belief that the original was in Latin, and such-like matters, were it possible to suppose that several different versions came out of the prison in Genoa.

The famous manuscript of Rustichello's version, known as the Geographic Text, which is itself by no means complete, exists to-day only in one copy in Paris and in one fragment in the British Museum which, however, differs very much from the Paris MS.

The most popular version during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was Pipino's Latin translation¹ made *c.* 1320 from an Italian version. Pipino, in another of his works,² tells us that his translation was made from the Lombard dialect. Actually his version corresponds to a well-known Venetian recension. Pipino himself says that he made his translation for the Reverend Fathers of his Order 'since it pleases my masters to read it in Latin rather than in the vernacular'. Ramusio states that Pipino was unable to find a copy of the Latin version, but Pipino nowhere says so himself; and indeed speaks of the Italian version which he translated in such a manner as to have led some to suppose that it was Marco Polo's original. Pipino does not mention Rustichello, but some Venetian versions do so; so also does the Spanish, which is derived from Pipino's Latin.

Marco Polo died in 1323, and at the time of his death

¹ The only printed edition of Pipino's version appeared without place, date, or printer's name. Presumably it was printed in Antwerp, *c.* 1485. No less than fifty manuscripts of Pipino have been traced.

² Yule, vol. i, p. 81.

there must have existed many different recensions in Latin, French, and the Italian vernaculars. There seems, however, to be no evidence that Marco showed any interest in the fate of his Book, and yet one cannot help believing that he himself possessed a copy of the complete text, whether that of Rustichello or some other. The 'de Cepoy' legend (contained in some Grégoire MSS.) which says that Marco in 1307 gave a copy of his book to a French envoy in Venice does not bear close inspection.

Benedetto published his monumental work on Marco Polo in 1928¹. In its preparation he discovered in the libraries of Europe eighty hitherto unknown manuscripts, and thanks to his untiring labours those now known to us number no less than one hundred and thirty-eight. Almost all may be grouped in one or other of two main categories, namely, those resembling Rustichello's text, and those related to certain Italian versions utilized by Ramusio, including of course Pipino's Latin translation. But according to Benedetto they all descend from a prototype which was already far removed from the original.

Ramusio prefixed to the Book two *proemios* or forewords, which I reprint and translate in the Appendix.² The first opens with the well-known address to the 'lords, princes, dukes, marquises, barons', with which so many texts begin. The second is a statement prefixed by Fra Pipino to his Latin translation, which is somewhat freely translated into Italian by Ramusio. In his preface, which is addressed to his friend Hieronimo Fracastoro and is dated 7 July 1553, Ramusio says:

And having found two *proemios* at the beginning of this book, which were originally composed in Latin, one of them written by that gentleman of Genoa, a great friend of the said Messer Marco, who helped him to write and compose in Latin the voyage while he was in prison; the other by a preaching friar Pipino of Bologna,

¹ *Marco Polo Il Milione*, edited by Luigi Foscolo Benedetto, Florence, 1928.

² See Appendix, pp. 20-5.

who, not being able to lay his hands on a copy of the Latin version (for nowadays this 'voyage' is only read in the vernacular), turned it into Latin in 1320—I do not wish to fail to reproduce both for the greater satisfaction and contentment of my readers, so that they together may serve as a more complete preface to the said book.

Ramusio based his Italian edition (which was published in 1559, two years after his death) mainly on Pipino's Latin text, although he knew it to be only a translation. Ramusio states that he also made much use of another Latin version contained in a manuscript of 'marvellous antiquity' lent him by his friend Ghisi, which he obviously at one time believed to represent Marco Polo's original.¹

This Ghisi manuscript which was consulted by Ramusio has never been traced, but it was no doubt closely related to a Latin version of which an eighteenth-century transcript of a manuscript once belonging to Cardinal Zelada was found in Milan by Professor Benedetto, and is now known as Z. This version was indeed known to Baldelli Boni,² but Benedetto was the first to recognize its importance, although it is very much abridged in the earlier chapters. It obviously derives from a Franco-Italian version superior to the Geographic Text; on the other hand it contains no less than two hundred passages not met with there. Of these, three-fifths are also to be found in Ramusio, showing that Ramusio had before him a very similar transcript.

Z, although more complete than any other known text of the second half of the Book, is very much curtailed in the first part. On this account it is unlikely that it was identical with the Ghisi manuscript, for Ramusio could hardly have regarded a version so incomplete at the beginning as Marco Polo's original. It is important to know that the abridgements in the early part of Z are referred to

¹ The passage in which this statement occurs was, however, omitted from all subsequent editions of Ramusio. It is hard to account for the omission of this striking passage; it is possible that Ghisi himself requested the printer (Giunti) to delete it from the second edition.

² *Il Milione di Messer Marco Polo viniziano secondo la lezione ramusiana, illustrato e commentato*, Florence, 1827.

specifically by the translator or transcriber as being intentional. If we place side by side corresponding passages in the Geographic Text of Rustichello and Z, the latter certainly gives the impression of being a translation from the former.

My object in these pages has been to give the adventures of Marco Polo's Book rather than those of Marco himself. Nothing new is likely to be discovered about the man, but so strange is the history of the Book that any day a new document may be forthcoming to dissipate the cloud of mystery that has always surrounded it. With regard to the problems connected with Marco Polo's journey, fresh light is constantly being thrown on these matters by scholars and travellers, and it may be safely asserted that every new discovery goes to emphasize and confirm the amazing reliability of Marco Polo's narrative.

In unravelling the great mystery attaching to Marco's Book it is important to dispose of all possible theories, in order that the ground may be clear for discussion on the basis of firmly established data. I myself have considered carefully three such theories, none of which have, so far as I am aware, been suggested before, namely:

1. Whether Marco Polo had prepared a complete draft of his own Book.
2. How closely the Ghisi manuscript was related to Z.
3. Whether more than one version of Marco Polo's notes issued from the prison in Genoa.

In spite of all the devoted labours of scholars like Yule and Benedetto no final solution of the problem has yet been attained, and it is this circumstance which has emboldened me to put forward the foregoing suggestions.

RAMUSIO

I feel that in connexion with Ramusio's famous version of Marco Polo an opportunity is offered me of giving a brief notice of this great Italian scholar, whose name is perhaps not so well known in this country as it deserves.

Giambattista Ramusio was born in Treviso in 1485, educated in Venice and Padua, and died in 1557. He spent forty-three years in the service of the State of Venice as Secretary to the Council of Ten or to various ambassadors. During his travels he took the opportunity of learning French and Spanish.

In 1523 he began to collect materials for his great book of Navigations and Voyages, of which three volumes eventually appeared, although four had been contemplated. The whole work contains seventy-seven voyages. During the sixteenth century four new editions appeared, and two more at the beginning of the seventeenth, but the work has never been reprinted since 1613.

Richard Hakluyt published his *Principal Navigations* in 1589, thirty years after the appearance of Ramusio's second volume. Hakluyt's volumes were mainly concerned with English travellers. Samuel Purchas, who continued Hakluyt's work, included many of Ramusio's travellers in his *Hakluyt Posthumus*,¹ which was published in four volumes in 1625-6. Both collections have often been reprinted, and in 1846 the famous Hakluyt Society was founded. Ramusio has not fared so well in his native country, but I understand that there is a project on foot to issue an entirely new edition of his collections in Italy.

Ramusio prefixed introductions to all his travellers, and these, though not always accurate, are of great interest. In his introduction to Marco Polo he tells us many curious things, which bear witness to his wide reading. For example, with regard to the first part of Marco's Book, dealing with the voyage made by Marco's father and uncle to the court of the Khan of the Tartars and later to that of the Great Khan, he says: 'I would never have understood that voyage if good fortune had not recently placed in my hands a part of a Latin translation of an Arabic work composed over two hundred years ago by a great Prince of

¹ He writes in his introduction to Marco Polo: 'I found this Booke translated by Master Hakluyt out of the Latine.'

Syria called Abilfada Ismael.' This note is of considerable interest, as giving an indication of the earliest translation into Latin of a work of which no translation appeared in print until 1650.¹

The devotion which Ramusio inspired in his publisher Tommaso Giunti is attested by two beautiful tributes to Ramusio written by Giunti. One of these appeared in the first edition of vol. ii, and the other in subsequent editions. The former I have thought fit to translate and print with this paper,² for apart from its literary merit it contains interesting bibliographical data in regard to the appearance of vols. i and iii without Ramusio's name, and to the double cause of delay in the publication of vol. ii.

¹ Abu'l-Fidā Ismā'el (b. 1273, d. 1331) wrote a history of the world entitled *Mukhtasar Ta'rikh al-Bashar*, and a geography entitled *Taqwīm al-Buldān*. It is clearly the latter work to which Ramusio refers.

² See Appendix, pp. 25-7.

APPENDIX

Note to the two Proemios prefixed to Ramusio's version of Marco Polo

THE two *proemios* which Ramusio prefixed to his version are, I think, deserving of more careful consideration than they have hitherto received.

Let us see first what Ramusio says about them. In his *Prefazione* addressed to Hieronimo Fracastoro (1st edition, pp. 8-9) he writes:

Et hauendo trouato due proemij auanti questo Libro, che furono già composti in lingua Latina l'uno per quel gentil'huomo di Genoua, molto amico del predetto Messer Marco, & che l'aiutò à scriuere, & comporre latinamente il viaggio mentre era in prigione: & l'altro per vn frate Francesco Pipino Bolognese, dell'ordine de Predicatori, che non essendoli peruenuto alle mani alcuna copia dell'esemplar latino, ne leggendosi allhora questo viaggio altro che tradotto in volgare, lo ritorno di volgare in latino del 1320.

PROEMIO PRIMO

THIS *proemio*, which begins with the well-known apostrophe to 'Princes, Dukes, etc.', was, according to Ramusio, composed in Latin by the Genoese gentleman who helped Marco with his Book in prison. He was a great friend of Marco's, but not apparently a fellow prisoner. Benedetto says (p. clix) that Ramusio found this *proemio* in the Ghisi manuscript. Ramusio does not actually say so, but since it is attributed to the Genoese friend who helped Marco with his Book, Benedetto is probably correct in presuming that this *proemio* occurred in the Ghisi MS.

It will be observed that although this *proemio* has many sentences in common with the introduction to the Geographic version, it shows at least three important differences:

First, where the French text says *raconte* Ramusio has *dettate*.¹

Secondly, the passage in Ramusio beginning *non volendo star otioso* down to *se non alcune poche cose* is entirely wanting from the Geographic Text, though something very like it appears in Z. This passage not only appears quite convincing but has important bearing on the genesis of Marco's Book; and it is strange that

¹ Professor Moule informs me that the British Museum MS. of Pipino which he used reads: *ab eo in vulgari fideliter editum ac conscriptum*.

it should only occur in Ramusio, who cannot very well have invented it.

Thirdly, there is no allusion to any help having been given to Marco in Genoa. Perhaps Ramusio thought that this silence was due to the modesty of Marco's Genoese friend, who, as he says, *scrisse per gratificarlo il presente Libro in lingua Latina*. Ramusio was, it seems, relying on more than mere hearsay if he made the double error of describing Rustichello as a Genoan and as merely a visitor to the prison, and the Ghisi text may have given him every excuse for believing the original to have been in Latin.

PROHEMIO PRIMO, SOPRA IL LIBRO DI MESSER MARCO POLO,
GENTIL'UOMO DI VENETIA, FATTO PER VN GENOUESE

Signori, Principi, Duchi, Marchesi, Conti, Cauallieri, Gentil'huomini, & chadauna persona, che ha piacere, & desidera di cognoscer varie generationi di huomini, & diuerse Regioni, & paesi del mondo, & saper li costumi, & vsanze di quelli, leggete questo libro, perche in esso trouerete tutte le grandi, & marauigliose cose, che si contengono nelle Armenie Maggior, & Minor, Persia, Media, Tartaria, & India, & in molte altre prouincie dell'Asia andando verso il vento di Grecoleuante, & Tramontana. Le qual tutto per ordine in questo libro, si narrano, secondo, che'l nobil Messer Marco Polo gentil'huomo Venetiano le ha dettate, hauendole con gli occhi proprij vedute. Et perche ve ne sono alcune le quali non hà vedute, ma vdite da persone degne di fede, però nel suo scriuere le cose per lui vedute, mette come vedute, & le vdite, come vdite. Il che fu fatto, accio che questo nostro libro sia vero, & giusto senza alcuna bugia, & chadaun, che'l leggerà, ouero vdirà, gli dia piena fede, perche il tutto è verissimo. Et credo certamente che non sia christiano, ne pagano alcuno al mondo, che habbi tanto cercato, ne camminato per quello, come il prefato M. Marco Polo. Percioche dal principio della sua giouentù, sino all'età di quaranta anni ha conuersato in dette parti. Et hora ritrouandosi prigionie per causa della guerra nella città di Genoua: non volendo star otiosa, gli è parso a consolation de i lettori, di voler metter insieme le cose contenute in questo libro, le quali son poche rispetto alle molte, & quasi infinite, che gli haueria potuto scriuere, se gl'hauesse creduto di poter ritornar in queste nostre parti. Ma pensando essere quasi impossibile di partirsi mai dalla obediencia del Gran Can Re de Tartari, non scrisse sopra i suoi memoriali se non alcune poche cose, lequali anchora gli pareua grãde inconueniente, che andassero in obliuione, essendo cosi mirabili, & che mai da

alcuno altro erano state scritte, accio che quelli, che mai le sono per vedere, al presente cō il mezzo di questo libro le cognoschino, & intendino, qual fu fatto l'anno del MCCXCVIII.

TRANSLATION

FIRST PREFACE TO THE BOOK OF MESSER MARCO POLO,
A GENTLEMAN OF VENICE, WRITTEN BY A GENOESE

Lords, Princes, Dukes, Marquises, Counts, Knights, Gentlemen, and all persons who delight and take pleasure in the knowledge of the various races of men and the diverse regions and countries of the world, and in learning about the customs and habits of these people, read this book: for in it are all the great and marvellous things which are found in Greater and Lesser Armenia, Persia, Media, Tartary, India, and in many other provinces of Northern and Eastern Asia. Which things are narrated in this book in the order in which the noble Messer Marco Polo, a gentleman of Venice, narrated them, having seen them with his own eyes. And since there are some things which he did not actually see, but only heard spoken of by trustworthy men, therefore in his account he has written of the things he has seen as seen, and of those he has only heard as hearsay. This was done in order that our book should be true and accurate without any falsehood; and whoever shall read it or hear it may fully believe in it, for the whole is most true. And I am convinced that there is no Christian or heathen in the whole world who has ever explored or travelled so much in it as the said Messer Marco Polo. For from the days of his early youth down to the age of forty he travelled in those lands.

And now, finding himself a prisoner in the city of Genoa on account of the war, not wishing to remain idle, it appeared to him that it would give pleasure to his readers if he were to put together the matters contained in this book—and indeed these are few compared with the many, nay, almost endless things which he might have written if he had believed that he would ever be able to return to this our country. As it was, being under the impression that it would be impossible for him ever to leave the service of the Great Khan, the King of Tartary, he only wrote down part of the things he remembered, considering that it would be a great pity if they were to sink into oblivion, because they were so remarkable and had never been written of by any one: and so those who can never see these things may now by means of this book know and understand them: this was done in the year 1298.

PROEMIO SECONDO

THE second *proemio* contains Ramusio's Italian version of Pipino's introduction to his famous Latin text. Curiously enough it differs considerably from Pipino's own words.¹ Taking Müller's edition of 1671² as representing the original, and comparing it with Ramusio, the following important differences will be found:

1. Between *la volgare* and *Et accio che la fatica* the following passage of the Latin original has been ignored for no apparent reason:

nec non & hi, qui propter linguarum varietatem omnimodam, aut propter diversitatem idiomatum, proprietatem linguae alterius intelligere omnino aut faciliter nequeunt, aut delectabilius legant, seu liberius capiant. Porrò per seipsos laborem hunc, quem me assumere compellunt, vel compulerunt, perficere pleniùs poterant: sed altiori contemplationi vacantes & infimis sublimia praeferentes, terrena sapere, terrena describere recusarunt. Ego autem eorum obtemperans jussioni libri ipsius continentiam fideliter & intelligibiliter ad Latinum planum & apertum transtuli: quem stylum libri materia requirebat.

2. Ramusio has interpolated between the penultimate and the last sentence the following words: 'Quel libro fu scritto per il detto Marco Polo del 1298, trouandosi pregon in la città di Genoua.' The Latin has no date or mention of the imprisonment in Genoa.

Incidentally it may be mentioned that Müller believed from the two Latin versions which he had before him that Marco Polo composed his original work in Italian: 'Ut autem Venetus erat, ita Italicè opusculum hoc scripsit ut ex Prefationibus ambarum versionum Latinarum liquet.'

PROHEMIO SECONDO SOPRA IL LIBRO DE M. MARCO POLO, FATTO DA FRA FRANCESCO PIPINO BOLOGNESE DELL'ORDINE DE I FRATI PREDICATORI, QUALE LO TRADUSSE IN LINGUA LATINA, & ABBREUIÒ DEL MCCCXX.

Per prieghi di molti Reuerendi padri mei Signori: io tradurrò in lingua Latina dalla volgare, il libro del Nobil, Sauio, and honorato M. Marco Polo gentil'huomo di Venetia, delle conditioni,

¹ Pipino's Preface was translated by Yule and published as an Appendix (see Yule-Cordier, vol. ii, p. 525.).

² *Marci Pauli Veneti, de Regionibus Orientalibus*, Andreas Müller, Cologne, 1671.

& vsanze delle Regioni, & paesi del Oriëte, diletlandosi hora i prefati miei Signori, piu di leggerlo in lingua latina, che in la volgare. Et accio che la fatica di questo tradurre non para vana, & inutile, ho considerato, che per il leggere di questo libro, che per me sarà fatto latino, i fidel huomini, che sono fuori dell'Italia, possono riceuer merito da Dio di molte gratie. Però che essi vedendo le marauigliose operationi di Dio, si potranno molto ammirare della sua virtù, & sapientia. Et considerando, che tanti popoli pagani sono pieni di tanta cecità, & orbezza, & di tante spurcitie, li christiani ringratiaranno Dio, il quale illuminando i suoi fedeli luce di verità, si ha degnato di cauarli da cosi pericolose tenebre, menandoli nel suo marauiglioso lume di gloria. ò che quelli christiani hauendo compassione, & cordoglio dell'ignoranza di detti pagani, pregheranno Dio per lo illuminare de i cuori di quelli, ò che per questo libro, la durezza, & ostination de i non deuoti christiani si confonderà, venendo gl'infedeli popoli piu pronti ad adorare gli Idoli falsi, che molti christiani il Dio vero. ò forse, che alcuni religiosi per amplificare la fede christiana, vedendo, che'l nome del nostro Signor Dolcissimo è incognito in tanta moltitudine di popoli, si commoueranno ad andare in quei luoghi per illuminar quelle accecate nationi de gl'infideli. Nel qual luogo secondo che dice l'Euangelio, è molta biada & pochi lauoratori. Et accio che le cose, che noi non vsiamo, nè hauemo vdite, le quali sono scritte in molte parti di questo libro, non parino incredibili, à tutti quelli, che le leggeranno, si dinota, & fa manifesto, che'l sopradetto M. Marco rapportator di queste cosi marauigliose cose, fu huomo sauiò, fedele, deuoto, & adornato di honesti costumi, hauendo buona testimonianza da tutti quelli, che lo conosceuano. si che per il merito di molte sue virtù, questo suo rapportamento è degno di fede. & M. Nicolò suo padre, huomo di tanta sapienza similmente le confirmaua, & M. Maffio suo barba, (del quale questo libro fa mentione) come vecchio deuoto & sauiò, essendo su'l ponto della morte familiarmente parlando, affermò al suo confessore sopra la conscienza sua, che questo libro in tutte le cose conteneua la verità. Il che hauendo io inteso da quelli, che gli hanno cognosciuti, piu sicuramente, et piu volentieri mi affaticarò à traslatarlo per consolatione di quelli, che lo leggeranno. & à laude del Signore nostro Iesu Christo creatore di tutte le cose visibili, & inuisibili. Qual libro fu scritto per il detto M. Marco del 1298, trouandosi pregon in la città di Genoua. & si parte in tre libri, i quali si distinguono per proprij Capitoli.

TRANSLATION

SECOND PREFACE TO THE BOOK OF M. MARCO POLO, WRITTEN BY FRA FRANCESCO PIPINO OF BOLOGNA OF THE ORDER OF THE PREACHING FRIARS, WHO TRANSLATED IT INTO LATIN AND ABRIDGED IT IN 1320.

At the request of many of my reverend fathers, I propose to translate into Latin from the *volgare* the book of the noble, learned, and honourable M. Marco Polo, gentleman of Venice, concerning the conditions and customs of the Regions and Countries of the East, because my aforesaid fathers prefer to read it in Latin rather than in the *volgare*. And in order that pains expended on this translation may not appear to be wasted or useless, I decided that in reading this book turned by me into Latin the worthy men who live outside Italy may receive credit from God for much thankfulness. For they seeing the wonderful works of God may appreciate the more His virtue and wisdom.

And in view of the fact that so many pagan people are full of such blindness and poverty and of so much uncleanness, the Christians will render thanks to God, who, enlightening His faithful ones with the light of truth, has deigned to save them from such dangerous darkness, by leading them into His wonderful light of glory.

Either these Christians having compassion and anguish on account of the ignorance of these pagans will pray God to enlighten their hearts, or through this book the hardness and obstinacy of indifferent Christians may be confounded, seeing that unbelievers are more prone to worship false idols than many Christians are to worship the true God; or some priests in order to increase the Christian faith, seeing that the name of our dear Lord is unknown to such multitudes of people, would be induced to go into those lands to enlighten the blind nations of the infidels. In that place according to the Gospels there is much wheat but there are few workers.

And in order that those things which we are not accustomed to nor have ever heard of, which are written in many parts of this book, may not appear incredible, it is pointed out and made manifest to all who read of them that the aforesaid M. Marco, who relates these marvellous things, was a wise, faithful, devout man, adorned with honest habits, having a good reputation among all who knew him, so that by the merit of his many virtues what he relates is worthy of credence. Moreover, M. Nicolo his father, a man of great learning, has confirmed these statements, and his uncle M. Maffeo (who is mentioned in this book), a devout and wise old man, being on the point of death, speaking in a familiar

way assured his confessor on his conscience that this book in every detail contained the truth. And having myself heard from those who knew him I was able with all the more confidence and good will to undertake this translation for the consolation of those who will read it, and to the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ, the creator of all things visible and invisible.

This book was written by the said M. Marco in 1298, he being a prisoner in the city of Genoa¹ and it is divided into three books, each having its own chapters.

TOMMASO GIUNTI'S EULOGY OF RAMUSIO²

IF men knew the real causes by reason of which matters sometimes turn out quite differently in the undertakings of others to what we have been led to expect, we should not be so much inclined to blame others either for neglect, or delay, or carelessness: but since, as a rule, the causes are hidden from those who are not behind the scenes, it happens that they generally blame those who should be excused. By which I mean that we have, as you have seen for yourselves, issued from our Press two volumes of navigations and journeys, namely the First and shortly afterwards the Third, which I gave you before the Second: for as the material belonging to the Third volume was by good fortune ready for the Press, we considered that it would please you if, while we were collecting sufficient materials for the Second volume, we should place at your disposal the Third volume, which had already been put in order: and indeed by clear indications we have realized that this has pleased you.

At the same time we know that you have been eagerly awaiting the second of those promised to you: and perhaps you have often reproached me and have complained of my tardiness, which I am quite certain you would have excused if you had known of the two terrible happenings which hindered me from satisfying ere this your desires. One was the death of Messer Giovan Battista Ramusio, and the other the burning of my Press: and if the latter was a cause of annoyance, the former was most bitter—and how great was my sorrow and grief, every one will readily imagine who was fully acquainted with the great love that had existed between us continuously for so long a space of years.

He was that man of rare intelligence who, prompted by the sole desire to delight posterity by providing them with accounts of so

¹ As I have already mentioned, these statements do not occur in the Latin original.

² Ramusio's first edition of vol. ii.

many and such distant lands, most of which were never known to the ancients, collected with unbelievable diligence and judgement from various sources, the two volumes which were published by us with our types under his direction and control. And he was indeed fully competent to carry out this task, seeing that, apart from the sciences and the knowledge he had of Latin and of the Greek language, he understood more than any other man concerning Geography: and this he had acquired partly by continuous and diligent study derived from the reading of good authors who have written on the subject, and partly from having in his youth spent many years in various countries whither he was sent on honourable service by this Illustrious Republic—whereby it happened that he even acquired the French language and the Spanish, which he knew as well as his mother tongue; and this knowledge he put to use by translating many of the relations printed in the First and Third volumes.

If his sagacious and estimable labours appeared unadorned by his own name, this was due to that rare modesty which he was wont to practice in all his doings: for while he lived he would never consent to the mention of his name, being a man far removed from all ambition, whose mind was solely bent on giving pleasure to others.

But I, who loved him living above all others and shall love him though dead so long as life endures, cannot any longer keep his name hidden in his valuable and honourable works, not merely because I so desire, but also because I regard it as my duty to do everything which in my opinion will contribute to his fame. For this reason you will find this Second volume, which we at last send out into the world, adorned with his name.

And let me assure you that to the many and great losses which we suffered in the Press on account of the fire there is added the loss to students of Geography: for there were burnt at the same time certain documents which Ramusio only a few months before he left this life had edited and sent to the press, together with several plates illustrating the countries mentioned in the book. I would have you rest assured, however, that those which have been saved will be found to be quite complete and well arranged: and I trust that you will derive from them useful diversion by reason of the description they give you of things various and wonderful.

And do not be surprised if in comparison with the two other volumes you do not find the Second so copious and rich in writers as Ramusio had intended it to be, when Death intervened: and if he had survived, although he was greatly occupied with the

important affairs of the Republic in his capacity of Secretary to the Most Excellent Council of Ten, he would not have failed to have added to the volume a large number of writers, and what was lost to this part by the fire he would have replaced twofold from the superabundant river of his high intellect. Nevertheless, having delayed the publication of this Second volume beyond my own intention and expectation, I have not the slightest doubt that you will in view of the above considerations forgive me, and will render thanks to the happy memory of Ramusio by giving him the true praise and honour to which he is entitled, as one who to your great pleasure and satisfaction has, by his knowledge and diligence, thrown so much clear light on matters relating to Geography.

POSTSCRIPT

THERE is one curious allusion to Marco's Book which I have never been able to explain. In Tellez's famous *Historia de Ethiopia a Alta* (Coimbra, 1660) there occurs the following passage:

Favoreceo tambien muyto a este commun erro Marco Paulo Veneto no seu Itinerario, porque diz que em Archico (que he o primeyro porto que, passa o mar Rox, pertenece a Ethiopia) costumaua rezidir aquelle grande Rey chamado Preste Ioam; o que he claramente falso, como largamente veremos.

Marco Polo, the Venetian, in his Travels also encouraged this common error, for he says that that great king called Prester John used to reside in Archico (which is the first port belonging to Ethiopia after passing the Red Sea), which is obviously false as we shall clearly see.

A reference in the margin reads 'Paul. Ven. Capit. 52.' I have searched in vain in every printed edition for this passage. It is unlikely that Tellez was quoting from a manuscript.

PRINTED IN
GREAT BRITAIN
AT THE
UNIVERSITY PRESS
OXFORD
BY
JOHN JOHNSON
PRINTER
TO THE
UNIVERSITY

