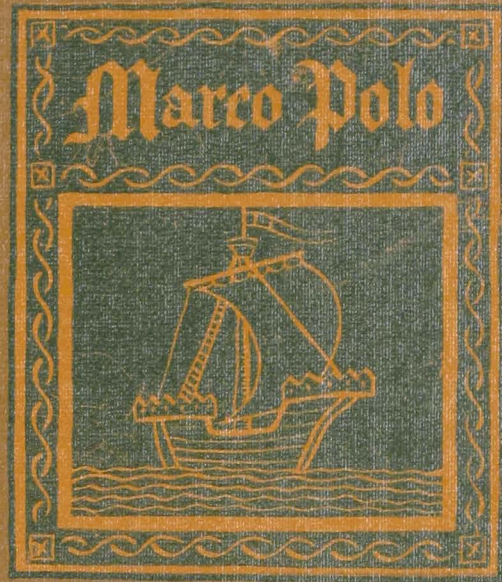


Venetian Adventurer



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Translations of Chinese poems into English verse,
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Handwritten text in a medieval script, likely the will of Marco Polo. The text is dense and covers most of the page.

I ego Marco Polo, genitri...



Iustus superius...

The will of Marco Polo. Photographed from the original in the Marcian Library in Venice. From the author's collection

Venetian Adventurer

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE
AND TIMES AND OF THE BOOK OF

Messer Marco Polo

By HENRY H. HART, F.R.G.S.



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UXORI

Alice Stern Hart

QUAE HIC OMNIBUS VITAE MODIS MIHI FUIT COMES

ATQUE ILLIC EST SEMPERQUE ERIT DUX

HOC AMORIS SEMPITERNI

TESTAMENTUM FERRO



*What, they lived once thus at Venice where the merchants were the
kings,*

Where St. Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed the sea with rings?

—BROWNING, "A Toccata of Galuppi's"

Preface

THIS BOOK is an attempt to present the entire life of Marco Polo in relation to his times and his book, as distinguished from outlines and sketches found in prefaces and introductions to the various editions of the text of *The Description of the World*. It supplements even the fullest and most satisfactory of these, the scholarly essay of Sir Henry Yule,* prepared many years ago as an introduction to his two magnificent volumes containing the annotated text of Polo's book and constituting one of the finest pieces of English research scholarship ever produced.

Since the publication of Yule's work, many hitherto unknown documents as well as a number of manuscripts of the Polo text have been unearthed, deciphered, and studied, and explorations in Europe and in Asia have supplied new information. Some theories have had to be revised and some cherished illusions have been dispelled. And the tale of Messer Marco is even yet not rounded out, nor can any account of him or his times claim to be complete; there ever exists the tantalizing and exasperating possibility, even the probability, that further important documents and other evidence may be uncovered, and that additional light may thus be thrown on many of the problems of the great Venetian traveler's life and times which are still hidden in the shadows of a poorly documented era.

However, it has been thought well to assemble the material that has been accumulated and to present it in the light of modern scholarship. The author's concern has been to present the story of Messer

* *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, 3d edition, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1921.

Marco Polo as he has found it in Marco's own book, in documents and contemporary chronicles, in later books, and as the result of much personal study in Venice and elsewhere in Europe and the Far East. More specifically, he aims to release the man Marco from the mass of dusty documents and weighty scholarly tomes which have tended to obscure his personality. If Messer Marco has here been brought to the reader as the vivid and sharply etched personality that he has become to the writer in the course of long association with him, the purpose of this book will have been accomplished.

In but few instances has the author obtruded his own opinions, and then only when the facts as he has found them seem to warrant a departure from traditionally accepted conclusions. There has been no witting departure at any time from the strict truth as revealed in the documents and manuscripts, but many lacunae in the traveler's life have been filled as realistically as possible, following careful investigation into the life of contemporary Venice and the Mediterranean and Eastern worlds.

The meticulous scholar may perhaps be disappointed at not finding here controversial discussions of efforts which have been made to elucidate certain of the unsolved problems presented by Marco Polo's life and book—the exact location of the Ca' Polo, the making of mangonels for the army of Kublai Khan, the exact routes followed by the Polos, obscure place-identifications, and the like. These problems have been deliberately omitted because of the author's conviction that they possess little interest except to the specialist, and for fear that dissertations on them might weary the reader who is desirous of obtaining a picture of the man and his times but is in no way concerned with the minutiae of research.

Every document used has been checked in the original language, and no reliance has been placed on quotations found in any work on the subject without verification, except in a few instances where it was impossible to consult the original. Except where acknowledgments are made, the author is responsible for all translations, including quotations from the various editions of the Polo manuscript and from other books and documents.

The bibliography does not pretend to list all the books covering the subject of life and travel in medieval Europe or Asia. Instead it covers those actually used in the preparation of the present work, including

editions of the Polo texts which contain introductions or annotations of value to the student.

It is with pleasure and gratitude that the author expresses his obligation to the officials of the British Museum, of the Bodleian Library, and of the Bibliothèque Nationale of France for their active assistance and kindly co-operation in locating manuscripts and supplying photographs, and to the Director of the Marcian Library in Venice for permission to examine and have photographed the original will of Marco Polo.

To the following persons also the author owes a debt of friendship and appreciation for active assistance. To Dr. Cesare Oelschki of Rome, for the locating of many very rare books on Venice and on Marco Polo not otherwise obtainable; to Sig. Eliseo Tealdi of Florence for photographs and books; to Dr. Lionel Giles and Mr. Edward Lynam, of the British Museum staff, for maps, photostats, and photographs; to Harold L. Leupp, Librarian of the University of California Library, for freely placing at the author's disposal the resources of the University collection and for permission to take certain photographs; to Mrs. Enid F. Tanner, of the University of California Library, for her invaluable assistance in tracing various books and documents; to Miss Marjorie Macaulay French, of San Francisco, for her patient and often arduous task of typing and preparing the manuscript of this book for publication; to his old friends Dr. Leon J. Richardson of Berkeley and Hon. Percy V. Long of San Francisco, for their constant advice and encouragement; and to Mr. P. Douglas Anderson, F.R.P.S., for his kindness and skill in photographing many of the maps and other material used in illustrating this volume.

Further it is a pleasure to record and to acknowledge the generosity of the following publishers for permission to quote or otherwise use the material indicated: Columbia University Press, for permission to quote from Edgar Holmes McNeal's *Conquest of Constantinople* (Robert de Clari); Harper and Brothers, for the privilege of quoting from Pero Tafur's *Travels and Adventures*, translated and edited by Malcolm Letts (Broadway Travellers Series); A. C. McClurg & Company for the use of certain material from Pompeo Molmenti's *Venice*, translated by Horatio F. Brown; Messrs. Peaslee, Brigham, and Albrecht, New York City, for permission to quote from F. Marion Crawford's *Salve Venetia*; Charles Scribner's Sons for the privilege of

quoting and otherwise using material from Yule's *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* and Cordier's *Ser Marco Polo*; The Hakluyt Society of London for permission to use material from several of its publications; Longmans, Green & Co., Limited, London, for the privilege of quoting from Howorth's *History of the Mongols*; John Murray, London, for permission to quote from Alethea Wiel's *The Navy of Venice*; and George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., London, for the privilege of quoting material from Moule and Pelliot's *Marco Polo*. The version of Marco Polo from which these quotations are made is a version of the French text (F) with additions, marked by the use of italic type from other texts inserted. In making the quotations this use of italic type has naturally been dropped.

HENRY H. HART

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
July 29, 1941

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Venetian Adventurer
THE LIFE AND TIMES OF
MARCO POLO



Chapter One

Prologue

I

THERE SET FORTH from the port of Venice in the year 1253 two brothers, bound for Constantinople on a trading venture. Probably neither of them dreamed that their voyage was to bring them fame, and that through them and the son of one of them European geographical knowledge was to be enriched as never before. That their adventures and those of the young Marco were to be immortalized in one of the most famous books in all literature could not have entered their minds, nor could they have known how far from home destiny was to guide them.

These merchants were Maffeo and Nicolo Polo, sons of one Marco Polo, a descendant of an old Dalmatian family which had come from Sebenico and settled in Venice in the eleventh century. The two merchants were probably not very wealthy, for they did their own traveling, buying, and selling instead of having agents in the numerous cities of the Levant where Venetian factories and colonies were to be found. Their older brother Marco may have been living at the time in Constantinople; for his will, drawn up in 1280, tells us that he once lived in Constantinople, in the quarter of St. Severus.

Each man left his wife behind him, for traveling either by sea or by land was dangerous, the political conditions in the Greek Empire were none too stable, and they had no way of knowing how long the journey would last. Nicolo was much concerned about his wife and loth to leave her, for she was with child and he feared that he would not be with her when her time of travail was at hand.

As Venetian women of the upper classes were accustomed to remain in seclusion, and did not go about the streets and canals, the Polos

bade their families a last farewell at their door, where the lapping waters rose and fell, covering the steps with green ooze and weed. At their order to push off, their gondola swiftly found its way through narrow canals and wide, in and out of the shadows of high palaces and houses many of which are still standing—for Venice has not greatly changed in its essentials since those adventurous days of the thirteenth century—and under the arches of numerous bridges. At last they reached the center of the city, the Rialto, near whose old wooden bridge was the meeting place of all Venice. Mingling with the crowd that swarmed everywhere in this, the busiest spot of the city, they bade farewell to their friends and acquaintances, then re-entered their gondolas, and continued on their way to the long quay where their vessel was berthed.

Long and narrow, built for both speed and fighting, with banks of long oars on either side and a mast with lateen-rigged sail to take advantage of every fair wind, the galley was heavily laden with their goods—wood, pig iron and wrought iron, grain, woolen goods, and salt meat—all much in demand in the capital of the Greeks. It was one of a number sailing, according to Venetian law, in convoy. She carried crossbowmen and slingers, catapults and balistae, with which to fight off the pirates who infested the sea. Trading was so perilous and strange vessels were so liable to attack that they frequently entered port stern foremost, steered by great side-oars, so that the fighting men might gather on the high poop deck to guard against attack. Moving thus, moreover, reversal and precipitate flight, which were often necessary, were facilitated. Merchants themselves were expected to join in the defense of their ships and their goods, for there was danger at every moment from marauders both on sea and on land.

The crews were freemen, so many of them Slavonians from the Dalmatian coast that the long quay by St. Marks was (and is) known as the Riva degli Schiavoni. No seaman could be under eighteen years of age; each had to carry certain prescribed weapons; and each was under oath to obey the laws of Venice. Crews were hired for the shipping season—from March 1 through November 30—and were paid in advance every three months. So thievish were they that passengers were always warned to deposit their valuables with the captain during a voyage.

The ship was fitted out with trumpets, drums, and kettledrums,

used for routine calls to duty, to mark the time, and, in case of a fight, to arouse and sustain the courage of the crew. Each passenger and sailor was allowed to bring on board bedding, one trunk, also enough water, wine, and biscuits for the voyage, and his own cooking utensils and firewood. The food for the voyage was simple—salt meat, vegetables, cheese, onions, garlic, and vinegar. The frying of fish was forbidden by statute, in order to prevent fires at sea. The voyage to Palestine usually lasted from thirty to forty days, and passengers paid from \$45 to \$125, according to their accommodations. The time and rates to Constantinople were probably about the same.

Their gear all safely stowed on board, the two brothers, leaning on the rail, watched their galley warp out, then glide slowly past vessels just in from Egypt and Palestine, from the Black Sea and from Crete. Along the quays and at anchor in the stream, others were busily loading for Spain and France, Holland, and England. At last, after passing long, low sand banks and the Lido and finally reaching the open sea, the captain spread his sails, and the voyage that was to be so momentous for the Polos and the world began.

II

In accounting for this trading expedition of the Polos we must review the medieval history of Venice.

In the middle of the thirteenth century Venice, Bride of the Adriatic, was at the zenith of her power. Her history was already long and eventful. In the earliest time the site of patrician Roman villas and the abode of fishermen, pilots, and refiners of salt, and later a refuge from the invading barbarians from the north, she had rapidly grown in trade, importance, and power. Her government was unparalleled in European history for its stability and its permanence. For centuries she had held the maritime supremacy of the eastern Mediterranean, and she ruled over a domain greater than had any other state since the fall of Rome.

The early Crusades—those oft-recurring waves of activity and fiery zeal—do not seem to have inspired the Venetians to join the hosts seeking the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre from the infidel. But they did not remain altogether unmoved or uninfluenced by that strange unrest which was destined to affect and finally to reshape all the social, political, and economic ideas of the Western world.

Keen-minded, and alert for business, the rulers of Venice realized that unless they were ever on the watch their greatest rivals, Genoa and Pisa, might win the transport trade of the Crusaders and perhaps ultimately undermine the mercantile and political position of Venice in the Near East. A fleet of more than a hundred galleys had set sail from the lagoons in 1204 under the banner of St. Mark to aid Baldwin, the Latin king of Jerusalem. In return for their aid, they had received, or rather extorted, important trade concessions. In the years that followed many of the islands of the Aegean Archipelago had fallen into their hands, as had also several cities of the mainland of Asia Minor. From a mere trading center Venice gradually became a political power, the better to control and defend what its people had won by battle, guile, and shrewd bargaining. Commerce, secured and managed as it was by the merchants of Venice, inevitably led to empire. It became necessary to control ever more of the eastern Mediterranean littoral, and this perforce led to a gradual breach with the Greek Empire of Constantinople, of which Venice had been for centuries a nominal vassal. The allegiance became more and more of a formality, the quarrels and differences ever more bitter.

Soon the opportunity of breaking all ties presented itself. The Venetians seized it and made the most of it—even controlling for a time the destinies of the Byzantine state itself. A fourth Crusade was preached in France at the opening of the thirteenth century by Folques of Neuilly-sur-Marne against the Saracens under Saladin, with the blessing and the active aid of Pope Innocent III. To Venice this meant that the long-awaited moment to break away entirely from the Greek Empire and to profit thereby had arrived. Quietly, and deliberately as ever, she set to work to take full advantage of every opportunity as it presented itself.

There are few more thrilling narratives in all medieval history than that of the conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders and their allies, the Venetians, as described by an eyewitness, Geoffroy de Villehardouin—and few episodes in all history as shameful as that rape of a helpless and unoffending people. No sooner had Folques and his followers aroused the flower of the French and Flemish nobility to take up the Cross and sword against the infidel than they dispatched six envoys (one of whom was Villehardouin) to Venice to bargain for the transportation of the Crusaders across the seas to the Holy Land.

Enrico Dandolo, one of the most magnificent figures of his or any other age, was doge of the city. He was a giant both mentally and physically, by turns merchant and ambassador, soldier and councilor, a typical Venetian of his time, shrewd, crafty, cautious, and infinitely resourceful. When the French messengers arrived in Venice in 1201 with their petition, Dandolo was eighty-nine years old; but, though almost blind, he was still erect, handsome, and indomitable as ever. He was the Ulysses of his age, and well merited the characterization of Villehardouin—"mult sages et mult preuz."

After eight days of hard bargaining the Venetians finally agreed on the terms of a contract with the Frenchmen by which they were to furnish transportation and provisions for the Crusaders. The French, however, had reckoned without troubles at home and the oozing of the courage and enthusiasm of their fellows. The sum of money agreed upon failed to arrive at the time promised. Meanwhile a large body of the Crusaders lay about the Lido for months, their camp "a den of gamesters, harlots, and mountebanks." Finally, when the Venetians saw that only a part of the contract money was forthcoming, they presented a shrewd plan to the disappointed Crusaders: They offered to remit the unpaid remainder if the Crusaders would aid them in reconquering some of their rebellious Dalmatian possessions. The French accepted with alacrity, and the expedition set forth. Dandolo, in spite of his years and infirmities, led the host in person; and so, for a short period of time, he and his fellow citizens became Crusaders.

A further agreement was made whereby the Venetians, after Dalmatia had been pacified, should proceed with their allies to further conquests in the lands beyond the seas, where they would divide all the spoils of conquest equally. The Crusade had thus over night developed from an expedition against the infidel into a campaign against fellow Christians. Moreover the Crusaders all too soon became more interested in spoils and adventure than in the destruction of the Saracens, and moral and religious aims and ideals were superseded.

After the fall of the rebellious city of Zara in Dalmatia, a trivial pretext was found to turn the all too willing Crusaders from the redemption of the Holy Land, which had been their original goal. The son of Isaac Comnenus, the deposed and blinded emperor of the Greeks, sought the aid of the allies in restoring his father to the throne. His request, reinforced as it was by wily offers of money and loot, was a



The capture of Zara by the Crusaders and the Venetians, 1202. From a painting by Tintoretto on the wall of the Sala dello Scrutinio, in the Doge's Palace, Venice. (Courtesy of Fratelli Alinari, Florence)



The second conquest of Constantinople by the Latins and Venetians, 1203. From a painting by Tintoretto on the wall of the Maggior Consiglio, in the Doge's Palace, Venice. (Courtesy of Fratelli Alinari, Florence)

temptation too strong to resist, especially by the merchant princes of Venice. They realized at once that by having as an ally the Emperor of Constantinople they would immeasurably strengthen their position in the Levant. So they agreed to help Comnenus, and in the spring of 1203 off they sailed to Constantinople.

What that Eastern capital was like we can determine. Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela in Navarre, who traveled throughout the Mediterranean world and the Levant for thirteen years (1160-1173), has left us a vivid picture of the capital of the Byzantine Empire in 1161, just a few years before it fell a prey to the rapacity of the "Latins" and the Venetians:

The circumference of the city of Constantinople is eighteen miles Great stir and bustle prevail in Constantinople in consequence of the conflux of many merchants, who resort thither, both by land and by sea, from all parts of the world for purposes of trade At Constantinople is the place of worship called St. Sophia It contains as many altars as there are days of the year, and possesses innumerable riches It is ornamented with pillars of gold and silver, and with innumerable lamps of the same precious metals King Manuel has built a large palace for his residence on the seashore The pillars and walls are covered with pure gold, and all the wars of the ancients, as well as his own wars, are represented in pictures. The throne in this palace is of gold, and ornamented with precious stones. . . . The tribute, which is brought to Constantinople every year from all parts of Greece, consisting of silks, and purple cloths, and gold, fills many towers. These riches and buildings are equalled nowhere in the world. They say that the tribute of the city alone amounts every day to twenty thousand florins (100,000 gold francs) arising from rents of hostelries and bazaars and from the duties of merchants who arrive by sea and by land. The Greeks are extremely rich, and possess great wealth in gold and precious stones They dress in garments of silk, ornamented with gold and other valuable materials The Greeks have soldiers of all nations, whom they call barbarians, for the purpose of carrying on their wars They have no martial spirit themselves, and, like women, are unfit for warlike purposes.

Robert de Clari, a French knight who took an active part in the siege and subsequent pillage of the city, indicates what a magnificent place it must have been in his description of the division of the spoils:

It was so rich, and there were so many rich vessels of gold and silver and cloth of gold and so many rich jewels, that it was a fair marvel, the great wealth that was brought there. Not since the world was made, was there ever seen or won so great a treasure or so noble or so rich Nor do I think my-

self, that in the forty richest cities of the world there had been so much wealth as was found in Constantinople. . . .

He then describes for us in fascinating detail the Great Palace and the magnificent churches with their numerous relics, the Hippodrome, the city gates and the statues:

Now about the rest of the Greeks, high and low, rich and poor, about the size of the city, about the palaces and the other marvels that are there, we shall leave off telling you. For no man on earth, however long he might have lived, could number them or recount them to you. And if anyone should recount to you the hundredth part of the richness and the beauty and the nobility that was found in the abbeys and in the churches and in the palaces and in the city, it would seem like a lie and you would not believe it.

This magnificent city, capital of the Byzantine Empire and the repository of the wealth and culture of the ancient and medieval world, was now destined to become the helpless prey of the greedy, unscrupulous, conscienceless marauders from the West. Villehardouin tells the sordid story with all its heroic exploits, its trickery, its stratagems, and its cruelty. His was nothing but a piratical expedition, disguised as a pious mission to depose a usurper. Dandolo was the leader; he had been the Venetian ambassador to Byzantium and knew both country and people well. Victory came swiftly, and the city opened its gates to the invaders. The colorful pages of the old French chronicle tell in words that never pale how the proud city of a million souls, once mistress of the Western world, fell after a very brief struggle before the allies, and how the blind Emperor was escorted from his dungeon to his ancestral throne.

Dandolo and his Latin associates immediately demanded fulfillment of Comnenus' promises and payment of what was due them. Part was delivered, but the evasive Greek kept postponing payment of the remainder, and all pleas and threats were unavailing. Impatient and suspicious after months of waiting, the allies finally demanded an immediate execution of the bond. A palace revolution ensued, and the French and Venetians, numbering but forty thousand in all, moved to attack. After a desperate struggle of nearly two years, again under the leadership of Dandolo, the allies captured the walls and swarmed through the streets of the hapless city.

The inhabitants were helpless. The sack of Constantinople that followed was one of the most terrible in all history. "Humanity

blushes with shame," writes Romanin, the Jewish historian of the siege, "and the mind shrinks from recounting the tale of the horrors committed." Nothing was spared. Palaces and homes were looted, churches and shrines were despoiled. The church of St. Sophia was stripped of its priceless treasures, and the drunken soldiers of the Cross set naked women of the streets on the high altar to dance for their pleasure. Wanton destruction completed the work. The loss to art was incalculable, and books beyond all price vanished forever in the wholesale burning of the libraries. Precious manuscripts in untold numbers were thrust as fuel into the campfires of the soldiers. Even the tombs of the Christian emperors and the sarcophagus of Constantine himself were broken open and the bodies despoiled of their precious raiment and jewels. The helpless women of the city, high and low alike, became the playthings of the conquerors. The Christian Crusaders wrought more havoc in the ancient capital of the Christian world than had the infidels throughout the centuries. Villehardouin boasts that the plunder exceeded all that had been witnessed since creation. It was at this time that the four bronze horses adorning St. Mark's (and attributed to Lysippus) were carried off as part of the Venetians' share of the booty.

The Greek government was swept away like chaff. The Venetians had been the real leaders of the conquest, and to Dandolo was offered the crown by his allies. He wisely refused, and Baldwin of Flanders was elected Emperor. The Venetians received as their share in the partition of the once-proud empire of the Caesars a full half of the loot, many of the Greek islands, and several of the great cities of the Empire on the coasts of the Hellespont, the Sea of Marmora, and the Black Sea. The aged Doge received a new and greater title, that of "Despot and Lord of One Fourth and One Half of the Romanian Empire." He lived but a short time to enjoy his triumph. Worn out by campaigning, disease, privation, and old age, Dandolo died in Constantinople in June 1205, and was buried in a chapel in St. Sophia; the remains of his monument may still be seen there, though they were almost obliterated in 1453 by the conquering Turks.

The Venetians had ventured forth in search of trade and had found themselves sharers in the spoils of a fallen empire. They wisely avoided the precarious title to political power, and instead devoted themselves assiduously to the developing and expanding of their wide

commercial interests. The markets, factories, and mercantile establishments which they controlled in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Levant, together with the lands which were their share of the profits of the Conquest, constituted the greatest commercial empire that the world had ever known. In spite of the weakness of the Latin Emperors and their utter incompetence in governing their newly won state, the Venetians slowly consolidated their own gains, developed and expanded their quarter in Constantinople, thoroughly organized their trade by land and by sea, and made themselves as far as possible independent of the political fortunes and misfortunes of the new rulers of Constantinople. Thus by conquest, treachery, and shrewd business enterprise the Republic had become the greatest and most powerful maritime state in Europe, and incidentally the trading journey of Maffeo and Nicolo Polo to Constantinople in 1253 was motivated.

III

For many long days the Polo brothers and their fellow-travelers sailed toward their goal, steering by the recently imported magnetic "nedylle" and the stars. They headed southeast through the sunlit Adriatic, on past Corfu, rounding the southern coast of the Peloponnesus, then winding in and out among the green islands of Greece, past Tenedos and Lemnos, ever steering toward the northeast. Passing through the Hellespont, they saw to their left the long low-lying sandy coast of the Thracian Chersonese, while far to their right lay the storied plains of Troy and the high peaks of Ida. Slowly the narrow vessel made its way through the strait which Xerxes had spanned with his bridge of boats in the far-off days of the Persian wars and the place where the fabled Hero and Leander died. Then on into the Sea of Marmora, peopled with legends and memories from the beginning of time. Gods and heroes, generals and statesmen, builders of Empire, world conquerors—all had sailed its blue waters in their day. On the travelers continued, past the rounded hill of Lybissa, under whose cypress-crowned top sleeps Hannibal, an exile in death as in life from the Carthage which he had loved and served so well. And ever they drew nearer to the city of the Caesars, heir to the mightiest empire of the Mediterranean.

At last, after weeks that seemed endless, weeks of seasickness, heat, bad food, sour wine, stale water, and crowded quarters, they sighted

Constantinople and saw the arches and porticoes of the Great Palace, the massive curved walls of the Hippodrome, and the high swelling domes of St. Sophia glittering afar in the sunlight on the Golden Horn.

In 1253 Constantinople was no longer the proud capital described by Benjamin of Tudela, Villehardouin, and Robert de Clari. After their successful assault on the walls of the city the Crusaders and Venetians had set fire to its houses in order to drive out the defenders and to prevent street fighting; two-thirds of the city had been laid in ashes by these great conflagrations. Innumerable structures, both public and private, had never been rebuilt in the interval since 1204. Many that were still standing had been stripped of their copper roofs, bronze ornaments, lead, and tiles. Ruined walls and churches, palaces, and dwellings were on every side. The imperial palaces themselves had been so befouled and neglected that they were no longer fit for human occupation. Essential public services such as the sewage system had been entirely neglected, many of the inhabitants of the city had fled, and most of those who remained were of the poorest classes. Parts of the walled precincts were a dreary wilderness. The Arab geographer, Abulfeda, who visited Constantinople in the fifteenth century, recounts that even then "in the interior of the city are sown fields, gardens, and many houses in ruins."

However, in spite of rapine and destruction, ruin and neglect, Constantinople was still the most important commercial city in the Western world. To it led the lanes of traffic from the farthest corners of the earth. The great caravan routes of Asia converged upon it, and the water-borne trade of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea sought its crowded harbors. Its coin was current everywhere from India to far-off England.

Such parts of the city as had been spared or rebuilt were crowded together, hovels and tenements shoulder to shoulder with palaces, churches, and markets. The streets were narrow, with overhanging balconies everywhere, for the inquisitive Greek loved to watch his neighbor's daily life. Constantinople's caravanserais, bazaars, and squares were the meeting places of Europe and Asia. There men bargained and quarreled, bought and sold, in a hundred different tongues. Her warehouses were heaped to overflowing with silks and spices, ebony and ivory. On her streets jostled freeman and slave, Negro and Tartar, swarthy Egyptian and pale Englishman. Mingling in the

crowd were Jews and Mohammedans, Turks and Armenians. On every side rose temples to a dozen faiths—churches, mosques, and synagogues. Within her walls swarmed increasing thousands of refugees from the devastating and blighting advance of the Turks, who were ever drawing tighter their encirclement of the remnant of the Greek Empire. Constantinople still merited her proud title of “The City.”

The temptations of lucrative trade attracted foreigners from everywhere in great numbers, and it is estimated that in the middle of the thirteenth century more than 60,000 Westerners were engaged in business on the shores of the Bosphorus. Each nationality had its own quarter, the largest of all being that of the Venetians. They were in possession of three of the eight districts of the city, a sort of *imperium in imperio* governed by Venetian officials, and surrounded by its own walls—a necessary protection in a city rent throughout its history by frequent riot and rebellion. They had their own wharves and markets, and enjoyed special trade privileges. Constantinople had thus become almost a second fatherland for the merchants of Venice, and was the center of extensive transactions by land and sea with the whole Black Sea basin. Such was the capital of the medieval Greek world when the Polos reached it at the beginning of their memorable travels.

IV

Nicolo and Maffeo Polo sojourned in Constantinople for six long years. Marco Polo passes over their stay in absolute silence. Apparently they never returned for a visit to their homeland during all this time, but busied themselves in buying and selling, trafficking and bartering, ever adding to their store of wealth.

Meanwhile politics were moving rapidly in the city. The Latin usurpers had never succeeded in ingratiating themselves with the Greeks, who rejected every move at conciliation. Baldwin II (de Courtenay), on ascending the throne in 1228, found the Empire sinking rapidly into decay and abject poverty. He spent most of his time abroad, begging at Western courts and at the foot of the Papal throne in Rome for financial aid. He was even forced to strip off what was left of the metal in the churches, palaces, and prisons of Constantinople to support his family, and to order vacant buildings wrecked for fuel. He obtained a few usurious loans from Italian merchants and once was

so hard pressed for money that he pawned his son and heir, Philip, at Venice as security for a debt.

Finally he was reduced to such dire extremities that his feudal barons pledged the crown of thorns of Jesus, which had been preserved in the Imperial chapel, with Venetian bankers for a loan, sending the priceless relic to be held in Venice as security. When the time approached for its redemption and for repayment of the loan, Baldwin, realizing that he would never be able to raise the money to redeem it and preserve it properly, sent agents to France to negotiate its sale to Louis IX (Saint Louis). Louis accepted the offer and dispatched two Dominican monks to Venice to pay the money due on Baldwin's debt and to convey the holy relic with proper ceremony to Paris. Saint Louis went to meet the procession with its precious burden in Troyes, and "it was borne in triumph through Paris by the king himself, bare-foot, and in his shirt, and a free gift of ten thousand marks of silver reconciled Baldwin to his loss." To house the crown properly the Sainte Chapelle, the most magnificent jewel box ever conceived or built by man, was erected by the Most Christian Monarch within his palace precincts. It is empty now, stripped of all its sacred treasures; but the crown, broken into three pieces, and bereft of many of its spines, which had been sold separately, is still preserved in the treasury of Notre Dame. Encouraged by the success of this transaction, Baldwin also "offered" to Saint Louis on the same terms many more holy relics, including even "the baby linen of the Son of God, the lance, the sponge and the chain of His passion, the reed of Moses, and part of the skull of St. John the Baptist." The king eagerly bought them all, and for the "reception" of these precious spiritual treasures twenty thousand marks were sent to Baldwin.

All of these makeshift expedients failed to prevent or even to postpone for long the inevitable downfall of the Latin Empire of Constantinople. Venice and Genoa were continually quarreling and disputing the control of the seas and the commerce of the East. Michael Paleologus, descendant of the Greek emperor deposed by the Crusaders, finally entered into an alliance with the Genoese to regain the throne. A decisive struggle between Latin and Greek, together with their respective Italian allies, was imminent in 1260.

All this became known to Nicolo and Maffeo Polo. Disturbing news and rumors were being constantly brought to Constantinople by

merchants and travelers from every quarter. The brothers consulted long and earnestly over the matter. They finally decided to collect their outstanding debts, turn much of their money into jewelry, purchase with the rest merchandise that could be easily transported, and leave the threatened city before it was too late. Already there were continual clashes and riots on the streets, in the market places, and on the quays, between Genoese, Venetians, Greeks, and Latins, and there was no time to lose.

The place they selected for their new headquarters was Soldaia in the Crimea. Members of the Polo family apparently had a branch business house there also, for Nicolo's brother in his will (dated 1280) left a house which he owned in Soldaia to be occupied by his sons and daughter during their lives and to be given thereafter to the Franciscan Friars of the city.

The Polos remained in Soldaia for some time. Business was evidently not as good as they had been led to expect, for one of the manuscripts tells us that they "saw after many days in that land that there was nothing for them, and decided to go farther afield." For the moment it was impossible to return to Venice; bandits on land, pirates at sea, marauding bands wandering everywhere were cogent reasons for continuing toward the east. There the Polos believed that they would be able to engage in more lucrative trade with the Mongols and other tribes farther from the beaten paths of commerce. They knew that there was good business to be done in wood, pitch, skins, salt, furs, grain, and, last but not least, slaves.

The trade in human beings in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was flourishing everywhere in the eastern Mediterranean basin and around the Black Sea and the mouths of the rivers draining into it. The Mamelukes of Egypt were regularly in the market for slaves with which to recruit their armies. Their harems necessitated large numbers of female slaves, as well as eunuchs. Egyptian purchasing agents were to be found in every port which could supply their needs. Europe also was in the market for slaves, and the business was a thriving and profitable one.

The most prosperous regions for this trade were the shores of the Black Sea and its hinterland. The Greek emperor Paleologus himself authorized the trade. Captives taken from the tribes which had refused to submit to the Mongol yoke were sold without mercy into servitude.

Hungarians, Russians, Tartars, and peoples from the Caucasus were shipped throughout the Moslem world. Moreover, it was not uncommon for the less-civilized peoples of South Russia to sell their own children, especially their daughters, to slave dealers for shipment to the West.

The greater part of this business was in the hands of the Italians, who, we are told, did their best (officially) to restrict the sale of slaves to those unfortunate human beings who were not Christians. The business tempted many, as the profit was great—usually at least one thousand per cent—and often the despicable rascals engaged in it forced poor helpless creatures who were Greek Christians to renounce their faith so that they might be sold within the law. About two thousand female slaves a year were sold in Alexandria alone. Circassians brought the highest prices, Serbs the lowest.

Mohammedan slaves were a profitable investment also, and many, together with those of Tartar origin, were taken to Italy. As a result of the Crusades and of business ventures in the Levant the numerous European merchants and other sojourners there became quickly used to the service of slaves, and conveyed them home with them to take the places of paid servants. A law of Florence of 1364 expressly permitted the importation of non-Christian slaves of both sexes for resale or gift by their owners. From 1366 to 1397, there were recorded in the city of Florence alone three hundred and eighty-nine sales of female slaves, of whom two hundred and fifty-nine were Tartars, and Florentine slave dealers did a large business in Ancona and Lucca.

Thousands were imported into Genoa and Venice yearly. In 1368 there were so many slaves in Venice, all shipped in from the Near East, that they for a time threatened the tranquillity of the state. From the seaports of Italy the slaves, sometimes entire families, were shipped throughout the country, and large numbers were re-exported to Spain and Germany, where the Emperor Frederic III especially authorized the trade. As males were sought after in the slave markets of Egypt as soldiers, so young girls were wanted throughout the West, partly for domestic servants but mostly as concubines for their Christian masters. Some of the proudest names of Italy appear in contemporary documents as owners of Eastern slaves. Pretty women brought as high as \$4,000 each. This tremendous trade in Eastern slaves, though it was brought to a sudden end by the fall of Constantinople in 1453, has left

its permanent impress not only on the population of Italy but on that of all those lands where these slaves were distributed. Every country from the North Sea to the Mediterranean received a very generous admixture of Russian, Tartar, Circassian, Turkish, and African blood, not to mention that of the numberless small tribes which swarmed in the Black Sea and the Caspian basin and of the peoples of Asia Minor.

Pero Tafur, the Spaniard, in his famous *Andanças y Viajes*, written in the middle of the fifteenth century, describes the slave market of Kaffa, which was the center of the trade in the time of the Polos:

In this city [Kaffa] they sell more slaves both men and female, than anywhere else in the world . . . I bought there two female slaves and a male, whom I still have in Cordova with their children. The selling takes place as follows. The sellers make the slaves strip to the skin, males as well as females, and they put on them a cloak of felt, and the price is named. Afterward they throw off their coverings, and make them walk up and down to show whether they have any bodily defect. If there is a Tartar man or woman among them, the price is a third more, since it may be taken as a certainty that no Tartar ever betrayed a master.

Again, in speaking of the Venice of his time, Tafur states that "they say that there are 70,000 inhabitants, but the strangers and serving people, mostly slaves, are very numerous." We shall find that Marco Polo expressly manumitted a slave, "Peter the Tartar," in his will, leaving him therein the sum of \$500, and that later the Republic granted Peter the full rights of Venetian citizenship.

It was in such regions and times that Nicolo and Maffeo traveled for days on horseback, through strange and unknown country, occupied by many groups of various nationalities, speaking different languages and dialects—Prussians, Tartars, Goths, Greeks, and Genoese. They often visited and spent much time in the numerous settlements of traders from their own city of Venice. And everywhere were bargaining and trading in salt and furs and wood and slaves.

Finally they entered the steppe country, and came upon wandering bands of Mongols living in round tents or yurts. Some of these felt dwellings were twenty feet or more in diameter, and were transported on wheels, dragged by oxen. The Polos began to pick up Mongol words and phrases and to make their way about unaided. They learned to drink kumiss, the favorite drink of the Mongols, made from fermented mare's milk. The wild horsemen whom they met had a strange



Hulaku Khan of Persia, brother of Kublai Khan (?). From a Persian manuscript of the sixteenth century. (Courtesy of the British Museum)

custom when offering kumiss to a guest: to assist him in drinking, his ears were seized and pulled hard, in order, their interpreter told them, that his throat would open wider. The Polos learned to like the tasteless dried meat eaten by the nomads with salt and water, and to sleep out under the stars. What they did find difficult was close contact with a people fanatically opposed to bathing or to the washing of their clothes. We must not imagine Venetians of the thirteenth century to have been ultra-fastidious either as to bodily cleanliness or to frequent changes of linen, but there was a vast difference between them and the unwashed Mongol horde.

Finally, near the junction of the Kama and the Volga, they arrived at Bolgara, chief town of Barka Khan, grandson of the great Genghis, who was accustomed to wander with his tribes in summer and to settle down in one of his towns for the winter. The Polos were so well received by Barka that they presented to him all the jewels which they had brought with them from Constantinople—we wonder if the gifts were voluntary or forced!—and, we are told, he gave them in exchange goods worth more than twice the value of the jewels. These goods the brothers accepted immediately and set about trading in them and increasing their wealth. During the year of their stay with Barka they witnessed many strange sights—visits of the desert tribes, the changing phases of seasons that varied greatly from those of sunny Venice, outlandish heathen customs, different foods, and a social life like that of another planet. Nicolo and Maffeo had grown accustomed to the Orientalized life of Constantinople, with its peculiar manners and practices, where women were set apart from the men in church and in home, and where the custom of veiling the face was prevalent. All was different here among the Mongols.

Business was excellent, and after a prosperous year the Polos prepared to return to Soldaia and thence home to Venice. It was the spring of 1262. They had been away from home for eight long years, and were anxious to be back with their families. Just as they were about to depart, hostilities broke out between Barka, their host, and Hulaku, his cousin, the brother of Kublai Khan. The war lasted eight months, during which the brothers found it impossible to return by the usual route to Constantinople and Venice. Though in times of peace the Mongols maintained relative tranquillity and safety on the caravan roads, this supervision was perforce relaxed during their frequent wars.

Bandits and highway robbers then took full advantage of the situation, and merchants and caravans were at their mercy. Lawless bands of Russians, Tartars, and Hungarians roamed the country. Hiding during the day, they attacked at night with their favorite weapons—bows and arrows—killed, robbed, and stripped their victims, then vanished into the wilderness with their spoil. They drove before them bands of horses as remounts and food, and in this manner could elude pursuit and remain far away from cities and towns. They were the scourge of the plains, and Nicolo and Maffeo had good reason to fear them.

The two brothers by this time had learned to speak the Mongol tongue fluently, and had adopted many of the customs of the country. Moreover, they had made numerous friendships with the many native merchants who trafficked with them. So they decided to travel “by the way of the rising sun,” in the hope of finding a route by which they could at length return to Venice.

They loaded their goods—never for an instant did the Polos ever step out of their character as merchants—on *arabas*, the type of wagon still used in this region. It has two wheels of great diameter, to negotiate streams and mudholes, and a hood of mats or felt to keep off sun and rain. Sometimes, in crossing long arid stretches, camels were harnessed to the carts instead of the usual horses or donkeys.

After several weeks of rough traveling the Italians entered a country which was a veritable desert. Its crossing lasted seventeen long days, and never during the entire time did they sight a town or even a tiny village. However, they met great numbers of Tartars on the road. These lived in tents, and drove their flocks and herds before them from one grazing place to another.

On the seventeenth day the travelers arrived at Bokhara. The city had been sacked by Genghis Khan, but had been restored by Ogedei, and was now ruled by Borak Khan. After the monotony of the long journey from Bolgara, Bokhara was a most welcome sight. It was surrounded by ramparts, above which rose the blue domes and tiled walls of mosques, gleaming in the sunshine. On the banks of the River Zaravshan, its castle rising from a hilltop in the middle of the city, Bokhara was one of the most attractive trading centers in the Mongol Empire. Its shops were overflowing with the merchandise of the East—silks, porcelain, ivory, spices, and cunningly wrought metal work. Its streets, markets, and caravanserais were filled with noisy, jabbering

crowds of people from every country of Asia, from the Yellow to the Black Sea. Chinese and other peoples of Eastern Asia were to be seen everywhere, drawn far from their own lands by the lure of profit. Again Nicolo and Maffeo began their trading, ever with the hope of returning soon to their native land from which they had been absent for so many years. But when they endeavored to move from Bokhara they found themselves in even worse straits than before. Not only were they cut off from the roads leading east to China, but to their dismay they found the route by which they had come was likewise blocked by the warring tribes. With that philosophical patience which comes with much traveling in Asia and in dealing with her peoples, they bowed to the inevitable and settled down in Bokhara to await better times.

At the end of three years' sojourn in the city, a change in their fortunes came about in a most unexpected manner. An envoy arrived in Bokhara, returning from a mission to Hulaku Khan to his brother, the Great Khan, lord of all the Mongols, "dwelling at the ends of the earth, between the sunrise and the Greek [N.E.] wind, who had Kublai Khan for name." Hearing of the presence in the city of two men from the Far West, the envoy called upon them, marveling much at them, their strange appearance and ways, and their proficiency in the Mongol tongue. On their part the Venetians quickly realized that, if handled tactfully, this visit might be the means of making it possible not only to leave Bokhara, and eventually to return to Venice, but also to transact some very profitable business en route. Trade, ever trade, occupied their minds above all else.

They therefore cultivated the friendship of the Khan's officer most assiduously with feasting, presents, and flattery, until they succeeded in receiving a cordial, even a pressing, invitation to accompany the mission back to its own country and to the capital of the great Kublai. They were promised protection and a safe journey for themselves and their "Christian serving-men whom they had brought with them from Venice."

According to Marco's statement the envoy also told them, curiously enough, that "the Great Khan hath never seen any Latins, and that he hath a great desire so to do." Enough accounts have been preserved for us to indicate that there had been a stream of travelers between Europe and the court of the Great Khan during the Mongol domination of China and that the arrival of the Polos was no unprecedented

or unusual event. The friar John of Plano di Carpini had visited Karakorum in 1245 and had written an account of his two years' journey. In 1253 William of Rubrouck, also a friar, had visited Mongka Khan at Karakorum as an envoy of Louis IX of France. He describes meeting a Greek knight in Karakorum, and, a little later, writes:

. . . a woman of Metz, in Lorraine, called Paquette, and who had been a prisoner in Hungary, found us out and prepared for us a feast of the best she had . . . she was fairly well off, for she had a young Russian husband who made her the mother of three children, and he was a carpenter . . . Among other things she told us there was in Karakorum a goldsmith, named William, originally from Paris. His family name was Buchier, the name of his father Laurant Buchier. She believed, too, that he had a brother who lived on the Grand Pont and who was called Roger Buchier.

In a subsequent chapter Friar William describes a great tree of silver, with silver lions spouting mare's milk, made by the same Buchier for the Great Khan. The tree had branches, leaves, and fruit of silver, an angel with a trumpet on the topmost branch, and four gilded serpents twined about the tree spouting four different liquors into vases.

These references and many others indicate that Europeans were no novelty at the Mongol capital in the middle of the thirteenth century. It seems impossible to accept Marco's statement that Kublai Khan had never met a "Latin." But perhaps Marco really believed it, and it does make a better tale.

The Polos were most anxious to terminate their enforced stay in Bokhara. Influenced largely by the fact that the road home by way of the West was still cut off, they took their courage into their hands and, "commending themselves to the care of God," set out on their long journey to the East. Their road led them across unknown plains and rivers, deserts and mountains, to the capital of the Great Khan, to that Kublai, whose grandfather Genghis had made the name "Mongol" a symbol of death and destruction in the West. They were to stand face to face with the monarch of all Asia, before whose frown all men trembled and whose whispered name struck terror into all Europe, from the Pope and the Emperor on their thrones to the lowliest peasants in the fields.

V

Theodore Roosevelt in his introduction to Jeremiah Curtin's *The Mongols* has well said that the most stupendous fact of the thirteenth

century was the rise of Genghis Khan and the spread of the Mongol power from the Yellow Sea to the Adriatic and the Persian Gulf: "Unheralded and unforeseen, it took the world as completely by surprise as the rise of the Arab power six centuries before."

The Mongols first appear in history as an obscure people dwelling south and east of Lake Baikal. They were a nomad race wandering over the grasslands with their herds, hunting and fighting, stealing cattle and women with equal coolness and dexterity. Knowing only the law of the strong against the weak, and acknowledging only the overlordship of their tribal leaders, the Mongols restlessly wandered the plains of north and central Asia and the Gobi region.

The story of Temuchin, known to the world as Genghis Khan, has been the subject of many books, and need not be repeated here. A brief outline of his campaigns and their effect on trans-Asiatic commerce must suffice. He was born about 1162. His father, Yesukai, died while the future conqueror was a mere boy. The leadership of his clan passed to another group, inimical to Temuchin's family. Immediately many of Yesukai's followers left his camp to join them. Hoelun, his widow, pursued them and brought them back by force, and by her iron will kept the clan intact and strong during her son's minority.

The young Temuchin, ruthless and daring beyond his years, won the respect and admiration of his people by leading them fearlessly on raids and forays against their neighbors. Many of the Mongol tribes joined him, and the confederation grew ever more powerful. Next Temuchin attacked his most powerful neighbors, the Naimans, who fell before his invincible generalship. This caused many other tribes to hasten to tender their submission and join his banner. In 1206 he was unanimously acclaimed by an assembly of his chieftains as Genghis Khan, "The Universal Lord."* Thereupon their monarch immediately ceased payment of the tribute which had been sent by his people for centuries, first to the government of the Liaos, and later to the Chins. The Chin emperor sent an envoy to demand immediate resumption of payment. The Mongol ruler answered by contemptuously spitting toward the south, where the Chins dwelt. This meant war.

Genghis Khan attacked and won. By 1215 most of the Chin cities were in the Khan's hands. A chronicler of the period, when describing

* M. Paul Pelliot believes that the correct translation of Genghis (or Chingiz) is "Ocean Great," parallel in meaning to "Dalai Lama."

the capture of a town, remarks again and again, tersely: "The Mongol general butchered." This meant that the garrison and at least three-quarters of the people were slain. Caught between the Sungs in the south and the ever-victorious Mongols in the north, the Chins were finally crushed. The termination of the campaign in the Far East was left to Genghis Khan's lieutenants, while he himself in 1223 turned to further conquests in the West.

The Mongol attack on the West had its origin in a desire for revenge rather than lust for conquest, though that soon followed. The emperor had sent a peaceful mission to negotiate for trade treaties with Mohammed, ruler of Kivaresm, in Persia. Apparently all was friendly between the two monarchs. Suddenly several hundred Mongol merchants who had come to Otrar to trade were imprisoned and murdered by Mohammed's order. The Khan swore dire vengeance and led his army in person to punish the Sultan. It was a bitter contest between savage Mongol and half-civilized Moslem. Town after town was taken, pillaged, and burned, and its inhabitants, men and women and children, were butchered like sheep. When Termed was taken, it was reported that some of the people had swallowed their jewels in order to save them. The Khan then ordered that the whole population be ripped open one by one to find the jewels and to set an example. In Herat the looting and destruction lasted a whole week, and when the Mongol horde swept on to further conquest it left behind it a million and a half corpses rotting in the ruins of the city.

At this time Genghis received at his headquarters China's most famous Taoist monk, Ch'ang Ch'un. During his invasion of North China the conqueror had learned the sage's great reputation, and sent him an invitation to visit him and communicate to him some of his wisdom. The invitation was accompanied by a golden tablet in the shape of a tiger's head, giving Ch'ang Ch'un free passage and assistance everywhere. Fortunately the correspondence between the two men and the story of the journey have been preserved for us.

Although seventy-two years old, the monk set out on his long journey in February 1220, expecting to join the monarch in Karakorum. Upon his arrival in Yen (Peking), with his retinue of Taoist priests and a Mongol escort, he learned that Genghis Khan had moved farther west on his campaign. He was, moreover, very much disturbed to learn that the caravan was to be joined in Yen by a number of girls who had

been collected for the Khan's harem. Feeling that his age was not a sufficient protection for him, or else fearing for the morals of his fellow monks, the old gentleman dispatched a letter of protest to the emperor, saying, "I am only a mountain savage, but how can you expect me to travel in the company of harem girls?" We are not told of the result; but probably the monk was humored.

The caravan continued on its way, and its Chinese chronicler tells of the people, habitations, manners, and customs of the districts through which it passed. Here we find full descriptions of the black and white tents of the Mongols, their clothing of hides and fur, their diet of meat and fermented mare's milk, the headdresses of the men and the women, and their lack of writing. Scattered here and there in this serious record we find descriptions of miracles, all redounding to the reputation of Ch'ang Ch'un, and some startling tales. We even discover a Mongol Tam O'Shanter, Li Chia Nu, who told the Master that once in the mountains through which they were traveling a goblin had cut off his back hair.

On the caravan traveled, over hills of sand "so numerous that they seemed to be rising and falling like ships on the crests of waves." Finally, after many weary months, the monk arrived at Samarkand in the winter of 1221. Genghis Khan was again on the march with his army, and Ch'ang Ch'un had to wait until spring. Then, with an escort sent to greet him, he set out for the imperial camp near Kabul. There at last the two men met.

The monarch's first speech with the adept was a request for the elixir of long life. Though Ch'ang Ch'un could not supply this, the two became very friendly, and had many discussions on religion and philosophy. After several months' stay the Taoist returned to his faraway home, the narrator of the journey noting many things of interest seen and heard on the way, all of it a most valuable contribution to our knowledge of Central Asia as it was in the thirteenth century.

Meanwhile the all-conquering Khan swept on his way westward, ever pursuing the fleeing Mohammed. One Persian province after another fell to him. The fugitive Mohammed reached the Caspian Sea, where he died on a small island on January 10, 1221. His family was captured, all his sons were killed, and his daughters were given as concubines to various Mongol princes. Having drunk so deeply of the joys of conquest, Genghis continued westward, slaying, burning, and

laying waste. The story of his progress is almost too ghastly for repetition. Never had the earth run so red with human blood. Not even domestic animals, cats, or dogs were spared. At Nishapur, to be sure that no one escaped, heads were cut from the dead and wounded alike and heaped in great pyramids. The city was so utterly wiped out that the Mongols were able to sow barley on its site.*

Genghis spent the winter of 1222 near the Indus River, and in the spring returned through Tibet to his homeland in Mongolia, arriving there in February 1225. Meanwhile two of his generals continued their way through Armenia and Georgia, overrunning the country between the Caspian and the Dnieper. The tribes fleeing before them retreated into the lands of the Greek Empire and on into Russia. The Mongols followed close on their heels across the Dnieper, and swept through the Crimea and across the Volga, meeting with no effective resistance anywhere.

On his return to the East, Genghis Khan found that both the Chin Tartars and the Sung Empire were again increasingly hostile to him. Negotiations between the Chin Emperor and the Great Khan failed, and the latter marched on Tangut, ally of the Chins. Before he had completed the conquest of the Chins, replete with massacre and slaughter and sacking everywhere, he fell ill, and died at the age of sixty-six, on August 18, 1227. Dreaming of bloodshed and destruction to the very end, his last words were instructions to his sons for completing the subjugation of the Chins.

Thus passed one of history's greatest conquerors—a man without conscience, of supreme executive ability, of merciless cruelty, and with but one object in life—absolute power over his fellow men. Born heir to a handful of huts on the Kerulon River, at his death he was ruler over more territory than any man before or since his day. To appease his insatiable ambition he had destroyed over eighteen million human lives in Tangut and China alone, besides the unnumbered dead left on the fields of battle and in the smoking ruins of cities and towns in the West.

* It is interesting to note that at this time a small group of Turcomans, numbering but four hundred and forty families, near the city of Merv, fearing the devastating Tartar hordes, fled with their chieftain Ertogrul to Angora (Ankara) in Asia Minor. From that small tribal nucleus sprang the Ottoman Turks, destined in a few hundred years to overthrow the Byzantine Empire and to terrorize Europe for many decades.

At the gathering of the clans after the burial of Genghis, his son Ogedei was selected as Grand Khan. Immediately the military campaigns, temporarily arrested at the death of Genghis, were resumed. In the West the Mongols renewed their attacks in Mesopotamia and Syria with all the ferocity of their race. It is reported that when Bagdad was destroyed by them in 1257 over eight hundred thousand of its inhabitants were slaughtered.

Meanwhile the Chins had been crushed by the Mongol troops in 1232. In 1234 Ogedei moved southward against the Sung Emperor, who had refused to acknowledge Mongol suzerainty. In the midst of his campaign he died of acute alcoholism, on December 11, 1241. After much quarreling at the Kuriltai ("meetings of the clan"), the Khanate was transferred from Ogedei's line to that of his brother Tului, whose son Mongka succeeded to the sovereignty of the Mongol dominions. Mongka gave over the military command in part of China to his brother Kublai, who proceeded at once to subdue the country. He was very successful, winning the conquered people by his humaneness and justice. Mongka became jealous and suspicious of his brother and, recalling him when the subjugation of the Sung Empire was almost complete, took up the task of finally subduing the Chinese in person. He was stricken with dysentery while besieging Ho Chu, and died in August 1259. Kublai immediately concluded a temporary peace with the Sung Emperor, and hastened to the Kuriltai summoned to choose a new Grand Khan. He was elected before the others of the family could arrive from their distant capitals and army headquarters, and was placed on the throne of Genghis Khan in 1260.

Shortly after his accession, civil war broke out between Kublai and his brothers and cousins. Kublai was able to conquer all China and Burma, but could not hold the rest of his empire together. He pressed his campaign against the Sung relentlessly, however. It was a long, wearing war, the Sung being forced ever farther south until a last stand was made at sea on the coast of Canton Province. Surrounded by the Mongol fleet, Liu Hsiu Fu, the Chinese commander-in-chief, seeing that all was lost, forced his wife and children to jump overboard from the imperial war junk. Then, taking the little boy emperor in his arms and telling him that death was preferable to capture, he leaped into the sea with him, and both were drowned. With the death of the Emperor, all effective resistance of the Chinese came to an end, and

Kublai Khan, who had mounted the Chinese throne as Shih Tsu, first emperor of the Yüan (Everlasting) Dynasty, soon ruled supreme over the Middle Kingdom and its dependencies. He selected Yen, the old site of one of the chief cities of the Chin Tartars, as his new capital, renaming it Khanbaligh (Cambaluc)—the present Peking.

Such was the state of China under the Great Khan when the Polos came to court.

The Mongols, continuing their conquest of the West under the Khan Batu, overran and devastated Russia, taking and sacking Kiev in 1240. The next year they laid waste Poland, Silesia, and Moravia. After a long siege Batu captured, pillaged, and burned Pest, the capital of Hungary, and wiped out all its inhabitants. Pursuing the fleeing king of Hungary he reached the shores of the Adriatic, where he took and sacked Cattaro. Only the news of the death of Ogedei caused him to bring his campaign to a close and return to Mongolia.

The remarkable success of the Mongols in their conquest of the West was largely due to the fact that the territories attacked by them were broken up into small, weak, and impotent states, continually engaged in warfare with each other. The Christian world was exhausted by the drain of its successive crusades to the Holy Land. It was, moreover, split into two parties, those of the Pope and those of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, forever quarreling among themselves, and not realizing the necessity of uniting against the common enemy. The West was thus at the mercy of the fierce warriors swarming from the steppes of Central Asia. The Mongols seldom met with vigorous or united resistance. Moreover, the invading army was remarkably well organized and disciplined, and the feudal system of the Mongols bound all the sections of the Empire together, insuring a strict supervision over all its parts.

The merchants who carried on the trade between China and the Mediterranean littoral had for centuries been hampered by the continual wars of the many kingdoms and principalities which lay across the caravan routes. The coming of the Mongols, destroying these petty governments and uniting their peoples into one mighty nation, strong and at peace, was welcomed and supported most enthusiastically by these mercantile interests.

At first each Pope in turn preached a crusade against the infidel invaders. Finding their efforts in this direction unavailing, they

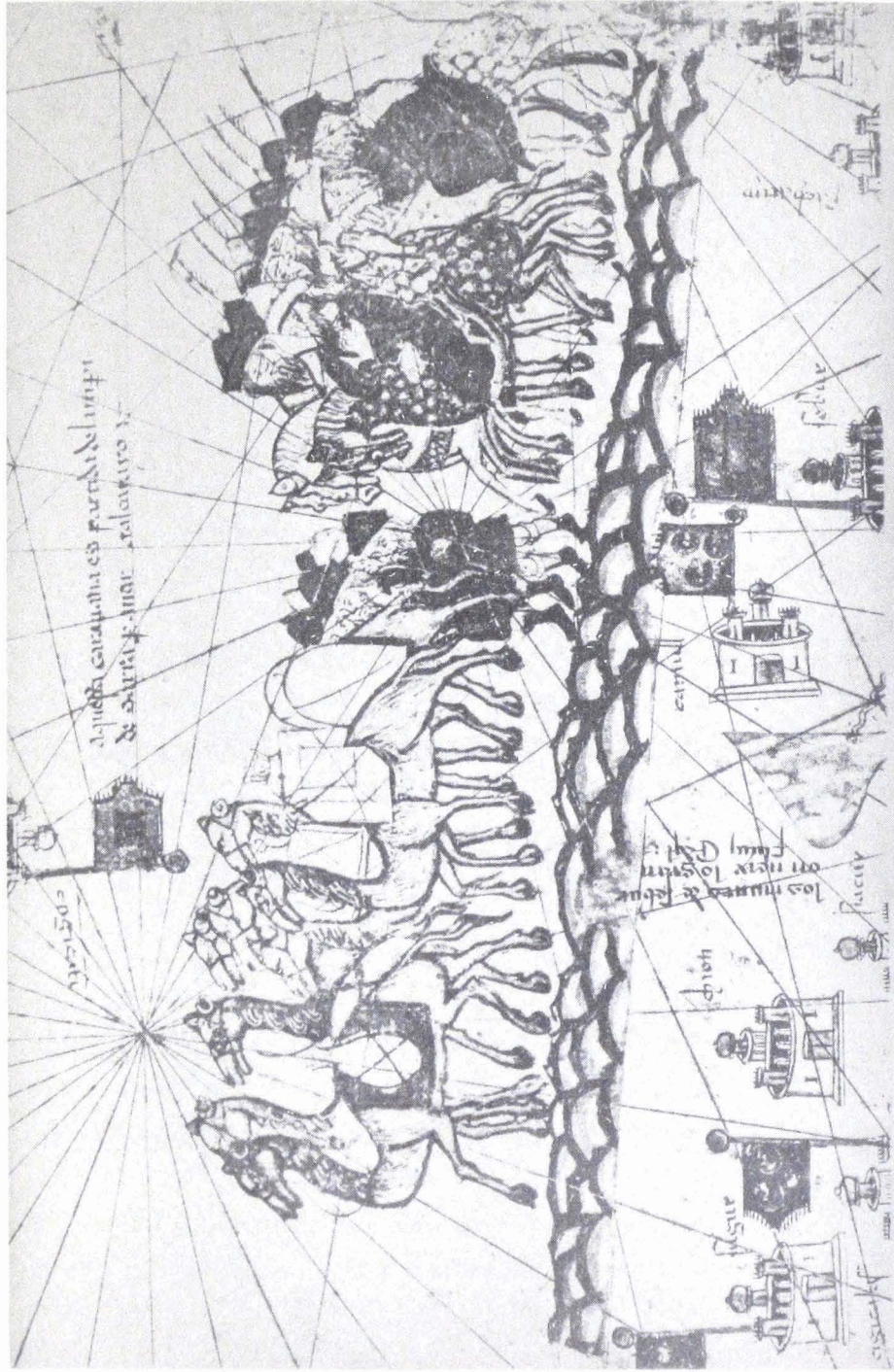
changed their tactics and commenced to send out emissaries to carry the faith to the barbarian hordes. In this effort numerous monks journeyed East over the caravan routes and brought back reports of the many peoples they had met and the countries they had traversed. Unfortunately most of their records were available and known to the clergy alone, and were never as widely read or as well known as the story told by Marco Polo.

With the passing of the years, moreover, the Christian world began to believe that in the Mongols they had a welcome ally against the Mohammedans, who were already threatening Europe by land and by sea and who had held Spain for some centuries. Though this hope was shattered by the defeat of the Tartars at the hands of the Egyptian Khalifate, and by the gradual breakup of the Mongol Empire after the death of Ogedei, the changed attitudes of both Tartar and Christian toward each other facilitated peaceful trading over the caravan routes of Asia for many decades.

Genghis Khan himself had issued an order that nothing should be permitted to interfere with the caravan trade. In fact it will be recalled that the greatest of his campaigns began as a punishment for murdering the members of a caravan. He established military posts along the main routes to protect the merchants and their goods, and had the roads regularly patrolled by police. For even though the Mongols were merciless in their military campaigns, they realized that, when once the conquered countries had been pacified, trade was all-important.

The principal land routes across Asia were two: The first from Little Armenia, the Empire of Trebizond, passed through Persia; this was followed by those who planned to continue their journey to India and the Far East by sea via the Persian Gulf. The second began in what is now southern Russia and crossed Central Asia to the Pacific.

And since, at the time when the Polos made their first journey, the great Western conquests of the Mongols had come to an end and the conquerors were busy consolidating or ruling the great territories they had acquired or in settling internecine feuds, from the Pacific to Hungary and from the Arctic Ocean to the Indian frontier there was a Mongol peace, and traders could proceed unmolested from the city of the Great Khan to the shores of the Mediterranean and the Volga.



A detail of the famous *Atlas Catalan*, made in 1375 for Charles V of France, and now in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris. This section shows the Polo brothers on their journey. The inscription reads: "This caravan has departed from the Empire of Sarra to go to Cathay." The mountains beneath the caravan are designated: "The mountains of Siberia, where the Volga River has its source." Cities are designated by walls and towers. (Courtesy of Les Amis de la Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

VI

The pair of Venetians with whom our narrative is concerned traveled north and northeast for an entire year before reaching their destination. Unfortunately, their son and nephew Marco, who at length dictated his book or who directed its writing, tells us little of this journey, "because Messer Marco, who saw all these things also will tell you about them clearly in the book which follows" dealing with his own subsequent journey. So in due time we too shall read something of the various countries traversed by the brothers, and of the peoples whom they encountered.

We of the twentieth century cannot picture to ourselves the terrors and hardships of a journey over the thousands of miles of the central Asian plain, desert, and mountain ranges nearly seven centuries ago. Hunger, thirst, the crossing of snowclad mountain ranges and long stretches of scorching deserts, threats and attacks of banditti and savage tribes, discomforts of every kind—these were some of the physical deterrents from such an adventure. But even more terrible were the superstitions and fears of the unknown, the incredible sensitiveness to tales of strange inhuman monsters and evil spirits which peopled the plains and the mountains. Such travel then involved not only venturing into the regions of an unknown world but conquering deadly fear by means of sublime faith or stubborn courage or both.

The simple tale of the Polos details nothing of all this. There is no expatiating on the sufferings or the fears of the brothers, nothing of their struggles, physical, mental, or emotional. We have their journey summed up in a few simple lines: They set out, they traveled a year, they passed through many countries and saw many peoples and tribes, and finally they reached their destination. Such an unadorned objective narrative is unusual in the history of travel and exploration. Perhaps, as Marco himself tells us, he preferred to leave unrecounted the experiences of his father and his uncle in order to incorporate similar ones in the account of his own wanderings and observations. But the fact remains that only an indomitable will, great physical resistance, infinite patience, and an extremely long view in making decisions and plans could have taken the Polos across unknown Asia and back to their home in Venice with no untoward accident—at least none that has been reported either in writing or in legend.

Even today Central Asia has been almost the last area on earth

to be penetrated by external influences. Isolated and protected by mountains and deserts, its people have changed but little, and their mode of life has not varied in many details. The location of its plains far from the sea, the unreliability of its water supply, the everlasting snow on its mountains, the chill winds, the avalanches, the salt steppes and the deserts had all molded its inhabitants into a people differing from any others the much-traveled Polos had encountered. Their religion, their occupations, and their social life were all largely determined by their physical environment.

As for the seasons in Central Asia, the winters are cruelly cold and the summers hot and dry, with terrific sandstorms which sometimes make even breathing a torture. The autumns are bearable but short; all too soon winter sweeps down, with its air so piercingly cold and dry that one's skin cracks open and heals with the greatest difficulty. Snowstorms follow and smother everything in their drifts. Life becomes almost unendurable at this season. Spring, even though short, has always been the happiest season of the year for the Mongols. The snow melts in the warmth of the sun, hurricanes die down and vanish, and the streams thaw out in forest and plain. Flowers spring up everywhere. Indeed, the expression "a meadow in full flower" is the highest praise the Mongols can give to anything they admire, from a fine house to a young girl in her marriage outfit. Many of the tribes indicate a lapse of years by the number of times the flowers have bloomed. At this season tents are rolled up and their contents aired in the sun, the cattle and horses wax fat on the lush green grass, and all the people rejoice.

Everywhere on their journey Nicolo and Maffeo mingled with the natives, of whom it has been said that "their fatherland is the tent and the back of their horses." By the roadsides and beside the river banks, among the hills and in the valleys, wherever grass and water were at hand for their animals, rose the tents of the Mongols. Odd-looking, round or six-sided, with dome-shaped roofs, the yurts dotted the landscape. They were of black or gray felt, coated with tallow or cow's milk to keep the rain out, and tied with horsehair cord or thongs to well-fastened frames of light wood. The floors were of beaten cow dung strewn with sand, sometimes boasting also a rug or a carpet. The furnishings were benches and a few chests, together with a few household implements hanging on the walls. The smoke from the fire,

usually of *argols* ("dried dung"), in the center found its way out through a hole in the center of the roof. The door was usually at the south, to avoid the cold north and west winds. The yurts themselves were generally surrounded by the carts of their owners.

The flocks and herds of the Mongols were both their necessities and their riches. The skins of their cattle supplied clothes, rugs, and yurt covers. From them the roughly tanned leather shields, belts, shoes, and various vessels and implements were made. The bones were used for innumerable purposes, and the sinews and tendons were twisted into bowstrings, thread, and cordage. The horns were utilized for drinking cups and musical instruments and in manufacturing weapons and glue. Even the dried dung was carefully gathered and used as fuel, for wood was scarce on the great plains and could not be wasted.

These conditions forced the Mongols to rely almost exclusively on an animal diet. As they themselves expressed it, "Grass is for animals, and animals are for man." They let nothing go to waste, eating even animals which died of disease as readily as those killed for food. Cats, rats, dogs—all were welcome, as long as they furnished meat. This they consumed in great quantities, roasted, smoked, or dried. They ate with a knife, biting into a large chunk and cutting it off at the lips. Then they wiped their fingers on their footgear, thus keeping the crude leather soft and flexible with a continual supply of grease. They made a cake somewhat like cheese from milk, drying it in the sun and later eating it or drinking it dissolved in water or tea. Their only vegetable food consisted of a bit of millet and garlic, the latter of which grew wild. And always they had their beloved kumiss.

Cleanliness, far from being a virtue, was positively a vice among this people, who seemed to venerate filth with religious awe: "They never wash clothes, since they say God would punish them for polluting the water; nor do they hang them up to dry in order not to pollute the air and they believe it would thunder if they did so, to show God's displeasure."

No one seemed to go afoot in Mongolia. The people, men, women, and children, may be said to have lived astride their tiny but remarkably tough and wiry horses. In the wild century when the Polos wandered in their midst, their two joys in life were war and the hunt. Otherwise they lay about in their huts and slept or drank.

Their measures of material values were a head of cattle, a sheep, a camel, or a horse. Their moral values had but one standard: "Is it useful?" What was useful was good; what was not was bad. Loyalty to friend and ally was observed, but their ethics seem to have stopped there.

Their religion, conditioned as it was by the environment in which they lived, could hardly have been highly speculative or idealized. They accepted the hereafter as a continuation of the life in this world, and buried horses and implements with their dead to aid them in the after life. They believed in an invisible supreme being, but asked him for little. More attention was given to their household gods, who were more familiar to them and to whom they made offerings of food.

The social life of the nomads was based on the family unit under the control of the father. The women worked hard, were old at forty, and were even dirtier than the men. They did most of the drudgery, reared the children, and in general bore the larger part of the burden of the household and the care of the flocks. They did fine embroidery work as well in the little spare time they might find. In return they were made to sleep in the coldest parts of the tents and received but little attention from their menfolk. Nevertheless, the Mongol woman had a certain degree of freedom. Polygamy was common; but the first wife was entitled to prior rights in property and inheritance, and her children likewise. Often on the death of the father the sons married his wives, though no one espoused his own mother. So, too, a man often married his brother's widow. The women of the tribe, both married and unmarried, were respected; and sexual morality was relatively high, though on this point there are divergent opinions. On the other hand, the women of an enemy were entitled to no respect and when captured were violated and treated with uncontrolled brutality.

As the Polos traveled along the well-beaten caravan track, they enjoyed watching the Mongols at their various occupations. Some were busy making the lattice framework of the yurts, others sewing at saddles or bridles, making arrows, or hammering out rough silver ornaments. Most of them, however, were only lying idle or looking after their weapons. Their many recent wars had brought them an ample number of slaves, and these did most of the men's work.

The two Italians watched the women tanning skins. Some of the tribes used skimmed milk and salt, others ashes and salt. Some soft-

ened the skins with the putrid livers of cattle or sheep mixed with milk, others with ewe's milk and salt or with sour cream. Both women and men amused themselves with archery contests and racing. Often the women were skilled archers and accompanied their men into battle. Some little groups made felt, beating the wet sheep's wool with sticks to tangle the fibers. After the strips had been pressed and finished, they were tied to the grazing ponies and dragged over the smooth grass, which gave them the final polish.

Hardly a day passed without encountering detachments of Mongol soldiers, each with two or three bows at his back, three quivers full of arrows, and an axe. Their helmets were of leather with a steel or iron top; and each had at his side a wicker shield. Often they carried long spears having hooks below the spearheads, with which to jerk their opponents from their saddles in battle. Many wore chain armor, made by smiths in the faraway Caucasus.

Around the campfire at night the Venetians were entertained with music of a kind, drawn from drums, fiddles, and guitars to the accompaniment of dancing and the clapping of hands, and with gluttonous eating and drinking. Wandering minstrels chanted long songs, of war and love or in praise of their horses, or told endless old legends of the tribes. The foreigners often sat shivering in the flickering firelight, chilled to the marrow by horrible tales of rapine and butchery, cannibalism and blood-drinking.

The whole pageant of Mongol life passed before them as they traveled onward toward the rising sun. They saw shamans and necromancers at their weird rites, and had their fortunes told with the shoulder-blades of sheep. They witnessed the consecration of sacred white horses, and the driving forth of evil spirits from the sick. They were present at many a marriage ceremony with its bargaining for the bride and its feasting. They learned that among a great number of the tribes a man did not deem a woman his wife until she had conceived by him. Betrothed children often lived together several years before marriage, and nothing was thought of it. The Venetians soon became accustomed to the offer of temporary wives when they spent the night in an encampment or a village; it was simply in accordance with the custom of the country and one still in full practice among the nomads.

One ceremony never failed to amuse them—the first and only washings of the newborn babe. Seven days after the child's birth, the

family teapot was rinsed, the water used for this purpose was salted, and the baby was washed with it. Seven days later he received a bath of salt water. At the end of the third seven days he was washed in diluted milk. Finally, twenty-eight days after birth, he was bathed in his mother's milk to prevent skin trouble. "And with these quadruple washings the Mongol is contented for the rest of his life."

On their journey they frequently encountered funerals (though usually interment was in a secret place, to prevent robbery), and saw that with the dead man were buried food and milk and a horse for his use in the next world.

For Nicolo and Maffeo traveling was comparatively easy. Were they not on imperial business, in the company of the envoys of the Great Khan himself, and did not their hosts' tablets of authority give them the right to command and to requisition, and to be obeyed everywhere in fear and trembling? At convenient intervals on the road they found relays of horses awaiting them, maintained at these post stations throughout the empire by the Great Khan for those traveling on official business.

Now six full years had passed since the wanderers had left the great city of Constantinople; and, unknown to them, many momentous changes were taking place in the world they had left behind. The Latin Emperor of Byzantium had been driven out, and Michael Paleologus the Greek once more sat upon the throne of his ancestors. His allies the Genoese were again in the ascendancy, and Venice was beginning a life-and-death struggle with her commercial rival in the Levant and the Mediterranean world. The French Pope Urban IV had died and been laid to rest with imposing pageantry in Perugia's cathedral, and another Frenchman had ascended the throne of St. Peter as Clement IV. He in turn was to be gathered to his fathers before the return of the Venetian brothers to their home in Europe, and his death was to affect their fortunes profoundly.

All this was unknown to Nicolo and Maffeo, for no news came to them as they continued slowly on their way. The days lengthened into weeks, the weary weeks into months, until when they had spent a whole year in traveling they at last reached Cathay, goal of their dreams and desires and hopes. A few more days, and they stood before the Great Khan Kublai, lord of all the Mongols and of China, undisputed despot of the East.

VII

It is important at this point to review the relations of China and Europe preceding the visit of the Polos. From the earliest period of human history, since long before the keeping of written records, there had been trade intercourse between China and Europe. Millet of Chinese origin has been found in the remains of the prehistoric lake dwellings of Switzerland, perhaps 25,000 years old. Records of the Han Dynasty have preserved accounts of Chinese embassies and exploring expeditions to the lands of the West. During the centuries of Greek and Roman ascendancy commercial relations were maintained with varying intensity. By camel caravan and junk, the spices, the silks, and the precious stones of the Far East reached the great emporia of the Western world, and the stuffs and glass of the Mediterranean basin were brought to the land of the sons of Han. In the oases, at the crossings and termini of the caravan routes, and on rivers and natural harbors, cities sprang up and flourished, with thronged streets and market places, temples, and palaces. Some of these trans-Asiatic paths of commerce remained open for centuries; raids of nomad tribes and pirates or wars and rebellion cut off all intercourse along other paths by land and by sea. During such intervals of disorder certain trading centers were abandoned or were destroyed by ruthless chieftains. Some of these, containing precious records of a past civilization, have now been excavated; others still lie buried beneath the desert sands of Central Asia.

The products of the Chinese were well known in the Rome of the Caesars. Horace refers to the arrows and the silks of the Seres, and Pliny the Elder speaks of the silk which the Chinese comb from the leaves of trees. Lucan in his *Pharsalia* describes Cleopatra, "her baleful beauty painted up beyond all measure. Her white breasts revealed by the fabric of Sidon . . . close woven by the shuttle of the Seres [the Chinese]." Tacitus has preserved for us a law enacted by the Senate during the principate of Tiberius "against men disgracing themselves with silken garments," and quotes a message from the Emperor to the Senate urging restriction of the growing commerce with the East, which was draining the Empire of its gold. The *Historia Augusta* records that in order to defray the expenses of a campaign against the Germans, Marcus Aurelius offered at public sale in the Forum of Trajan, among other things, his wife's gold-embroidered silk robes.

Josephus, in describing a triumph of Vespasian and Titus in Rome, states that they were both clad in silk. An epigram of Martial speaks of fine silk sold on the Vicus Tuscus, one of the most fashionable shopping streets of Rome. And there is preserved in the Vatican a fragment of a Roman tombstone inscribed with the name of a woman, "Thymele, dealer in silk"; and other stones erected to or by *siricarii*—"sellers of silk"—are to be found in the various museums of the Eternal City.

In the Roman markets many Chinese products were offered for sale—furs, musk, ginger, cinnamon, rhubarb, and rice—as well as other commodities imported into China and re-exported to the peoples of the West. In exchange the Chinese imported, over the caravan routes and by sea, glass, dyes, woven stuffs, lead, precious stones, and many minor products. The balance of trade was always largely in favor of the Far East. In fact, one of the causes contributing to the weakening and decay of the Roman Empire was the continual adverse trade balance and the draining of the precious metals into Asia to pay for the enormous quantities of goods imported to satisfy the extravagant tastes and demands of Rome's wealthy classes.

As the changes of the monsoons and the problems of navigation were gradually learned and understood by seafarers, the maritime trade between East and West grew ever larger and more important, though the caravan routes continued to carry a large portion of the commerce.

As the power of Rome weakened, the expansion, first of the Parthian kingdom, then of Persia, threatened and finally seriously interfered with direct commerce between the East and the West, and the unending struggles of China with the nomad hordes on her frontiers served to make trade conditions even worse. These restless nomads were related racially to the Huns who swept in a great flood over Europe in the fifth century A.D. The contest between the Chinese and the Mongols (often designated by different names, such as *Hsiung Nü*) lasted for centuries. At times the Chinese were able to repel the barbarian tide breaking on their borders; at times the invader was successful, even ruling parts or the whole of China for varying periods of her history. The Great Wall, built in the third century B.C., was devised by one of China's greatest rulers to keep the barbarians in check.

With the fall of Rome and the beginning of the so-called Dark Ages, commercial relations between China and the West gradually declined almost to the vanishing point. The new order of things in the Western world had elevated to power a rude and unlettered class, with but little knowledge and limited wants and desires. Their own lands produced enough to satisfy their physical needs, and under the feudal system commerce played but a secondary role in Europe. The shrunken Empire and the new nations that were formed from its fragments and its neighbors offered a very inconsiderable market for Chinese goods—and they had, in turn, little to offer of interest or value to the Far East. Under the Emperor Justinian and his successors the cultivation of the mulberry and the introduction of the silkworm into the Byzantine Empire established an industry large enough to satisfy the small demand of the West for silk, which had once been the most valuable cargo of camel and junk.

In the cultural night which had settled over Europe there was no place for interest in faraway lands or peoples. The very memory of the early voyages to the East, and of Asia in general, had died out. Geographical knowledge was gradually replaced by fantastic ideas and legends largely inspired by reading or misreading the Bible. Attention to foreign lands, when there was any, centered on Palestine, because of its religious associations. In Constantinople alone, where the arts and sciences were maintained, even though in an attenuated form, and where decadence never reached the depths that it did in Europe (always excepting Spain during its eight hundred years of Arab-Moorish domination), communication and trade with East Asia were maintained. Scraps of information about China were brought to that Greek capital from time to time by rare voyagers who had ventured timidly out upon the wastes of land and sea toward the lands of the rising sun.

China herself never lost touch with the peoples of Central and Southern Asia. During the flourishing centuries of the T'ang Empire (618-960), when China was all-powerful in the East, she was united to the important peoples of Asia by bonds of commerce and social intercourse. Her merchants penetrated with their goods to the farthest corners of steppe and desert, mountain and valley. Her Buddhist pilgrims wandered to India and Ceylon, and even to the islands of the southern seas. On their return they wrote of their travels and their experiences. Many of their stories have been preserved to our day—invaluable rec-

ords of the life, the industry, the politics, and the religions of the peoples of the East. Chinese embassies visited most of the important cities of Asia, and treaties of amity and commerce among them were arranged. Printing flourished in China, spreading knowledge everywhere there. The use of the magnetic compass for navigation spread rapidly, increasing the trade by sea. The T'ang emperors were the rulers of a country and a people more civilized than any the world had known since the fall of the Roman Empire.

Foreigners from every part of Asia came to reside at Ch'ang An, the capital. In its streets men of every nation rubbed elbows, and every dialect and language from the Caspian to the Pacific was heard in its squares and market places. Its universities were crowded with thousands of students from Japan and Korea, from Tibet and the South. In the great cities and seaports were colonies of traders—Arabs, Hindus, and even Europeans. Some of these had their own mosques and churches, so numerous were their inhabitants. In the capital there stood for centuries a church of the Nestorian Christians, erected A.D. 635 by a wandering remnant of the excommunicated sect. Long and interesting descriptions of China and its trade have been left us by the merchant Suleyman and other medieval Arab travelers, for the Arabs held the monopoly of the sea-borne traffic between the Far East and the Persian and Red Sea ports and Egypt for many hundreds of years.

The ninth and tenth centuries witnessed the decline and fall of the T'ang Empire. Weakened morally by luxury and easy living, undermined by the rule of unscrupulous and greedy eunuchs or women, this great period, often called the Golden Age of China, ended in a welter of blood and disintegration. There ensued fifty years of chaos and disunion, known as the era of the "Five Dynasties." This period was finally terminated by an army revolt, which placed the imperial yellow on the shoulders of Kuang Shun, the first emperor of the Sung Dynasty, which dominated China (960-1126) until its conquest by the Mongols.

Though not so powerful as the great epoch that had preceded it, and with frontiers that were continually shrinking under the increasing pressure and inroads of the Tartar tribes, the era of the Sung was the mellow afternoon following the brilliant midday of the T'angs. Its capital of K'ai Fêng Fu was still the center of Far Eastern civilization, the storehouse of all that was rich and cultured and admired by the

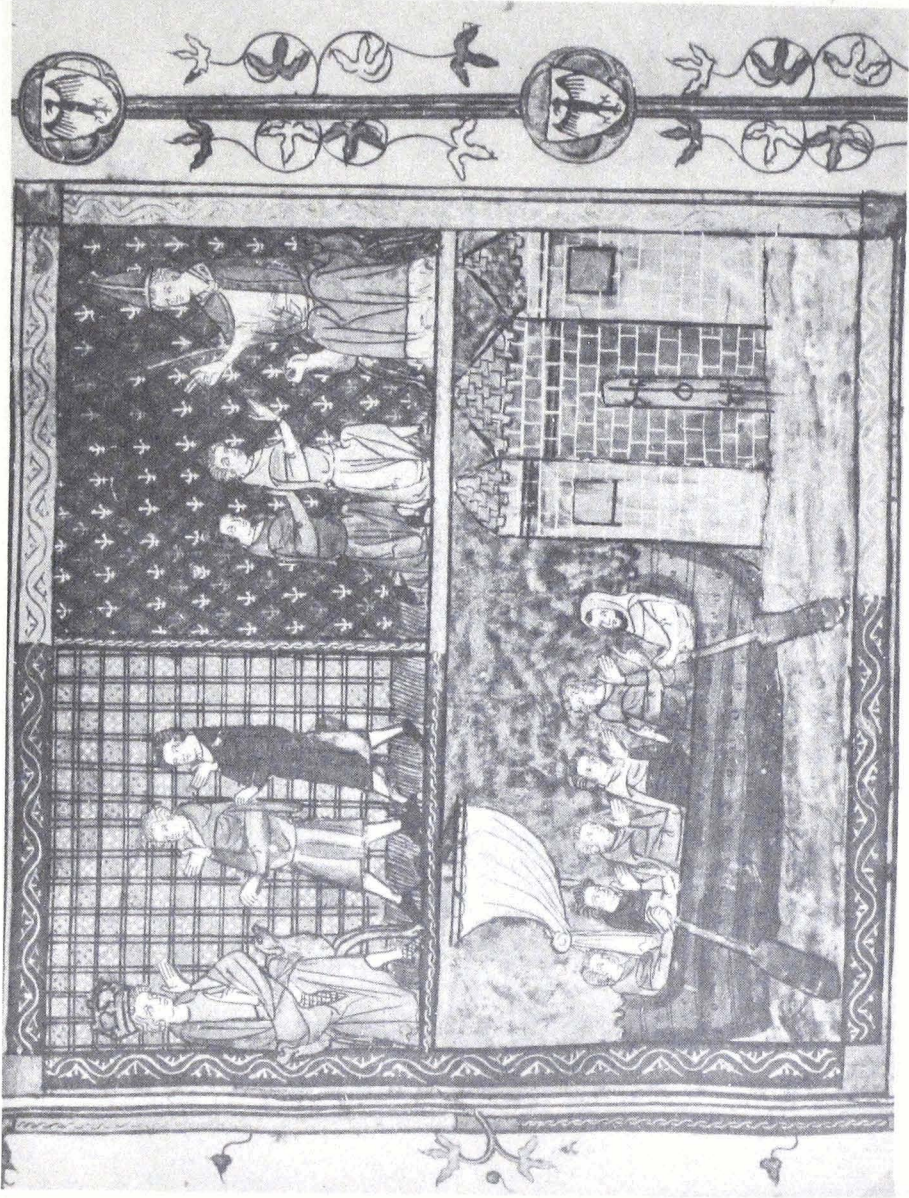
peoples of Asia. Her very riches and civilization, however, caused her to be coveted by the barbarians. After many failures they finally had their way, and the Sung met their end, vanquished by the wild horsemen of the steppes. Khan succeeded Khan as we have told before, and when the Polos arrived in Cathay, the great Kublai sat upon the throne of his fathers.

VIII

Such being the position of China with respect to medieval Europe, what specifically awaited the Polos on their arrival at the Khan's court? We are nowhere told where Kublai Khan was holding court on the arrival of the brothers from Bokhara. In 1263 he had selected Khanbaligh (Peking), usually called "Cambaluc" in the Western chronicles of the period, as his capital, and was busily engaged in constructing its walls and palaces. He may have been there, or in the old capital of Karakorum, or at his summer palace at Shangtu of which we shall hear more later.

Wherever he first welcomed the Polo brothers, we are assured that the Grand Khan "beamed with the greatest graciousness" at the arrival of the strangers, and that he received them with great honor and joy, and feasted them well. He was consumed with curiosity about the West, and promptly asked all manner of questions about the Emperor of the Romans (the Byzantine ruler), and about other Western kings and princes and their methods of administration. He also made many inquiries about their relations, peaceful and warlike, with each other, and their manners and customs. Most of all, he appeared interested in "Master the Apostle," which was the usual French expression of the time for the Pope, and about the Church and its doctrines and practices.

The Great Khan listened attentively to all that Nicolo and Maffeo had to tell him of these various matters. He gave much thought to their statement; he then summoned his nobles and obtained their approval of a plan to employ the brothers as his messengers to the Pope, accompanied by Cogotal, one of his "barons." The Italians were called before him, and the offer was made to them. They quickly perceived that this was the way offered them by fate to return to their faraway home. Moreover, they recognized the advantageous position in which this would place them for further trade with the masters of the Far East. They accepted with alacrity, and prepared to depart with Cogotal.



Three pictures of the Polo brothers from an old manuscript: *Upper left*. A supposed interview of the Polo brothers with the Emperor Baldwin of Constantinople. *Upper right*. Audience of the Polo brothers with Teobaldo of Piacenza at Acre. *Below*. The Polo brothers sail through the Black Sea. From the illuminated frontispiece of Royal MS 19 D I, folio 58. The text is in Old French, second half of the fourteenth century. (Courtesy of the British Museum)

pol. & me lire marco pol. auoit le
vuy chapitre. Comment le gñe
Khan leur donna la table dor
de son commandement.



Dvant le seignour loz
ot en charge tout lo
message. E ilz fist
donner vne table dor
en la quelle il estoit
contenu que les .iii. messages

Kublai Khan presenting the golden tablet of authority to the Polo brothers, here, curiously enough, depicted as tonsured monks. From the Royal MS 19 D I, folio 59. (Courtesy of the British Museum)

Kublai Khan presented to them their symbol of authority, a tablet of gold bearing his great seal, and engraved with a statement that the three men were his personal messengers and were to be supplied everywhere en route with horses, escorts, and all needful help and provisions.

The letter to the Pope which the Great Khan entrusted to the Polos was of the greatest importance, for had the Church complied with its requests the history of the Far East and perhaps of the entire world might have been profoundly changed. Kublai requested—some manuscripts read “commanded”—the Pope to send to him a hundred men learned in the Christian faith and thoroughly acquainted with those seven arts which embodied the ideal of a liberal education for the medieval scholar—rhetoric, logic, grammar, arithmetic, astronomy, music, and geometry. Kublai was asking for men of the highest scholarly rank to be sent him. He specified that he desired, moreover, men well trained in argument, fitted to demonstrate to his people the superiority of Christianity over idolatry. He pledged his word that if they could prove their thesis to his satisfaction he and all his subjects would become Christians and good sons of the Church. He furthermore asked the brothers to bring back to him some of the oil from the lamp which burned above the sepulchre of Jesus at Jerusalem. This holy oil, consecrated by the Patriarch, was a prized article of commerce in the Middle Ages, and most Levantine Christians held it a sovereign cure for all the maladies of body and soul. The Armenian clergy, as we shall learn, had a monopoly of its sale in Jerusalem and a most profitable business it must have been if we can accept the testimony of many pilgrims of the period.

It was in no way strange that Kublai Khan manifested such a keen interest in Christianity and the Church. Many Christians of various sects held various influential positions at his Court as ministers, doctors, and teachers; and alliances of marriage had united the family of Genghis Khan with the Christian Tartar tribe of the Keraites. Some of the manuscripts inform us that Kublai Khan's mother, Siur Kukteni, was a Christian. This statement is confirmed by contemporary Arab chronicles, and by a statement in the *Yüan Shih*, the Chinese dynastic history of the Yüan period. If true, it was only natural that the alert, intelligent Great Khan should seek to learn more of his mother's religion and why it was so powerful in the West. If it had potentialities,

religious, political, or economic for the advancement of his own people, he was determined to take advantage of them.

Thus at last the Polos set out upon their long journey of thousands of miles back to their home in Venice. After only twenty days of travel, Cogotal, their Mongol companion, fell ill—at least that was his excuse—and could travel no farther. Nicolo and Maffeo, however, taking with them the gold tablet of Imperial authority, continued on their way westward. We know nothing whatsoever of their route or their adventures. Marco simply tells us that the journey lasted three long years because of bad weather, floods, storms, snow and ice, and the many other difficulties of the road.

Finally they crossed the frontiers of the Mongol Empire into Armenia and arrived at the coast town of Laias. They were returning to familiar scenes, and now encountered many Europeans, among them numerous Genoese, who were thriving mightily everywhere in the Levant as a result of their alliance with the Greek Emperor Michael.

The brothers took passage on the first ship available from Laias to Acre, the last port on the Syrian coast held by the Crusaders. It was destined to fall into the hands of the Turks in 1291, but was still a busy flourishing seaport when Nicolo and Maffeo sailed in past the lighthouse and sighted its high walls and towers. They immediately visited their fellow countrymen in the quarter reserved for them and their trade. There they were able to get once more in touch with what had been happening in business and in politics. To their dismay they learned that "Master the Apostle," Clement IV, had died at Viterbo some months before and that his successor had not yet been elected. This upset all their plans for presenting Kublai Khan's letters and for a speedy return to his capital.

Fortunately, the Papal legate for Egypt, Teobaldo of Piacenza, was in Acre en route to Jerusalem. They sought and obtained an audience with the learned man, for they knew that he was very influential in Church affairs and realized that his friendship and counsel could be of inestimable value. The legate listened with intense interest to the story of the Polos, for the Imperial letter contained a promise of great expansion for Mother Church, just as for the brothers it offered an opportunity to fill their coffers still further. But the Polos' return to Cathay had to await events beyond their control. Teobaldo's advice was brief and to the point: "Sirs, you see the Apostle is dead, and because

of that you must bide your time in patience until another Apostle be chosen. And when that happens, you will be able to accomplish your mission.”

The two brothers, seeing the wisdom in his words, decided to return at once to Venice and remain there until a new Pope was seated upon the throne of St. Peter. They departed from Acre at their earliest opportunity, proceeding first to Negropont, on the Greek island of Euboea, the center of Venetian influence in the East after the expulsion from Constantinople, and thence home to Venice.

And now, after fifteen years of wandering, the brothers leaned on the rail and watched the shifting scene as their vessel entered the familiar harbor. How fast their hearts must have beaten as in turn the landmarks slowly came into view. First the old church of San Giorgio Maggiore—not the great building of today with its campanile, but a smaller, far less pretentious building. Then, as they drew nearer, the two columns of the Piazzetta, the crowds of sailors unloading and loading vessels with loud cries and curses, the swift gondolas dodging in and out among the larger vessels and through the side canals and under the bridges, the mooring posts and the lanterns, the swelling domes of St. Mark’s reminiscent of that Constantinople where they had dwelt for so long, and, towering above all, dominating the whole sea-front of the city, the great Campanile, built over two hundred years before.

When Messer Nicolo arrived at his home he found great changes. His wife had died, and his son to whom she had given birth after her husband’s departure was a strapping lad of fifteen. He had been baptized Marco, after his uncle, Nicolo’s oldest brother: “And it was that Marco of whom this book speaks.”

Chapter Two

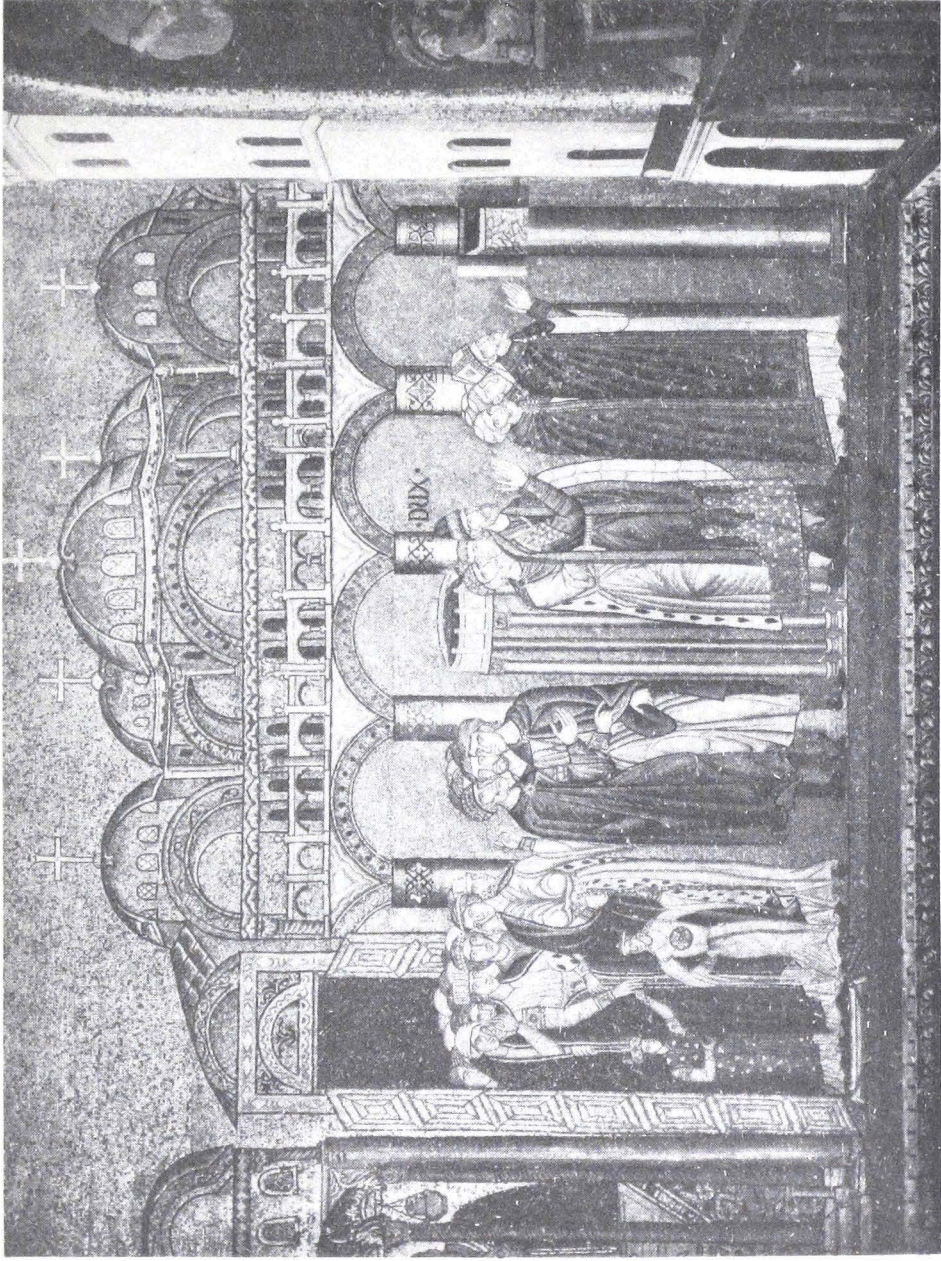
The Boy Marco



OF HIS BOYHOOD, or of what took place between his birth and his departure from Venice on his own memorable journey, Marco Polo tells us nothing. We can, however, glean enough details from existing genealogies and documents of the time, as well as from reading between the lines of his book, to reconstruct it in part if not as a whole. Except in the cases of a few geniuses and infant prodigies, the life of a man from his birth to his fifteenth year, even though it be very significant from the psychological point of view, is seldom of importance with regard to his external experiences. Perhaps we need not regret Marco Polo's reticence concerning his early years.

Though his mother had died early and his uncle Marco was probably away most or all of these years in Constantinople, his aunt Flora (on his father's side) was living in Venice with her child, and he had several cousins. Three of these were illegitimate, but that appears to have been of little consequence in the Venice of the day. Indeed, he had still another cousin whose father and mother are both unknown and who in his turn had a "natural" daughter. Probably young Marco was cared for by his relatives until the return of his father from Asia.

His life was that of the other boys of his age. It included little schooling, and he acquired his education on the canals and the quays, the bridges and the open squares of the city. Formal education was then reserved for the few, though one may well believe, contrary to the opinion of many editors and commentators, that Marco could read and write his own language. In his introductory chapter he tells us that "he wrote only a few things in his notebooks" because he did not



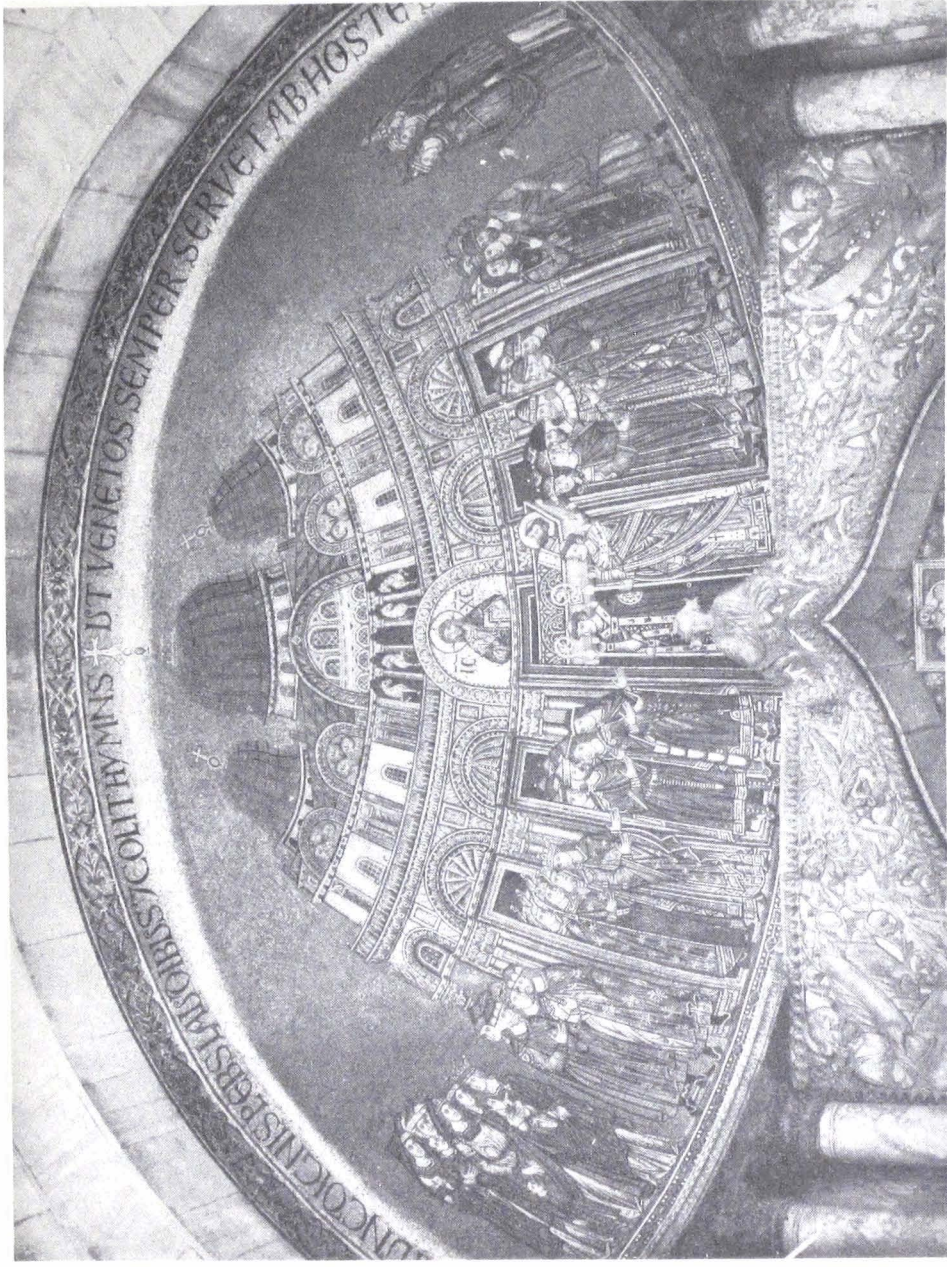
“The Miraculous Revelation of the Lost Body of Saint Mark.” St. Mark’s, Venice. Mosaic, gold background, early twelfth century. (Courtesy of Fratelli Alinari, Florence)

know that he would ever return home from China. In another chapter of his book Marco states that when he traveled on missions for the Great Khan he "would fix his attention, noting and writing all the novel and strange things which he had heard and seen." We may conclude that the boy, who, we are informed, later learned four foreign languages in Asia, could read and write some Italian. Perhaps he knew a little French also. Aside from his scant knowledge of letters—not enough, evidently, to enable him to write a long book unaided—most of Marco's education was gathered at the quay-sides and in the Church.

Like other boys he took part in the festivals of the Church—and they were many in Venice. With his friends he must have marched in the processions and joined in the pageants. St. Mark's, which has changed but little since the day when Marco Polo played in its porch as a boy, was a school in itself for both the unlettered and the learned. Its extensive and magnificent mosaics told in vivid fashion the story of the world. In the atrium was spread out the whole tale of the creation of the world and of man—the stories of Cain and Abel, of Noah and the Ark, of the Tower of Babel, of Abraham and other patriarchs, and of Joseph and Moses. Inside the Church the wondering children saw unrolled before them the story of Jesus and His passion and, as they walked about, learned from the simple pictures of gleaming gold and richest hues the lessons of His ministry on earth. In every corner and on every available bit of wall or arch was a Bible story. Even the most ignorant could learn their religious history as in a great picture book, its leaves those magnificent mosaics which still look down upon us seven centuries after the master workmen set them in their place, bit by bit, in fadeless colors and in brightest gold.

The boy would listen open-mouthed and wide-eyed as he stood before the high altar and heard the legend told of the bringing of the body of Holy Mark, the city's patron saint, from Alexandria to Venice. That story, written down in quaint old French by Messer Martino da Canale during the very years of Marco Polo's boyhood in Venice and so preserved for us, is well worth the retelling.

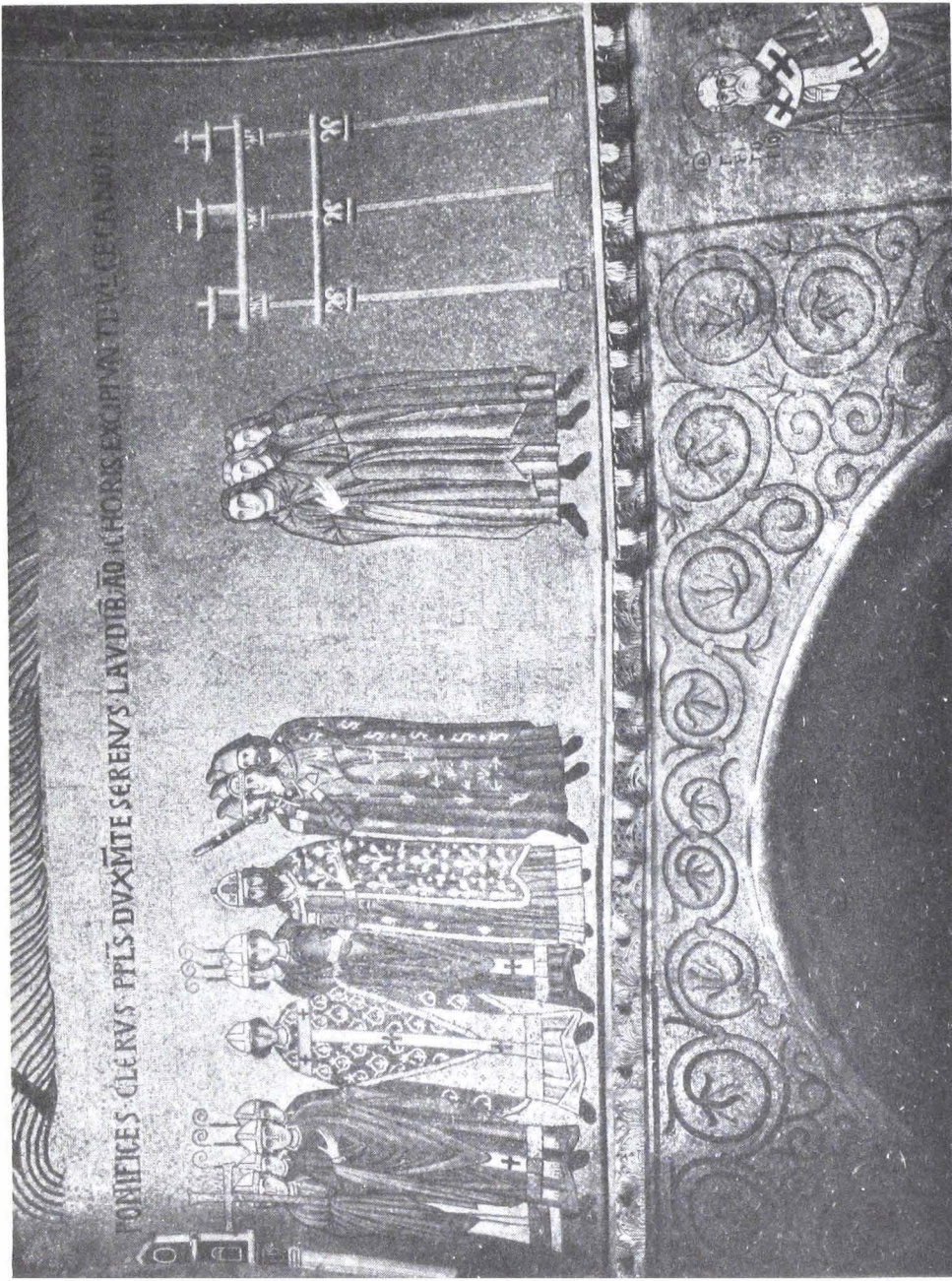
Tradition has it that Saint Mark was caught in a storm while on his preaching mission, and made a forced landing in Venice. There an angel greeted him, "Peace to thee, O Mark, my evangelist," and foretold that some day his body would find its last resting place in a shrine of the city in the sea.



Detail of the "Conveying of Saint Mark's Body." Mosaic, gold background, eleventh century, St. Mark's, Venice. (Courtesy of Fratelli Alinari, Florence)

And in the time of Monsignore the Doge Giustiniano [827-829] there came to Venice the precious body of Monsignore San Marco. It is the truth that at that time there was a ship of the Venetians in Alexandria. In this city was the precious body of Monsignore San Marco, whom the unbelievers had killed. . . . Now in the ship of the Venetians . . . there were three valiant men, one named Messer Rustico Torcellese . . . and the second valiant man who was with Messer Rustico was named Messer Buono dal Malamocco, and the third was named Stauracio. These three valiant men had such great hope and devotion to convey Monsignore San Marco to Venice that . . . they got into the good graces of him who was guarding the body of Monsignore San Marco and became his friends. And then it happened that they said to him: "Messer, if you wish to come with us to Venice and carry away the body of Monsignore San Marco, we shall make you a very rich man." And when the valiant man (who was called Messer Teodoro) heard this, he said: "Be silent, signori, speak not such words. This cannot be for anything in the world, because the pagans hold it the most precious thing in the world, and if they should spy out that we have such a desire, all the treasure of the world would not prevent them from cutting off our heads. And so, I pray you, do not speak such words to me." Whereupon one of them replied and said: "Then we shall wait until the blessed Evangelist commands you to come with us," and they spoke no more at that time. But it came to pass that there entered into the heart of this valiant man [the desire] to carry off the body of Monsignore San Marco from that place, and to betake himself with it to Venice. So he said to the valiant men: "Sirs, how can we carry off from here the Holy Body of Monsignore San Marco without the knowledge of any person? And one of them said: "We shall do it well and wisely." And so they went to the sepulchre as quickly as they could, and raised the body of Monsignore San Marco from the sepulchre where it was, and they put it into a basket and covered it with cabbages and with pieces of swine's flesh, and they took another body and placed it in the same sepulchre and in the cloths from which they had taken the blessed body of Monsignore San Marco, and sealed the tomb just as it had been sealed before, and the valiant men took the body of Monsignore San Marco and conveyed it to their ship in the same basket, as I have told you of before. And because they had fear of the pagans they placed the Holy Body between two slabs of pork and hung it [the basket] on the mast of the ship, and they did this because the pagans would in no way have touched the flesh of swine.

What shall I tell you? At the very moment that they opened the sepulchre there went forth throughout the city an odor so great and so pleasing that if all the spice-shops in the world had been in Alexandria they would not have been sufficient to cause the like. And then the pagans said: "Now Marco is moving about," because they were wont to smell this fragrance every year. Nevertheless, some of them went to the sepulchre and opened it, and saw the body of which I have made mention to you, which the Venetians had placed in the sepulchre in the cloths of Monsignore San Marco, and they were satisfied. But there were



Detail of the "Reception of the Body of Saint Mark." Mosaic, gold background, thirteenth century. (Courtesy of Fratelli Alinari, Florence)

pagans who came to the ship and searched it in every part, for they believed most certainly that the Venetians had therein the body of Monsignore San Marco. But when they saw the flesh hanging from the mast they commenced to cry out *hanzir, hanzir*, that is to say "pork, pork," and departed forthwith from the ship. The wind was fair and in the right quarter, and they raised the sails to the wind and went out upon the high sea, and had with them one of the valiant men who had guarded the body of Monsignore San Marco, and the other remained in Alexandria and came to Venice a year later. . . .

What shall I tell you more? So the vessel continued on its journey from day to day, until it had brought the blessed body of Monsignore San Marco to Venice. And it was so well received . . . that now that he was come to Venice the Venetians placed their hope in him and . . . carried before them the blessed figure of the precious Evangelist . . . and if any would wish to know the truth of the matter, just as I have told it to you, let him come to see the fair church of Monsignore San Marco in Venice, and let him look at all in front of the fair church, for there is written all this story as I have told it to you, and he will gain the great pardon of seven years which Monsignore the Apostle has granted to those who come into this fair church.

This was not the only story young Marco Polo heard about the patron saint of Venice. The old men sitting in the sun on the Piazza often told the boys gathered around them, greedy for details, how, when the Church built to receive the saint's body was to be consecrated in 1094 the body had vanished, for no one could find any trace of it after the destruction of the older church in the great fire of 976. The Republic thereupon decreed a fast and public prayer to God, that He might reveal the holy body of Saint Mark. As the procession, with the Doge at its head, wound slowly through the Church, a great light shone out near one of the pillars, part of the masonry crumbled, and a hand bearing a gold ring on the middle finger was thrust out through the hole. At the same moment a sweet fragrance filled the whole Church. There could be no doubt in anyone's mind that this was the veritable body of the holy Mark, and the people gave thanks to God for the miraculous recovery of their lost saint.

The body was placed in a marble crypt, where it lay until 1811. It was then removed to the high altar of the Church where it now lies.

The boy never wearied of the great cool dark interior of St. Mark's Church, in many ways the most unusual in all the world. Each pillar differed from the others, for not one was originally made for the church in which it stood. Each had a tale to tell of some pagan temple or some early Christian church for which its sculptors had chiseled it.

Every shipmaster returning to Venice brought with him loot from some ancient building—pillars or slabs of finest marble, statues or other plunder, which had once beheld the glories of ancient Greece or Rome. Marco was fascinated by the strange smooth panels of the walls, made by sawing some of the columns in half, polishing the flat surfaces, and setting them side by side with the grain reversed. In this way their designs appeared for all the world like those the children used to make by putting a great blob of ink on a scrap of vellum and folding it down the center while quite wet, so that the blot spread, producing all kinds of queer monsters. He saw dragons and trees, rocks, and saints and angels, as imaginative visitors to the Church still do.

On great holidays Marco used to worm his way through the crowd—dressed in its best silks and furs but reeking of garlic and onions and fish and none too clean beneath all its holiday finery—that he might catch a glimpse of the Pala d' Oro, that wonderful altar piece of gold and silver-gilt which had been a hundred years in the making in Constantinople. A murmur of wonder and delight, not unmixed with awe, swept through the crowd of assembled worshipers each time the curtains were drawn aside; and the shining-eyed lad beheld scenes from the life of Jesus, the Madonna, and the saints, all in colored enamels, set with six thousand pearls, garnets, sapphires, rubies, and emeralds, while neighbor whispered to neighbor that there were thirty pounds of gold and three hundred pounds of silver in the shrine and that the jewels were beyond price.*

On the altar before the Pala stood massive vessels and candlesticks of gold, and behind it was the altar of the Holy Cross adorned with two slender twisted columns of alabaster. As a sacristan passed between the columns with his lighted candle, the marble glowed with diffused light and Marco heard someone above his head whisper that those columns had been brought to honor Holy Mark from the great temple built by King Solomon himself in Jerusalem.

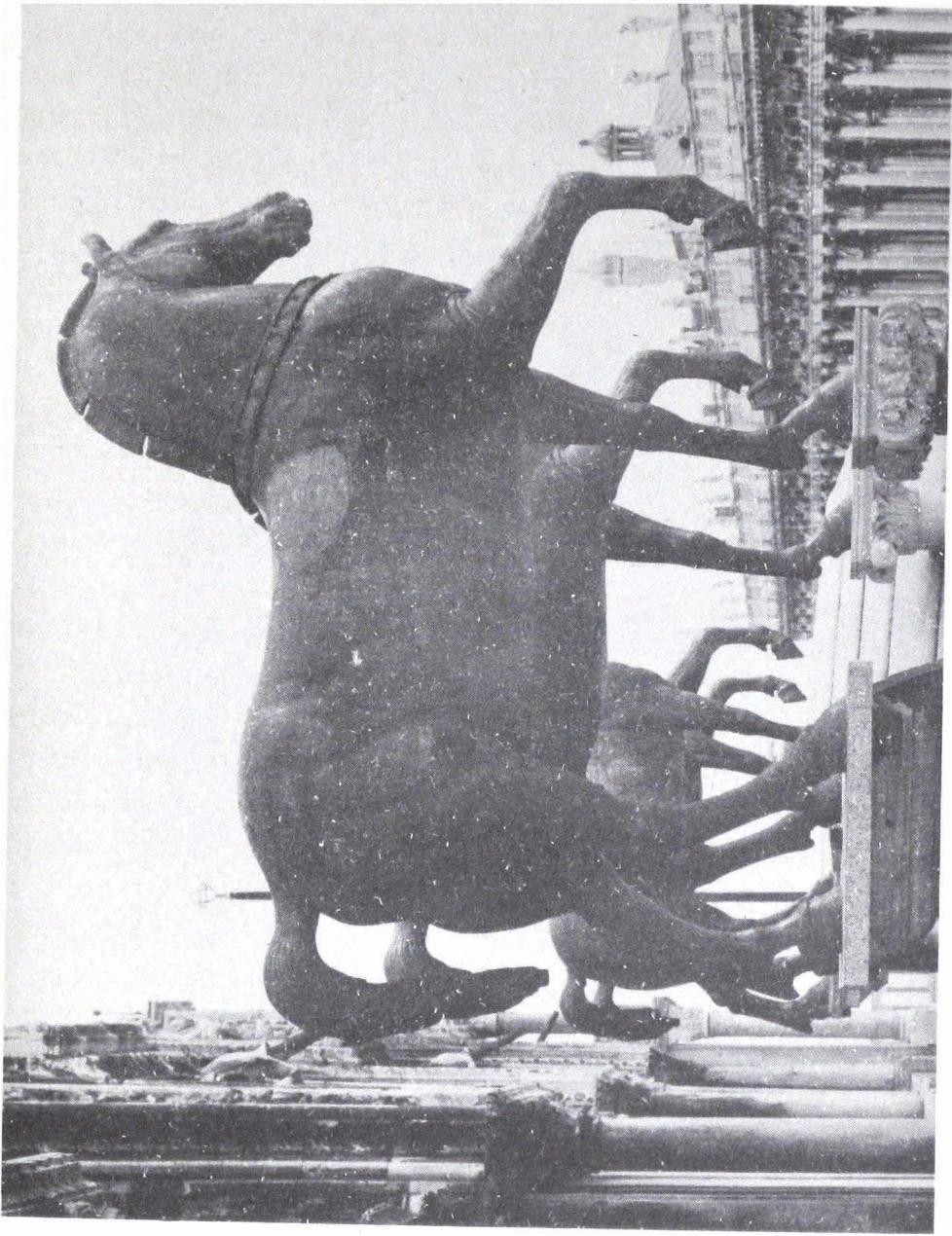
At other times Marco loved to wander in the galleries and watch the master mosaic workers at their labors—for you must know that St. Mark's was many years in the making, and work on it has not ceased even to this day. And the laborers would stop gladly and talk to the bright-eyed boy who was even then ever curious and anxious "to seek

* This was before the masterpiece was looted by the French under Napoleon, and before the great cabochons were stolen and replaced by cheaper cut stones.

out the causes of things," as Vergil had put it many centuries before. He heard how the bits of stone and glass were made, and marveled to learn that the gold was real gold leaf laid on between two red-hot panes of glass, and then cut up into tiny squares and inlaid, tens of thousands of square feet of it—so that it gleamed from every wall and corner, a background for all the storied pageant of the ages.

When he grew weary of the gloom of the Church and its heavy clinging fumes of incense and its intoned prayers and chants, he and his friends played about the porticoes and on the steps, and found never-ending fun in looking for new pictures carved on the seven arches of the entrance. They found a child in the yawning mouth of a lion, an eagle about to eat a lamb, all kinds of animals, real and fanciful, a farmer reaping corn, a man and woman riding on dragons, men hunting, boys quarreling and stealing eggs, and many other things. They all knew by heart the stones of the months and their symbols. They had been told that the carving of the little lame man with crutches, with his finger at his mouth, was the portrait of the architect, whose name was never known. They could all repeat the legend of how he appeared from nowhere before the Doge Pietro Orseolo, who was anxious to rebuild the Church after its destruction by fire in 976, and how he had offered to make the new Church more beautiful than any other in the world if only his statue would be set up in a conspicuous place. Unfortunately, he was once overheard to say that the Church would, after all, not be so beautiful as he might have made it. The Doge did not forget the remark, and so, the boys were told, the statue had been placed in a very inconspicuous position.

How they loved to look up at the four great gilded bronze horses, which had traveled far and wide since first they were cast! Some said they were Greek, others that they belonged to an arch erected in Rome in honor of Nero and had been carried off to the imperial hippodrome of Byzantium by Constantine. Dandolo had claimed them as part of the Venetian spoil in 1204, and they had been brought over the sea in triumph and set high on the outer gallery of the Church. Little could Marco Polo and his friends know that when many centuries had passed, and the glory of the Queen of the Adriatic was dimmed and tarnished, they would be carried off by Napoleon and set up in Paris; nor that after Waterloo they were to travel back once more to the city set in the sea, and there gaze out again over its people. Nor could they foresee



The bronze horses of St. Mark's, brought to Venice after the conquest of Constantinople.
(Courtesy of Fratelli Alinari, Florence)

that the horses would be hidden once again a hundred years thereafter, this time in far-off Rome, to save them from wanton destruction hurled from the skies.

The Piazza is no longer quite the same as when the Polos lived. The pavement has been raised, and new buildings have sprung up; but many landmarks still stand as they were in the thirteenth century. Always against the southern sky Marco could see from the Piazza the two great pillars near the water's edge, one of red, the other of gray granite. There once had been three, brought with other spoil from far-off Tyre a hundred years before. One had fallen into the sea and had never been recovered. The two others had lain for years on the shore, for no one could be found to raise them. Finally, in 1172, Nicolo Barattieri, an engineer from Lombardy, offered to erect the columns. On the top of one was placed the statue of Saint Theodore, once patron saint of the Venetians, standing on a crocodile. Marco must have wondered, as all men do still, why he stands ever with his face to the city, his back turned to the sea whence Venice drew all her wealth and glory. The second pillar had not yet received its proper crown, the Lion of St. Mark.

The columns held another interest for Marco and his friends, for between them gambling tables were set up, and crowds of patrons were always crowded about them. Men said that the concession for the tables was the reward granted Barattieri for his work. The pillars had still another attraction, grim and tragic; for with the granting of Nicolo Barattieri's petition the city fathers had issued an order that thenceforth public executions were to take place between the columns; and the stones of the Piazzetta could tell many a tale of men and women done to death or tortured there.

Everywhere as the boy walked in the streets or rowed about in the canals he saw changes going on—the tearing down of old houses, the building of newer, richer, more luxurious palaces. For the wealth of the East was pouring into Venice and she was expanding in every direction. Though the gondola was the favorite conveyance, horses were still to be seen in some of the streets and alleys, and beyond the Piazza of St. Mark's, where now the Royal Gardens flourish, the Doge had his stables.

The favorite haunts of the boys were the Rialto and the quays. The Rialto was the center of Venetian life. Thither converged bridges,

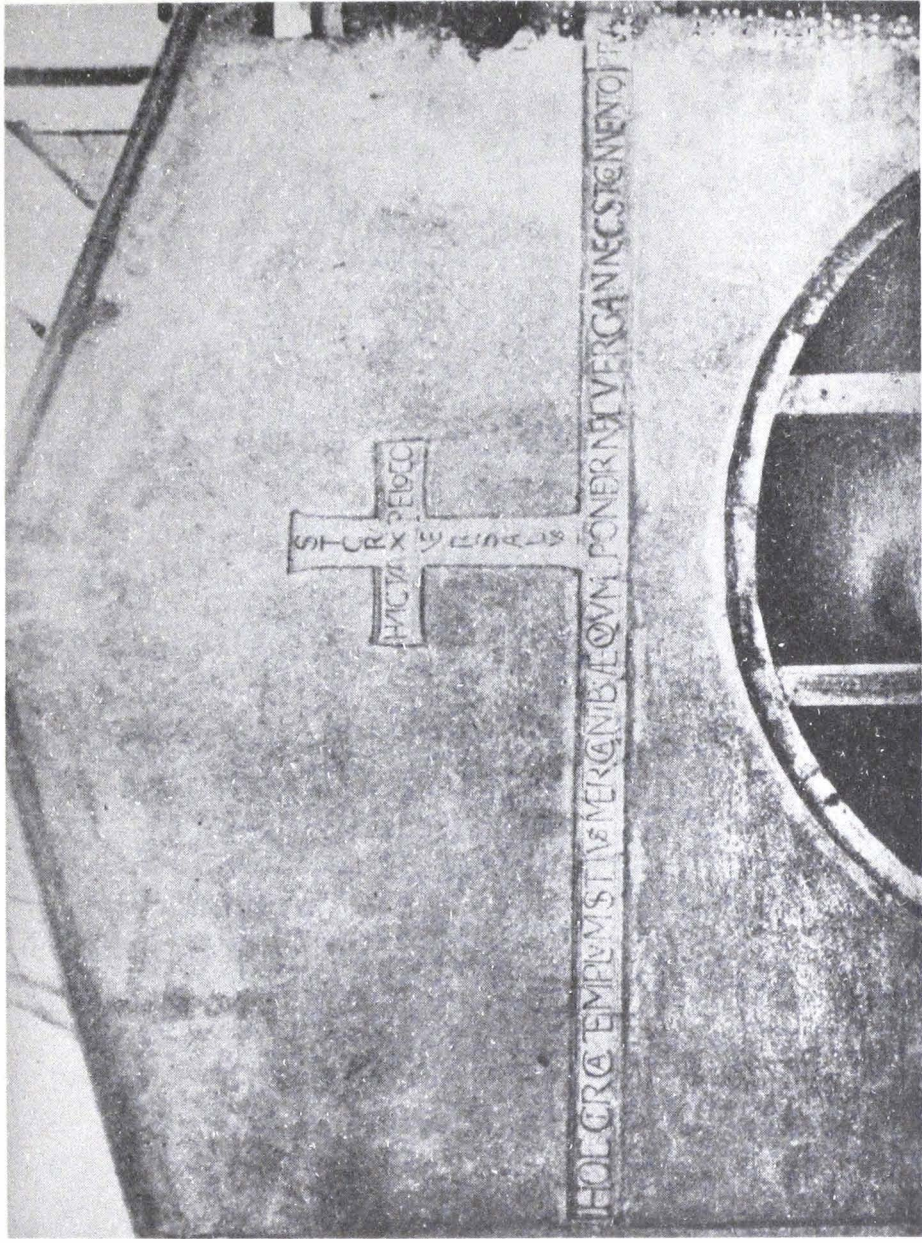
canals, and streets. There were the shops and crowded markets. The oldest church in Venice—San Giacomo di Rialto—stood there. According to tradition it was built in the fifth century. Its colonnades were adorned with frescoes, and there merchants and brokers gathered, to hear and exchange the latest news—arrivals and departures of vessels, political moves on the mainland, and all the multifarious gossip of metropolitan Venice. On its gable was carved the inscription now famous throughout the world but probably as little heeded as are the sententious inscriptions over halls of justice and civic monuments everywhere. Marco Polo, as an old man, saw the Church moved from the spot where it stood when he was a boy. The Rialto had to be enlarged and a loggia built to provide more shelter. So the ancient Church was moved and much of it was destroyed or extensively renovated. But passers-by can still read the original inscription beneath the cross: *Hoc circum templum sit ius mercantibus aequum, pondera nec vergant nec sit conventio prava* [“About this temple let the merchants’ law be just, let not their weights be false, nor their covenant unfaithful”].

In the Campo of the Rialto thronged merchants and visitors from every corner of the world—from the Levant and Greece, from Spain and France, and from cold northern Germany and England. Business was on everyone’s lips. Venice seemed to live only on business and for business, and the boy Marco grew up in its atmosphere. To be a great merchant was every Venetian’s ambition, and Marco dreamed of the day when he, too, like the father and the uncle whom he had never seen, would fare out into the unknown world of the East and become a merchant prince and build a fine palace on one of the canals and, who knows, even be elected Doge. Nothing was impossible for a Venetian in those prosperous, rollicking days of the middle twelve-hundreds.

A busy street has always fascinated small boys—the ideal place to play, the ideal place to see all, the ideal place in which to get into every sort of mischief. Still more attractive to them were the streets and canals of Venice, the crossroads of the world, where the East met the West, where Byzantine silks and satins rubbed shoulders with the furs and coarse clothes of the visitors from the north, and where faces and costumes from the four corners of the Mediterranean mingled and jostled from dawn to dusk. From the ringing of the *marangona* bell, summoning artisans to their labors, until the *rialtina* sounded the curfew three hours after sundown, the narrow streets and campi were



Carpaccio's "Miracle of the Holy Cross," showing the Rialto Bridge as it probably was in Marco Polo's lifetime. Painting in the Royal Academy of Venice. (Courtesy of Fratelli Alinari, Florence)



Part of the façade of San Giacomo di Rialto, the oldest church in Venice, probably the fifth century, since moved and restored. The abbreviated Latin inscription reads: "Sit crux Vera salus huius tua christe loco." ["May Thy true cross, O Christ, be the true safety for this place."] The inscription below reads, "Hoc circum templum sit ius mercantibus aequum, pondera nec vergant, nec sit conventio prava." ["About this temple let the merchants' law be just, let not their weights be false, nor their covenant unfaithful."] (Courtesy of the University of California Library)

thronged. The city was a great center of world trade, attracting every sort of stranger, rascal, and adventurer.

Manners and morals were anything but strict, and boys on the streets were soon old far beyond their age. The women of the city were notorious throughout Italy for their easy virtue. The chronicles and verses of the time, with their descriptions of the daughters of Venice, read like the vitriolic lines of Martial and Juvenal and Petronius. Women were not safe on the streets or even in the churches themselves. A Latin document still in existence records how the Council of Forty tried and condemned Zanino Grioni, of the quarter of St. Eustacio, to imprisonment for three months for having assaulted and abused Moreta, the daughter of Marco Polo, in the Campo San Vitale. A decree of the Great Council of March 1315 declares that "multa inonesta et turpis committuntur in ecclesia et porticu et platea Santi Marci"; and Marco Grimiani, a patrician, was ejected from St. Mark's not long after for attempting to rape a young girl in the very atrium of the Church itself. It is interesting to note that when he was tried and found guilty and fined three hundred lire, one-third of the fine was paid to the girl. The archives of the period are full of trials and convictions of men of the finest families, for abduction, rape, bigamy, and worse, all seemingly carried on quite shamelessly and in the open.

In an age when cursing and blasphemy were common—it is strange how many of men's curses have remained unaltered through the centuries—the Venetians were so notorious for their foul language that Petrarch complains of it, and the archives of the city reveal formal decrees against cursing and blasphemy. One declared, in the vile Latin of the law books, that anyone, either man or woman, who injured another by calling him a "vermum canem" should be penalized in the amount of twenty soldi. Gambling was so rife that laws were continually being passed for its control. It was necessary to enact a statute prohibiting gaming in the portico of St. Mark's itself, in the courtyards, and in the chambers or doorways of the Doge's palace. Professional gamblers were flogged and branded.

Purity and simplicity of life, incorruptibility in politics or business, or an exalted and rigid standard of morals and virtue were hardly to be expected in the Venice of the thirteenth century. It was ever seething and throbbing with business and pleasure, passion and vice. People of every nation and of every type were drawn there. The city was on

one of the main routes to the Holy Land. Pilgrims, men and women of every age and every condition, adventurers, thieves, honest men, priests, prostitutes, confidence men, merchants, all thronged her canals, her streets, and her market places. The poor found lodging in her hospices, the rich in her hotels and taverns. A German bishop of Passau, Volger von Ellenbrechtskirchen, has left us a vivid description of the Venetian inns of the period: The travelers could admire beautiful marble work everywhere, but there were no stoves, no drainage, and absolutely no sanitary conveniences. He tells us that the beds, or rather pallets, were miserable, and the furniture rickety and broken. But, he adds, the Venetian innkeepers have "the delightful custom of adorning the bedrooms with flowers."

In early days Venice was shocked at the way in which the inns offered feminine attractions openly to their guests, and passed laws against the practice—in vain. In 1226 the city fathers resigned themselves (one can hear them sighing virtuously) to the idea that "*le meretrici fossero omnino necessarie in terra ista.*" They thereupon simply forbade them to reside in the homes of private citizens, and segregated them in a restricted area. These women were allowed by the same statute to mingle with the crowds in the Rialto and around the taverns, but "when commenced to sound the first evening bell of San Marco" all had to retire to their quarter in Castelletto. Some of these bright-eyed ladies' names are preserved for us—Maria Greca, Lena de Florentia, Isabeta de Francia, etc., indicating that, ever and everywhere, articles bearing labels of foreign origin have been more attractive than home products.

The segregation laws proved ineffective, and the prostitutes scattered and plied their trade in many other parts of the city. Quaint drawings of these women, modestly dressed but most assiduously engaged in seducing a very timid young man, have survived in the famous manuscript of "The First Decade of Livy," and Carpaccio has pictured two of them, richly dressed and bejeweled in the height of fashion, surrounded by pet dogs and birds, in his "Due Cortigiane" in the Correr Gallery of Venice.*

* This is the picture which Ruskin considered the finest painting in the world. "I know," he says, "no other which writes every nameable quality of painters and in so intense a degree—breadth with tenderness, brilliancy with quietness, decision with minuteness, color with light and shade. . . . I know no other picture in the world which can be compared with it."

Venetian manners and morals were crude, and the strangers who thronged her streets and canals, with their violent emotions and desires, made them worse. In that motley crowd love rubbed shoulders with lust, religious fanaticism with atheism, charity with boundless greed, virtue with vice, courage with cowardice, hypocrisy with sanctity, and blackest iniquity with spotless purity. The gradations and refinements of men's natures were not to be found in Venice, where, in Marco Polo's lifetime, an old world was dying and a new one was passing through the painful travail of birth.

Crime was rife everywhere, and an ever increasing number of statutes were enacted in an effort to control it. These laws throw an interesting and revealing light on Venetian character and life. Crimes against property were punished with far more severity than those against the person. Theft was the most heinous crime of all. For stealing the value of twenty soldi a man was flogged and branded. For a second offense his eyes were torn out. If the amount exceeded twenty soldi, the culprit was hanged. If a thief caught in the act attempted to defend himself with weapons, or wounded anyone, he was condemned to lose his eyes and his right hand. Murderers were decapitated, hanged between the columns of the Piazzetta, or burned; and a poisoner, if his victim did not die, had either one or both hands chopped off or his eyes destroyed with a white-hot brazier. Before his execution a particularly dangerous criminal was conducted on a long boat through the Grand Canal from the Church of San Marco to Santa Croce, stripped to the waist, and tortured with red-hot pincers the while. From Santa Croce, after having had his right hand cut off, he was dragged along the street tied to a horse's tail. Then, after being brought in this fashion to the Piazzetta, he was decapitated between the two columns and his body was quartered and exposed to public view.

Minor offenders, especially priests, were placed in wooden cages hung from a wooden pole halfway up the campanile of St. Mark's, fed on bread and water, and exposed to the insults of the mob. One was kept there over a year. For lesser crimes the culprit carried a board describing his crime hung about his neck.

These crowded streets, this open immorality, this cruelty and inhumanity, this filth and vice, strangely mingled with beauty and pageantry, were the forces which molded the character and shaped the mind of the boy Marco during the long years while his father, Messer

Nicolo, and his uncle, Messer Maffeo, were in Constantinople and Bokhara, traveling across the deserts and steppes of Central Asia, and sojourning with the Great Khan Kublai in his capital at Khanbaligh, many thousands of miles from Venice.

But all was not black and ugly in thirteenth-century Venice. Its people seem to have been then, as now, essentially lighthearted, pleasure-loving, and blithe. Their year was punctuated with many cheerful, colorful saints' days and festivals. Then all the populace would turn out in best doublet and hose, in silk and fur and cloth of gold, to eat and drink and dance and make merry. They would throw off the dull gray cares of everyday life, and revel in living under intense blue skies and beside waters sparkling in the sun. Some of these festivals are still part of Venetian life, but many passed away with the downfall of the Republic.

The one loved best by Marco and his friends was "La Sensa," the great feast of Ascension Day, during which Venice was transformed into a pageant of blazing color, and when all its citizens came forth to witness the annual wedding of Venice and the sea. This day was the greatest, the most solemn, and the most dignified and impressive of all the festivals of the year. It had its origin in the conquest of Dalmatia by the Doge Pietro Orseolo II in the year 1000. On his triumphal return it had been decreed that the Doge, the clergy, and the people should go on each Ascension Day—the day on which he had set sail for Dalmatia—to assist in the benediction of the Adriatic.

In that far-off time the ceremony was simple. The clergy in full vestments were rowed out on a barge draped in crimson and bearing water, salt for purification, and an olive branch. On the route to the Lido they were joined by the state barge of the Doge. The whole procession then continued on to the Lido, chanting litanies and the psalm, *Exaudi nos Domine*. The bishop then offered a solemn prayer to God to calm all troubled hearts and to remove all sin. He closed the prayer with the Latin invocation, "We pray thee, O Lord, to grant unto us this sea, and that thou wilt vouchsafe unto all who sail upon it peace and quiet." After blessing the water, and chanting verse 7 of Psalm 51—"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean"—the prelate sprinkled the Doge and his retinue with a portion of the consecrated water and poured the rest of it into the sea. High mass was then celebrated at the Church of St. Nicholas, and the Doge returned home.

With the passing of time the festival became much more of a pageant and a show, and a new ceremony, the *sposalizio*, or marriage, marked the day. On the occasion of his state visit to Venice in 1177 Pope Alexander III presented a consecrated ring to Doge Ziani with these words: "Receive this as a pledge of the sovereignty which you and your successors shall have in perpetuity over the sea." Thenceforth the feast of "La Sensa" became the most magnificent of all Venetian pageants.

The Doge appeared with his retinue in his most gorgeous robes of state and was rowed in his barge by young nobles. Followed by thousands of boats and gondolas he was escorted to the Lido. As he approached he was met by the Bishop of Castello, who offered him peeled chestnuts, red wine, and a bunch of roses in a silver vase. After the usual prayers the bishop blessed a gold ring. The Doge, rising from his seat, threw the ring into the open Adriatic, with the solemn words: *Desponsamus te, mare, in signum veri perpetuique domini Serenissimae Republicae Venetae* ["We wed thee, O sea, in token of the true and perpetual dominion of the Most Serene Venetian Republic"]. After the customary mass the Doge held a great reception and state dinner. St. Mark's square was converted into a great fair filled with booths for the occasion, and reveling and merrymaking, buying and selling, eating and drinking continued without hindrance for eight days. It became the great annual fair of the city, where all things were bought and sold. To it flocked people from the neighboring cities and towns. For there were displayed the wares of the East and the West as nowhere else in all Europe. And, to add a further attraction for visitors, indulgences were granted to all those who came to the churches during this period of rejoicing.

The pageant which impressed young Polo most was the installation of the Doge Lorenzo Tiepolo in 1268. Martino da Canale was there and saw it all, and wrote it down for us in his "*Cronique des Veneziens*." The future author of the most famous of all travel tales and Venice's greatest medieval chronicler may well have rubbed shoulders in the crowd and perhaps have exchanged remarks on that occasion.

Canale begins the story of the great day by telling us that the Doge's first act was to invite to him all those with whom he was not on good terms; these he embraced and they became his friends. Then the pageant began. The first display was on the water. Messer Piero

Michele, the captain of the fleet of galleys, led his vessels in review before the ducal palace,

and sang the praises of Monsignore the Doge in this manner: "Christ conquers, Christ reigns, Christ rules; to our Signore Lorenzo Tiepolo, to God be offered thanks, to you, O illustrious Doge of Venice, Dalmatia and Croatia . . . salvation, honor, life and victory, and may St. Mark aid you!"

Then all the sailors raised their voices in cheers and cries of praise, and the galleys were steered through the canals of the city.

Next came the boats bearing citizens of the other islands of the lagoons, the men of Murano being especially noticeable with live roosters in their barges and great banners flying from their masts.

The guilds of the crafts, marching two by two, then paraded in their gorgeous costumes, each guild in a different garb. They marched past their Doge and Dogressa on foot, each guild with its master craftsmen in the van. The smiths led the procession, with banners and trumpets and other musical instruments, and wearing garlands on their heads. As they passed in review before the palace they saluted the Doge and wished him long life and victory and good fortune. Next came the furriers clad in ermine and other rich furs; they marched past two by two, shouting and cheering. They were followed by the weavers with their music and songs, also ten master sailors dressed in white clothes decorated with vermilion stars and with musicians leading. After them came long lines of clothworkers with trumpets and cups of silver and jars of wine, wearing olive wreaths on their heads and carrying olive branches in their hands. The several crafts followed in turn—workers in cotton and woolen cloth, and quilt makers, in white cloaks decorated with fleurs-de-lis and with garlands of gilt beads on their heads, and preceded by banners and music. And also there marched before them, two by two, little girls and boys singing songs. And everywhere were heard cheers and cries: "Viva il nostro Signore Lorenzo Tiepolo, nostro Doge."

Now I shall tell you of the master-workers in cloth of gold. Know then that they had robed their bodies richly in cloth of gold and they had arrayed their apprentices, some in cloth of gold and some in purple and taffeta, their heads wreathed with garlands of pearls with borders of gold.

The procession seemed endless. Following the clothworkers came the other guilds—the shoemakers and the mercers and the sellers of provisions and cheese, all in scarlet and violet; and the sellers of birds

and fish, their robes trimmed with fur; and the master bankers, wearing garlands of pearls, and in their midst two men on horseback dressed like knights-errant and leading four women dressed in strange garments, two on foot and two on horseback. Then, following the barbers, came the master glassworkers, dressed in scarlet trimmed with fur and wearing gold-bordered pearl garlands on their heads, with music marching before them, and bearing in their hands flasks and goblets and other fine specimens of their craft. Next came the comb and lantern makers, the latter carrying lanterns full of birds of many kinds. "To rejoice Monsignore the Doge they opened the doors, through which the birds all flew out, and departed flying hither and thither, each according to its desire." Then came the goldsmiths richly dressed, "wearing garlands and necklaces of gold and silver, pearls, and rich and precious stones, sapphires, emeralds, diamonds, topazes, jacinths, amethysts, rubies, jasper and carbuncles of great value."

So they marched by the Doge and Dogressa, each band playing music and cheering their new Doge. Canale concludes: "I shall remain silent about the other crafts Know ye that Monsignore the Doge was installed on a Monday, and until Sunday the people of Venice did nothing but go to see their Signore and their Lady in the manner which I have related."

It was a spectacle which Marco Polo doubtless remembered often, lying out under the stars in the deserts of Central Asia, surrounded by ill-smelling sheepskin-clad Mongols, telling interminable tales of foray and of love by the flickering firelight and piping on their high-pitched Tartar flutes.

The streets taught Marco and his friends many other lessons. The rites of the Catholic Church were usually employed in Venetian weddings; but women schemed to marry to escape payment of debts, often seemingly without benefit of clergy, and sometimes not having met their future husbands before their union. Such marriages could be annulled, and many men had several wives in this way. Some of these affairs ended in the law courts, and reports of many such trials have been preserved in their strange mixture of local dialect and bad Latin. A few sentences from two of the trials are worth repeating. Though the incidents took place in 1443, they illustrate the frank ideas and practices of the thirteenth century.

A certain Pietro of Trent, a broom peddler, passing one evening

through the parish of S.S. Gervasio e Protasio, stopped in front of the house of Cataruzza, widow of Giovanni Banco. Seeing the lady at her window, he called to her:

“Madonna, find me a pretty girl.”

“You beast, you drunkard. What are you trying to do, make a procuress of me?” she screamed at him.

“I’m not saying that at all. I mean that I want you to find me a girl for a wife.”

“Good, if that’s it,” replied Cataruzza, thinking immediately of a girl of her acquaintance. “By the faith of God I’ll get you one. Come back here tomorrow.”

The next day Pietro came back, and there was a pretty girl named Maria, also a certain Domenico Moxe, who asked of Pietro and Maria if they wished to be united “as commanded God and Holy Church.” They answered in the affirmative, took each other by the hand, “fecero colassion de brigada e poi consumaverunt matrimonium,” and that was all there was to it!

Another musty old volume recites the tale of one Beatrice Francigena. On her way home from a visit to Treviso she stopped at the house of a relative named Zanina, where by chance there was a man named Falcon, one of Beatrice’s old acquaintances. The two seem to have come to an understanding very speedily, as Zanina most naïvely states in her testimony:

While they were standing conversing, the said Falcon spoke to the said Beatrice thus:

“Beatrice, will you do me the great honor? You know that I offer you my hand, and are you going to give your hand to another?”

And she replied:

“I thought you were making sport of me, and that you were jesting.”

And the said Falcon answered:

“What I have promised you I wish to promise you again.”

And both of the aforesaid persons went into the room of the house of the said witness and spoke there, saying:

“Beatrice, you know that you are my wife.”

And she replied:

“But yes, by God.”

And then he touched Beatrice’s hand saying:

“I take no other wife but you.”

And she replied:

“And as for me, I take no other husband but you.”

Marriage was cheap, lightly taken on and as lightly laid aside by the good citizens of Venice. They did not seem to be guided by the dictates of European chivalry and idealized love. They appear rather to have had much of the older Asiatic attitude toward women, and selected their wives primarily as breeders of children and housekeepers. Fra Paolino, in an interesting document written when Marco Polo was an old man, gives his fellow Venetians advice on how to select a wife: She should not be under eighteen, nor her husband under twenty-one. "The husband should not be guided by the advice of his wife, who has not sound judgment, because she has neither a sound or strong constitution, but one poor and weak, and the mind naturally inclines according to the disposition of the body." Moreover, the widespread ownership of female slaves with their lack of moral sense, and the open relations with their masters, tended to drag or force the free women down to their level to hold or to recover the affections of their husbands. The chronicles of the time are full of lurid tales of domestic revenge, stabbings and poisonings, caused by the intrigues of wives, slaves, concubines, and lovers. Madness from poisoning was so common that it had a name of its own—"erberia." And much of all this was common street talk in Marco's time.

The boys in their play and their wanderings could hardly escape funerals, which in many ways resembled the rites of Egypt and the ancient East. The dying person was laid on the floor, which was covered with ashes. A bell was rung to summon the mourners, and priests chanted the *Miserere* and psalms in the street before the door. A surviving spouse was expected to exhibit the most extravagant display of grief in public, rolling on the ground, screaming, tearing out hair by the handful, and howling and moaning unceasingly, in true Oriental fashion.

When friends tried to carry out the body, wrapped in a sheet or in matting, the husband or chief mourner threw himself on the threshold as if to prevent the removal of the body, and had to be dragged away. The family and friends followed the corpse to the parish church, screaming and howling through the streets, and keeping up their wailing and noise during the whole funeral service. The same senseless performance was enacted at the grave. This barbarous custom continued for centuries. The Church struggled against it in vain, and threats of excommunication had finally to be invoked before it was stopped.

Poor people often left their dead exposed for several days in the street so as to touch the hearts of passers-by and elicit alms from them.

The boys had their best times at the quays and along the water front. The homes of most of them were dark, with a few narrow windows fitted with iron gratings. On many of the smaller canals scarcely any light entered the houses, so that they were chilly and gloomy and damp. Hardly any had sanitary drainage, but relied on the rise and fall of the tide for flushing. True, there were fireplaces and sometimes ovens; but the furniture was solid and hard and there were few comforts, so that the youngsters were glad to escape promptly each morning into the warm sunshine.

Dressing did not consume much time. Like nearly everyone in Europe of that period, the Venetians, both men and women, slept naked. Bathing was a practice not followed by many. If indulged in, men and women bathed together, or scrubbed each other in turn with none of our present-day sense of modesty. Underwear was seldom worn, and if worn was practically never changed. It was considered such a luxury that we find a widow, one Sofia Banbarigo, leaving in her will "one of her new chemises to dona Reni and one to dona Donado." Elsewhere we find included in the pay of a maidservant "one chemise a year." Cleanliness was entirely subordinated to outward appearance; and the Venetians, both men and women, went about, like their fellow-Europeans, in gorgeous silks and furs and jewels, with unwashed bodies and absolutely filthy undergarments or none at all.

So the boys, with bobbed hair, wearing short tunics, and shoes or sandals of leather or wood, ate their meal of vegetables, fruit, and fish or sometimes meat—the latter highly spiced, especially in summer, when food spoiled easily and its taste had to be disguised—and fared forth.

Such streets as the city boasted were unpaved and muddy. The women wore high pattens or clogs to keep their skirts out of the mud. Sometimes the clogs were more than three feet high, almost like stilts, and a fall while walking was highly dangerous, particularly in the case of a pregnant woman. In fact the government some years later forbade the use of these extremely high clogs, declaring that such accidents caused expectant mothers to give birth to premature or misshapen children. No efforts were made to keep the streets clean, and housewives threw refuse out before their doors. The scavengers were the

pigs of the monastery of St. Anthony of Padua, which wandered at will throughout the city.

On their way to the water front Marco Polo and his friends often stopped to watch the glassworkers at their furnaces. They never ceased to marvel at the dexterity with which the master-worker dipped his blowpipe into the pot of glowing liquid, twisting and turning it as he blew, and, swinging the incandescent bubble in the air, produced any shape he desired as though by magic. They watched the workers change the shape of the lump or bubble by dexterous movements of their wrists, building complicated pieces by adding lumps or strips from the furnace, then clipping off here and twisting there with their steel shears and pincers, until they had evolved pieces of every conceivable shape and color. The work was all done by the corporation or guild of glassworkers, who guarded jealously the secrets of manufacture. The boys loitered, too, before the open workshops of the weavers of silk and cloth of gold and silver and crimson damask, and of the makers of the embroidered work for which Venice was famous throughout Europe. The goldsmiths and leatherworkers and jewelers all plied their trade in the open, and the boys watched with fascinated eyes the artisans working on ornaments, rings, chains, filigree work, plate and enamel panels, which were shipped to every corner of Europe. They loved, too, to visit the bronze founders and workers in metal, as well as the armorers and makers of weapons and chain-mail for the pilgrims and soldiers and adventurers who were continually passing through the city on their way to the East. The best examples of the work of these craftsmen were saved for exhibition at festivals and fairs, where they brought high prices, and advertised to the whole world the magnificence and the eminence of the Queen of the Adriatic in commerce, in riches, and in the arts and crafts of both East and West.

Finally, after many twistings and turnings and crossings of bridges and following narrow footpaths, the boys reached the Arsenal, in the eastern part of the city. It was rapidly becoming the greatest industrial plant in the Western world. The centers of Venice's power and wealth were the Rialto and St. Mark's and the palace of the Doge, but the backbone of that power and wealth was the Arsenal. Built on two islands, it had but one access to the lagoon, and at the time when Marco and his young friends played about it massive walls were being built to protect it.

The Arsenal manufactured every part needed in shipbuilding, as well as complete war and merchant vessels. Anchors, rivets, cordage, canvas, cannon, and castings all were produced within its walls, under strict supervision of the state. The workmen, a carefully selected group, had to undergo a certain amount of military training. From among them were selected as well the police and the firemen of the city, and to them went the honor of carrying the Doge around the Piazza of St. Mark's after his election, and of serving as guards at the ducal palace during the sessions of the Grand Council. The finest workman was given the title of "High Admiral," and was the director of all the laborers in the Arsenal. He had many privileges, wore special state robes, and at a later day was the pilot of the Doge's barge during the Ascension Day ceremonies

The yards were heaped with all kinds of lumber—fir for masts, spans, and planks; larch for beams; walnut for rudders; elm for capstans—all brought from the forests of the mainland near by. Oak for keels and ribs and planking was brought in from Istria and the Romagna, and was stored under water for ten years after it had been cut and shaped, in order to harden it and render it impervious to changes in temperature. Smithies and workshops, ropewalks and foundries were in continual operation, with ships in every stage of construction—the whole a playground paradise for small boys. It was an attraction to their elders, too. To it came the poet Dante, and the place impressed him so profoundly that he introduced it into the *Divina Commedia*, comparing the lake of boiling pitch reserved for extortioners to the boiling of pitch in the Venetian Arsenal.*

* *Inferno*, XXI, 7-15:

Quale nell'arsena de'Viniziani
 Bolle l'inverno la tenace pece
 A rimpalmar li legni lor non sani
 Chè navicar non ponno, e in quella vece
 Chi fa il suo legno nuovo, e chi ristoppa
 Le coste a quel che pui viàgge fece,
 Chi ribatte di proda, e chi da poppa,
 Altri fa remi, ed altri volge sarte,
 Chi terzuolo id artimon rintoppa,
 Tal, non per fuoco, ma per divina arte
 Bollia laggioso una pergola spessa,
 Che inviscava la ripa da ogni parte.

We are very proud of our mass production and look upon the assembly lines of our great factories as one of the wonders of modern industry. Yet all these methods were known to the *arsenalotti* of Venice. Pero Tafur, who visited the city in 1436, left the following vivid picture of the speed with which war galleys were equipped once the hull had been built:

And as one enters the gate there is a great street on either hand with the sea in the middle,* and on one side are windows opening out of the houses of the Arsenal, and the same on the other side. And out came a galley towed by a boat, and from the windows they handed out to them, from one the cordage, from another the bread, from another the arms, and from another the balistas and mortars, and so from all sides everything that was required. And when the galley had reached the end of the street all the men required were on board, together with the complement of oars, and she was equipped from end to end. In this manner there came out ten galleys fully armed, between the hours of three and nine. I know not how to describe what I saw there, whether in the manner of its construction or in the management of the workpeople, and I do not think there is anything finer in the world.

It may be noted in passing that the speed with which the Venetians could build ships was phenomenal. In 1570, during the Turkish War, 100 galleys were built and outfitted in as many days. We are told that Henry III, King of France, during a visit to Venice in the summer of 1574, inspected the Arsenal. A galley was shown him of which the keel and ribs alone were in position. He then sat down to a two-hour banquet. During that time the galley was fully constructed, completely equipped, armed, and launched in his presence.

From the Arsenal young Marco would often make his way along the water front to the quays and piers where the activities of Venice, the greatest commercial port of the Middle Ages, were centered.

The wharves were heaped high with Venetian products being loaded for export—salt, glass, salted fish, wooden utensils, and wrought iron. Together with them were goods for reshipment to the East, wares from other Italian cities, Germany, Hungary, and Dalmatia, and even from France, Spain, and faraway England. Great galleys, both long and round, lay at the docks disgorging their cargoes newly arrived from the East: neatly stacked heaps of reddish sandalwood from Timor, filling the air with its heavy odor; bales of silks and cotton goods, cloth of every texture and color, from Damascus and

* Probably the Rio dell'Arsenale, which was the entrance to the Old Arsenal.

Bagdad and Alexandria. Alongside lay bags of gums and medicines—gum arabic, cinnamon, cassia, rhubarb, and myrrh. Standing about were busy ships' clerks and warehouse assistants, checking off goods, weighing and measuring, arguing and comparing; while merchants stood by and watched carefully the unloading of the more precious cargo—precious stones, pearls, coral, gold and silver bars, and coin. Heaped up in confusion were sacks and bales of sweet-smelling cloves and nutmegs, camphor in bamboo tubes, pepper and ginger, ivory and satinwood. Lying all about were columns and architraves, pedestals and panels of stone and of polished marble—loot from some long-fallen temple on Syrian or Greek or Egyptian shore, brought to enrich and embellish St. Mark's or the other churches in course of erection everywhere in the city or to beautify the palace of some noble or merchant prince.

These stones made convenient seats for the boys, who sat and watched the busy scene about them much as young Dante sat a few years later on a rough-hewn block of stone hard by the old Baptistery and watched the Duomo, the cathedral of his beloved Florence, slowly grow under the magic hand of the master builder. Though Dante came to Venice shortly before his death in 1321, he and Marco Polo apparently never met. One of them was destined to recount the undying tale of the most wondrous journey of all time by land and sea to the Golden East and back to Europe; the other was to become immortal as the narrator of the greatest journey of the soul of man upward through the realms of the spirit.

The picture was kaleidoscopic. There were ever new sights and sounds. Here were long lines of women, interspersed with a few men, all of a strange aspect and in outlandish garb, looking fiercely and sullenly about them. They were slaves, just landed under guard from the Levant, far from the lands where they were born, and en route to the market and the auction block. There were sailors wandering aimlessly about, speaking in every known language, pushing, jostling, laughing, joking, with an eye ever keen for a pretty form or face after their many long weeks at sea.

Mingling in the crowd were often a handful of Jews, who had come in their boats from Spinalunga, the island across the channel from the Piazzetta. The Jews of Venice were gradually becoming very important in the Levantine trade, and though they were forced to live

apart from their Christian neighbors, their value to the maritime interests of the Republic was fully realized, and they were not molested. To the boys, intent on all that went on, these Jews were just another element in the motley throng that peopled the water front from dawn to dusk and even far into the night.

Venetian boats sailed every sea and river in Europe. The flag of the Lion of St. Mark was a familiar sight in every harbor worthy of the name. Treaties and pacts bound the city in amicable relations with Moslem and Christian alike. Venice dealt with the Sultan of Egypt and the Khan of Tartary, with her sister cities of Italy and the Emperor of Germany.

Young Marco doubtless loved to watch the galleys enter and leave the harbor, some under sail, some rowed by slaves or freemen. He was fascinated by the many shapes and sizes of the vessels lying alongside or at anchor. There were small boats for trade in the estuaries, larger ones which ascended the rivers, great galleys to sail the high seas, and ships of war, long and powerful, with their *castelli* amidships guarded by slingers and bowmen, their decks laden with catapults, balistae, and heaps of stone missiles, their bulwarks covered with *impavesata* or bucklers of leather to keep off the Greek fire thrown by attackers, and their prows armed with great beaks for ramming the enemy. All about the water front and canals moved guard boats with men in armor, on the watch for smugglers. Interspersed with the larger boats, moving swiftly hither and thither among the islands and beyond the lagoon, were fishing boats, flat-bottomed, swift and easily steered, their sails of red and orange glowing in the sunlight and casting strange bird-like shadows on the water. Sometimes they passed, heaped high with sardines and other fish; at others they narrowly missed boats coming to market, heavily laden with pumpkins, grapes, figs, and pomegranates. The boys knew the cut of every sail, the lines of every vessel of the lagoons, and could tell from which island each came.

But Marco took most delight in listening to the sailors as they sat about at their noonday meal or when they were loafing off duty. He heard endless tales of war and piracy, of smuggling and shipwreck, of weird happenings and amorous adventures in the far lands of the earth. He absorbed and stored up in his active young brain divers odd bits of knowledge, sea stories and legend, words and phrases of strange tongues, practical points of nautical lore, the places whence came cer-

tain goods, and where others fetched the best prices. Little did he dream that some day he, the Venetian boy who sat hugging his knees in round-eyed excitement at the tales of these common seafaring men, would travel thousands of miles beyond the farthest traveled man of them all and that the story of what he saw there would surpass anything that the tired old ears of the world had ever heard before. And still less did he dream that his tale, translated into all tongues, would hold boys and men entranced and breathless six hundred long years after he had gone to his rest in the city of his fathers.

Such was the Venice into which Marco Polo was born in the year 1254; such were its men and women, its streets and its houses, its palaces and churches, its customs and manners and morals, all of which shaped his plastic young mind through its formative years.

And so Messer Nicolo Polo, landing with Messer Maffeo, his brother, after their long absence from home in the far lands of the earth, found his "son of fifteen years who had for name Marco," and saw that the boy was comely and good.

Chapter Three

The Journey

THE ARRIVAL of Nicolo and Maffeo in Venice marked a turning point in Marco's life. He now listened eagerly to his elders' tales of the strange lands through which they had traveled and the many peoples with whom they had dwelt, their appearance, their dress, their manners and customs, and how their lives and habits differed from those of the Venetians. The boy was alert, intelligent, and insatiably curious. And his father took a great delight in answering his questions, so that Marco began to feel at last as though he knew the countries of Asia and their peoples personally. He even began to pick up some of the words and phrases in the Tartar and Turkish and other strange languages in which his father and uncle often conversed and which they even frequently interspersed in their Venetian speech. He learned of the commodities which the various tribes and peoples bought and sold, their various currencies, where each group lived along the great caravan routes, what they ate and drank, how they were born and married and buried, their religious beliefs and superstitions. He was unconsciously storing up practical knowledge which was to prove invaluable in the days to come.

Nicolo and his brother found it very difficult to settle down to the comparatively humdrum existence of the city on the sea. The effect of fifteen years of travel and life in faraway countries and amid strange peoples had entered their blood, and they chafed at the restraint and confinement in one place for long. Moreover, they felt that their stay was but temporary, and that the time of their return to the East depended only upon the election of a new Pope, which seemed endlessly delayed.

Nicolo took unto himself a new wife and Marco found himself with what he had never known before—parents, and a home in which he was more than a mere cousin or nephew.

The patience of Messer Nicolo and Messer Maffeo grew ever shorter as month followed month. Two long years passed, with never a sign of agreement on the man who should succeed to the throne of St. Peter. The Polo brothers decided to wait no longer, for they feared that the Great Khan would be disturbed at their failure to appear and would believe that they did not intend to return. The greatest opportunity of their life would be lost if they delayed too long. Fortune beckoned insistently, and they obeyed her urging.

One day Nicolo called Marco to him, and announced that they had decided to take him along with them. Marco was now a man in his father's eyes. In 1271 a Venetian youth of seventeen was fully grown and ready to take his place in the world. He could hardly be left at home as an apprentice or a clerk in some counting house when a fortune awaited him in far Cathay. The boy could hardly believe his ears. He, Marco Polo, was going to travel! No, not on a petty unimportant voyage to the Dalmatian coast, or to Alexandria or Constantinople or Syria or the Black Sea. These would have been more than enough to make him the envy of every boy and young man in Venice. He was going to the other end of the earth, to visit and live in the cities of his recent dreams, those cities hardly ever seen by European eyes. He was to cross the whole world and see the shores of the boundless ocean on the other side. He was setting out for the lands of gold and silk and ivory and spices and precious stones. He was to dwell in the capital of the Great Khan, who was a personal friend of his father and his uncle.

Marco was one of the fortunate mortals of this earth, or perhaps one of the most unfortunate: Fortunate because Fate granted him his dearest wishes—travel and wealth and distinction; unfortunate because all these came to him in youth and early manhood. The evening of his years, instead of being a glorious sunset after a brilliant day, seems to have been a fading into a dull and gloomy twilight, deepening into night, far from the lands where he had spent his youthful years and where he had found joy and happiness and excitement and prominence, and perhaps love. Destiny decreed that people were not to believe his later tales of wonder, that his townfolk were to make a mock and

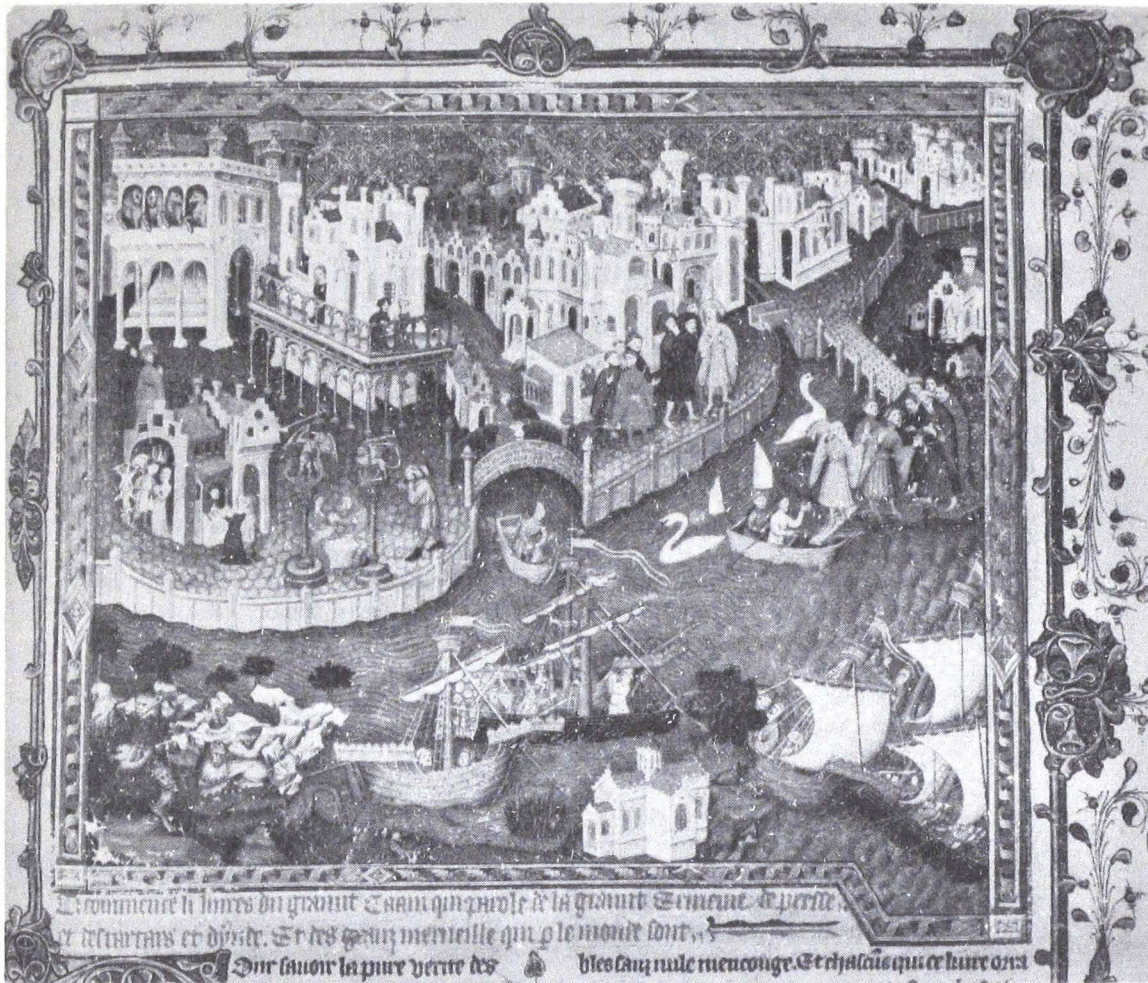
a byword of him, and that his book, born of the heat and fire of the adventures of his best years, was to be accepted as nothing more than a romance and a pleasant tale to read or hear by the fireside of a cold winter's night, along with tales of King Arthur and Huon of Bordeaux and Tristan and Iseult. But all this was in the womb of time, and the young Marco knew only the joy of living, the thrilling anticipatory delights of travel and new scenes and adventures.

Again the Polos prepared to travel toward the rising sun, and again Nicolo left his wife with child. Once more they made the rounds of visits to their friends and, this time with Marco, heaped their luggage into their gondolas and after a last farewell to their families wound their way through echoing canals, between the shadowy high-walled palaces and tenements, past markets and dark shops, and under the arched bridges.

At last they reached the familiar docks. There were the Piazza and the Piazzetta, with young Marco's friends the stone masons still patiently laying the pavement. There were the great bronze horses gleaming in the sunlight, and the statue of St. Theodore smiling down at him from the top of his lofty pillar as he passed. All the world seemed to be singing in Venice that bright summer day of 1271, aglow with warm marbles, blue sky, and sparkling water. Marco's heart sang with it as he drew alongside the ship, clambered up on her deck, and looked back upon the city he was leaving and south, beyond the Lido and the lagoons, to the new world to which he was faring forth, news of which he was destined to bring back to his fellow countrymen and the whole world after many long weary years.

Never was the city which he was leaving to be so fair, so rich, so powerful again as when Marco left it on that day in all the impatience and insouciance of youth. Da Canale, who has given us the description of the installation of the Doge Lorenzo Tiepolo, has left us his vivid impression of the city at the beginning of his chronicle:

Venice, today the most beautiful and the pleasantest city in all the world, full of beauty and of all good things. Merchandise flows through this noble city even as the water flows from the fountains. Venice is enthroned upon the sea, and the salt water flows through it and about it and in all places, save in the houses and on the streets, and when the citizens go forth, they can return to their homes either by sea or by the streets. From every place come merchandise and merchants, who buy the merchandise as they will and cause it to be taken to their own countries. Within this city is found food in great abun-



Et comment li livres on gironit l'esau qui prole de la grant Sermeue de perie
Et de l'artans ce dist. Et des granz merveille qui ple mouit sont,
Sur l'auoir la pure veue des bles lauz nule meucouge. Et ch'alaiz quice lunt onz

(Courtesy of the Bodleian Library)

dance, bread and wine, chickens and river fowls, meat, both fresh and salt, the great fish both of the sea and of the rivers, and merchants of every country who sell and buy. You may find in plenty within this beautiful city men of good breeding, old and middle-aged and young, much to be praised for their noble character, and merchants who sell and buy, and money changers and citizens of every craft, and seafaring men of every sort, and vessels to carry [goods] to every port, and galleys to destroy their enemies. Moreover, in this beautiful city are fair ladies and damsels and young maidens in great number, and apparelled very richly.

As the vessel slowly moved out from the wharves toward San Giorgio Maggiore and the Lido, the boy could see a familiar high building on the Riva degli Schiavoni, near the ducal palace. Torn down long ago to make room for improvements, it was then known from its two high towers as the Palazzo delle due Torri. It was a prominent landmark in its day, and is pictured in a vividly colored miniature in an early fifteenth-century manuscript of "the book of Marco Polo" now in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. The miniature represents the departure of the three Polos from Venice.

In this palace, in the year 1362, some forty years after the death of Marco Polo, dwelt the poet Petrarch. From it he sent letters to a friend, the secretary of the Pope, and in them Petrarch describes the busy water front as he saw it and as it must have been a few short years before on that memorable day when the Polos set sail from Venice:

See the innumerable vessels which set out from the Italian shore . . . one turning its prow to the east, the other to the west; some carrying our wine to foam in British cups, our fruits to flatter the palates of the Scythians, and, still more hard to believe, the wood of our forests to the Aegean and the Achaian isles; some to Syria, to Armenia, to the Arabs and Persians, carrying oil and linen and saffron, and bringing back all their divers goods to us. . . . Resting on their anchors close to the marble banks which serve as a mole to the vast palace which this free and liberal city has conceded to me for my dwelling, several vessels have passed the winter, exceeding with the height of their masts and spars the two towers which flank my house. The larger of the two was at this moment . . . leaving the quay and setting out upon its voyage. If you had seen it, you would have said it was no ship, but a mountain swimming upon the sea, although under the weight of its immense wings a great part of it was hidden in the waves.

The skyline of church and palace and tower sank swiftly below the horizon, and even the slender campanile of St. Mark had faded and vanished in the pale yellow gold of the twilight when the young man

finally left the rail to unpack his baggage and settle down for the long voyage.

Even though the Mediterranean had been traversed by countless vessels since man first dwelt on its shores, men still feared it and its storms. Not only were they in terror of these natural dangers, but they ventured forth fearsomely because of their dread of unknown monsters. Ludolph Von Suchem, a German churchman, has told of the perils of Mediterranean sea-travel in his "Description of the Holy Land" written about A.D. 1350:

I have often been in sundry storms at sea beyond all description . . . Indeed I know it to be true that there is no stone or sand at the bottom of the sea that is not moved, if it can be moved, when the sea rages and raves thus, and this is often proved among islands, where the sea is narrow, where an exceeding great number of stones are cast from one shore to another in storms.

After describing strange winds and shoals and rocks and coral, we are told of the sea-swine

which is greatly to be feared by small ships, for this same fish seldom or never does any mischief to great ships unless pressed by hunger. Indeed, if the sailors give it bread, it departs, and is satisfied; but if it will not depart, then it may be terrified and put to flight by the sight of a man's angry and terrible face Howbeit, the man must be exceedingly careful when he is looking at the fish not to be afraid of it, but to stare at it with a bold and terrible countenance, for if the fish sees that the man is afraid it will not depart, but bites and tears the ship as much as it can.

Another fish men feared was the *melar*, which lurks near the coast of Barbary. Ludolph was told that one of these fish bit a certain ship, thinking it was good to eat:

And straightway the mariners, the servants of the ship, went down into the hold, wishing to see where the ship was broken. They found that a fish's tooth, as thick as a beam, and three cubits long, had pierced the ship As I was wondering at the length and breadth of such a fish, the same sailor told me not to wonder, because there was in the sea a fish a mile long.

And Ludolph saw whales spouting, and speculated about flying fish, and wondered how far they could maintain their flight:

I have diligently inquired of knowing seamen whence these fish come, and they have answered me that in England and Ireland there grow on the seashore exceedingly beauteous trees, which bear fruit like apples. In these apples there is bred a worm, and when the apples are ripe they fall to the ground, are broken in the fall, and the worms fly out, having wings like bees. Those of them who

first touch the land become creatures of the air, and fly about with the other fowls of the heavens; but such worms as first touch the water become creatures of the water, and swim like fish, but yet sometimes wander into the other element and exercise themselves by flight.

Ludolph was a bit cautious, for he added: "Whether they do so grow upon trees I do not know beyond having the story, but they are eaten like fish, and are seen to fly by men voyaging at sea." The "knowing seamen" certainly had much amusement at the expense of the simple, credulous pilgrim from far-off Germany.

These stories indicate how the sea was still feared by man. Marco must have heard many such tales, and even taller ones from his friends among the sailors on the water front of Venice and on the very boat which took him to Syria. How he must have drawn his blanket just a little closer over his head at night, when the wind rose and the tempest roared and the lightning flashed and the little vessel rocked and tossed as it was buffeted by the great seas and all the monsters of the deep reached up with greedy clawing hands from the depths or screeched and howled in the rigging, enraged at being cheated of their prey!

At last the long voyage came to an end. The coast of Syria was sighted, and a few hours later Nicolo and his boy and Maffeo arrived in the great city of Acre.

The same Ludolph, though he arrived in the city after it had been taken and sacked by the Moslems, describes it as it must have appeared to the eyes of the Venetian travelers in 1271:

This glorious city of Acre stands, as I have said, on the seashore, built of square hewn stones . . . with lofty and exceedingly strong towers . . . Each gate of the city stood between two towers.

There were "notable walls" all about the city.

The streets within the city were exceeding neat, all the walls of the houses being of the same height and all alike built of hewn stone, wondrously adorned with glass windows and paintings . . . The streets of the city were covered with silken cloths, or other fair awnings, to keep out the sun's rays.

The various kings, princes, and nobles of the Crusaders' kingdom were there, and they

walked about the streets in royal state, with golden coronets on their heads, each of them like a king, with his knights, his followers, his mercenaries and his retainers, his clothing and his warhorse wondrously bedecked with gold and silver, all vying one with another in beauty and novelty of device, and each man apparelling himself with the utmost care.

The pilgrim describes in great detail the castles and palaces and the dwellings of the Knights Templars and other orders of chivalry. Fortunately for our tale, Ludolph mentions the foreign merchants' quarter in his description of the city of Acre:

There also dwelt in Acre the richest merchants under heaven, who were gathered together therein out of all nations; there were Pisans, Genoese, and Lombards . . . There dwelt therein also exceeding rich merchants of other nations, for from sunrise to sunset all parts of the world brought merchandise thither, and everything that can be found in the world that is wondrous or strange used to be brought thither because of the nobles and princes who dwelt there.

After taking lodgings in the Venetian quarter, the Polos immediately sought out their friend Teobaldo of Piacenza, and consulted with him as to their future movements. They desired to fulfill as many of the requests of Kublai Khan as possible, so as not to return to him empty-handed. They therefore asked Teobaldo's permission to proceed to Jerusalem to obtain some holy oil from the lamp ever burning above the sepulchre of Jesus. Having received his consent to the journey, the Polos again boarded ship and sailed south to Joppa and thence made the journey of thirteen leagues overland to the Holy City.

Jerusalem and the surrounding country were as a magnet to the medieval world. Sacred to three religions, the city of David had been the center of strife and pilgrimage for centuries. Crusader and Moslem were continually at war over it, and the poor townfolk were seldom at peace. It was the goal of countless pilgrimages from all over Europe, and many of these pious travelers of the Middle Ages have left remarkable tales of what they saw and believed about the "sights" of the city. In their naïveté they accepted every tale or legend told them with unquestioning credulity. There was something to be shown to convince the visitor of the absolute truth of nearly every verse in both the Old and the New Testament, though most of the pilgrims took great interest in the scenes of the life and passion of their Lord. Seemingly nothing had been lost or destroyed since the beginning of the world. Evidences of the veracity of every phrase of the Gospels were to be seen on all sides, and the city swarmed with guides eager to conduct the visitors from place to place.

Burchard of Mount Sion, a German Dominican monk, came to Palestine about 1282. At the foot of the Mount of Olives he visited

the Garden of Gethsemane and there saw the imprint of Jesus' head and hair and knees on a rock so hard that a chisel could not remove even a little dust. Burchard has described also the place where Marco and his father and uncle obtained the holy oil:

The cave wherein is the Lord's sepulchre is eight feet long and likewise eight feet wide. It is entirely cased with marble on the outside, but within it is bare rock, even as it was at the time of His burial. The doorway into this cave is entered from the east, and is very low and small.

On the right hand as one enters is the tomb of the holy sepulchre, against the north wall. It is of gray-colored marble, and is three palms above the surface of the pavement, and eight feet long, even as is the crypt or cave itself within, and is closed on every side. No light from without can be had inside, because there is no window to bring light into it; but nine lamps hang above the Lord's sepulchre, which give light within.

Burchard describes the stone at the entrance to the cave as part of the very one which was rolled away from the entrance after the death of Jesus. He also saw the hole where the cross was erected, still red with blood, and part of the stone pillar where Jesus was scourged, and the spot where St. Helena found the true cross.*

Marino Sanudo, a noble Venetian who visited Palestine in 1321, wrote several chapters describing the country in a book with the quaint title, *Secrets for True Crusaders to Help Them to Recover the Holy Land*. He was shown, among other things, the prison where Jesus was confined, the chamber of the Last Supper, and the basin in which the disciples' feet were washed—and "hard by are the tombs of Solomon, David and the other Kings of Judah." At the south of Mount Zion he saw "the field that was bought for the thirty pieces of silver for which Christ was sold by Judas." Sanudo was shown also Pilate's house and that "of the traitor Judas, where he dwelt with his wife and children."

The same Ludolph who has described for us the perils of a pilgrim at sea also visited the holy places in and about Jerusalem. He saw a pit in Bethlehem where

the Blessed Virgin lay hid for three days for fear of Herod, and suckled the Child Jesus there. In her fear she chanced to let fall some of her milk upon a stone in that place, which milk is there even to this day. The milk oozes out

* It is interesting to note that the Colonna family of Rome derives its name from the fact that one of its ancestors carried off a part of this same column to the Eternal City.

of the stone like moisture, and is a milky colour with a tinge of red. The more of the milk is scraped off, the more is restored in the same quantity, and no more. This is the milk which may be seen, and is shown in many different churches; for it is taken away hither and thither by the pilgrims.

He saw, too, the rocky cave into which many of the bodies of the slaughtered Innocents were cast, and he tells us sadly that "this rock has been almost entirely carried away by pilgrims."

Ludolph visited the tomb of Rachel and "the pit into which Joseph was cast by his brethren, and sold to the Ishmaelites." He also saw the Dome of the Rock, and believed that he was gazing upon the Temple of Solomon. He made a pilgrimage in his turn to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. He tells how the sepulchre itself is covered with white marble:

The stone which covers it on the front side has three holes pierced through it, and through those holes one can kiss the true stone thereof. This stone where-with the sepulchre is cased is so cunningly joined on to the sepulchre that to the ignorant it seems to be all one stone. . . . It is and ever has been kept most carefully guarded. Indeed, if Christ's sepulchre could be carried away in grains of sand it would have been so carried away long ago, even had it been a great mountain, so that scarce one grain of sand would have remained on the spot.

Ludolph gives us also a bit of interesting information about the exact place where the Polos bought their oil:

Now, as for the lamps and candlesticks which are said to be round about the Holy Sepulchre, I declare that there is no lamp or candlestick whatever round about the sepulchre; but there dwell in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre ancient Georgians who have the key of the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, and food, alms, candles, and oil for lamps to burn round about the Holy Sepulchre are given them by pilgrims through a little window in the south door of the church.

A pilgrim of the twelfth century tells of seeing a beautifully adorned lamp which burned over the sepulchre, one which went out of itself at the ninth hour each Good Friday and lighted itself again on Easter Sunday at the hour of Jesus' resurrection. He was told that this lamp had been placed there by Martha and her brother Lazarus. Possibly some vague report of this miracle was the reason for Kublai's desire to possess some of the oil. It was evidently quite a usual custom for visitors to take away with them some of the blessed oil, for an early pilgrim who visited the sepulchre describes the lamp at the head of the sepulchre as having been placed there when Jesus was laid in the grave,

and asserts that it has burned on the same spot day and night ever since. He also informs us that he took some of the oil away with him as a blessing, and replenished the lamp with fresh oil.

After obtaining the blessed oil the Polos returned at once to Acre. There they again appeared before Teobaldo, and declared that, even though no Pope had been elected and no early election was indicated, they felt it their duty to return at once to the court of the Mongol Emperor. At their earnest request Teobaldo gave them official letters to him. These letters certified that the brothers had made every effort to do Kublai's bidding, but that the death of the Pope and the continued failure of the cardinals to elect another had prevented their return sooner. Teobaldo, as the representative of the Church, assured the Lord of the Mongols that he would be informed when a new Pope had been elected and that every effort would then be made to carry out his wishes.

As soon as the Polos received the documents they packed their goods and set forth from Acre. They had proceeded only as far as Laias when they were delayed by a rebellion led by one of the grandsons of the Great Khan. Troops and refugees blocked the caravan routes and made further progress impossible. Before the roads were cleared, a courier arrived from Acre to notify the travelers that their friend Teobaldo had himself been elected Pope and that the newly elevated Apostle, who had taken the title Gregory X, had summoned them to return at once to him at Acre. The King of Armenia, who regarded the brothers as official papal ambassadors, sent them back to the city on an armed galley with Gregory's messenger. On their arrival they immediately presented themselves before the Pope to felicitate him on his elevation to the throne of St. Peter and to receive his orders.

Marco tells us that they were welcomed with great honor and feasting, and that they received a special blessing; for Gregory hoped to spread the teachings of the Church through them to the far-off heathen land of Cathay. The new Pope evidently found a great dearth of priests capable of teaching and willing to venture into the unknown lands of the East, for he selected but two to go with the Venetians—Brother Nicolas of Vicenza and Brother William of Tripoli. These men belonged to the Order of Preaching Friars; and one of them, William, was well known in his day as the author of a book on Mohammed and the Saracens. Gregory conferred on the Friars plenary

power to ordain bishops and priests and to act in his place, gave them jewels and other gifts to take to the Great Khan on his behalf, and sent them forth on their mission with his papal blessing.

After all this had been done, the three Venetians and the two Friars returned to Lais and set out on their long journey toward the East. No sooner had they entered Armenia than they heard that Baybars, "the Arbalaster," who had risen from slavery to the throne of the Mamelukes, was invading the land with his Saracen host, sacking and laying waste the countryside far and wide. The danger to the travelers was very real, but they determined to push on. The two Friars, however, were terrified beyond all measure, and were sure that they were going to lose their precious lives. They would not go on, and cast about for some way in which they could return to the greater safety of the seacoast. Evidently they were not fired with that white-hot zeal for the faith which had impelled so many of their fellows to cross burning sands and snowclad mountains in order to convert the heathen in the uttermost lands of the earth. Comfort, good food, and a pleasant life among their own people meant far more to them. Even the fact that they were traveling with men protected by the letters of the Pope and the golden tablet of the Mongol Emperor did not reassure them.

Very fortunately for the Friars there happened to be in the neighborhood a company of Templars on their way back to Acre by sea. The Knights Templars, or the "Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon," were not unknown to the Venetians, as they had often met with them elsewhere on their travels. Shortly after Baldwin I of Jerusalem had ascended his throne in the year 1100 he had granted the Knights part of his palace next to the so-called "Temple of Solomon," whence they had taken their name. Their power spread rapidly, and they maintained establishments in almost every city of the West. Not only did they fulfill the original aims of the Order—the guarding of the roads to the Holy Land and constant battling with the infidel—but during the thirteenth century they became a real financial power in both Europe and the Levant. Their commanderies were in constant correspondence with each other, and their prestige and their military power combined to make them the natural depositaries of the wealth of the nobles for safety and for transmission from one city to another. Gradually even kings used them as their agents. "They wear white mantles with a red cross, and when they go to the wars a standard of

two colours called *balzaus* [bauceant] is borne before them. . . . These Templars live under a strict religious rule, obeying humbly, having no private property, eating sparingly, dressing meanly, and dwelling in tents." Thus they are described by a pilgrim who saw them in Jerusalem in 1185. Beside their land in Syria and Palestine they had property and political influence in Cilicia, and, as Marco's narrative indicates, in Armenia also.

The Friars, mindful of the opportunity to return to Acre well-guarded and free from all danger to their pious skins, refused to go a step farther. They threw themselves on the mercy of the Master of the Templars and pleaded to be allowed to return under his protection to Acre. This was granted, and the two men departed, after handing over to the Polos the letters and gifts destined by the Pope for the Great Khan. Campi, the writer of the "Ecclesiastical History of Piacenza," with a malicious gleam in his eye closes his account of the incident by stating that they returned without making any report of the matter to Pope Gregory, who believed them to be still on their journey with the Polos.

Nicolo and Maffeo were in no way daunted by the defection of cowardly Brother Nicolas and Brother William. They had traveled the road before; they spoke the languages of the country; they bore letters and gifts from the Supreme Pontiff of the Western world to the greatest monarch of the East; and, most important and valuable of all, they had in their possession the gold tablet sealed with the sign manual of the great Kublai himself. This in itself was a safe-conduct, an "open sesame" and a guaranty of food, shelter, and protection throughout practically all the territory which they were about to traverse.

There have been countless arguments and many books written in an effort to trace the route followed by the three Polos from Lais to the place where they at last met Kublai Khan. Marco does not outline the journey in the first part of his book. One brief page covers the long journey from Venice to Shangtu. He stated that he intentionally omitted making any mention of the places, peoples, and adventures met en route "because we shall tell it to you in order in its proper place below." However, he does say that they traveled through many perils and hardships with unflagging courage for three years and a half. They traversed burning deserts many days' journey in length,

and crossed many difficult mountain passes, "always in the direction of the Greek wind [the northeast] and the Tramontana [the Pole-star, hence the north]." He explains that the excessive length of the journey was caused by heavy snows and ice, the necessity of crossing great rivers, and by contrary winds which interfered with traveling. Moreover, he points out, they could in no wise proceed as swiftly or as easily in winter as in summer.

Even though we cannot follow with certainty the exact route of the travelers, references by Marco throughout his book and vivid descriptions of some of his personal experiences give us a general idea of the itinerary and of what he and his father and his uncle encountered on their long journey to the East and back to Venice.

The first country through which they passed was "Little Armenia" (Cilicia), of which Laias was the port. It was the center of a very large and flourishing trade in cotton and spices. In his detailed description of the very first country of the domains of the Great Khan which he visited, Marco indicates his interests and gives us the attitude of mind that we shall find throughout his work. He discusses trade, hunting, the religion and politics of the country, and the manners and customs of the people. Of the latter he sadly tells us that though they are Christians they are not good Christians, for they are not "as the Romans are." He asserts that once they were doughty and valiant warriors, but now "they are without any good qualities, but are the best sort of drinkers."

From Cilicia the travelers passed through modern Anatolia, which he calls "Turcomania." Marco informs us that the Turcomans weave the finest and most beautiful rugs in the world. One Latin manuscript of this chapter contains a most interesting and significant paragraph, contrasting as it does the bigoted, fanatical, narrow-minded religious ideas of thirteenth-century Europe with the tolerant, broadminded outlook of the Mongol monarchs, rulers of broad domains and peoples of most diverse faiths:

Those Tartars have no concern as to what god is worshipped in their territories. As long as you are faithful to the Khan, and very submissive, and thus give the tribute which is fixed by decree, and justice is well served, you may do as you please about your soul. Nevertheless they are unwilling that you speak evil of their souls, or that you should interfere with their acts. Do whatsoever you will about God and about your soul, whether you be Jew or pagan or Saracen or Christian who dwell among the Tartars.

With such far-seeing wisdom did the Tartars grant freedom of thought to all within their borders, and keep religious peace among the diverse inhabitants of their dominions.

After passing through Turcomania, the travelers reached Great Armenia. There, the Venetian tells us, stands Noah's ark on the top of Mount Ararat. According to the Armenian Prince Hayton, who, while he was Prior of the monastery of the Prèmontres de Poitiers in 1307, wrote a history of his country, "this mountain is higher than any other in the world." Both Marco and Hayton tell the same tale—that the mountain cannot be ascended because of the heavy snows which blanket it both summer and winter, but that at the top something black (the ark) protrudes from the snow and can be seen at all times.

Among other things seen by the travelers in this region, the most noteworthy was what Marco called "a fountain from which oil flows in such a great abundance that a hundred shiploads [camel-loads?] of it may be taken from it at one time. This oil is not fit to use as food, but it is excellent for burning and for anointing camels which have the mange or the itch. People come from far distant places to obtain it, for in all the countries round there is no other oil."

This brief reference by Marco to petroleum, the use of which has revolutionized the industries of the entire world, is a striking example of the neglect by the peoples of the Middle Ages of products and processes used extensively by the ancient Mediterranean peoples and then entirely forgotten again until our own times. Forms of both bitumen and petroleum had been used by the Egyptians, the Mesopotamian peoples, the Persians, and the Romans. Their employment ranged from mummy preservation to burning for both heat and light, and much use was made of them for waterproofing, for binding brickwork, and on roads. Our deep-drilling methods were, of course, unknown except by the Chinese, who drilled as early as 200 B.C., and went to a depth of 3,500 feet with crude bronze drills and bamboo casings. Many of the classical writers mention both bitumen and petroleum and describe their properties fairly accurately.

Crude petroleum was an article of commerce in the Roman Imperial era. In 624 the Emperor Heraclius invaded the Baku region and destroyed many temples where the Persians prayed before burning wells of natural gas. Agricola, in his famous *De Re Metallica*,

so wonderfully translated by Herbert Hoover and his wife, speaks of the collection of "liquid bitumen" and gives a woodcut of the process. The ancient Babylonians used torches soaked in crude oil, and the Romans burned it in lamps. The later Romans used it as fuel in their central heating plants and in their great baths. Gradually, however, after the decay of the Empire and the destruction of great homes and public buildings, the use of petroleum as a fuel among the peoples of the Mediterranean area was discontinued and was not revived until the eighteenth century, in the district around Baku described by Marco Polo.

A limited use of petroleum did survive through medieval times in several ways, in addition to its use in warfare. We are solemnly assured by Aethicus Istricus, writing in the eighth century, that if armor is dipped in a mixture of petroleum and the blood of a child, it will become impenetrable by any known weapon. "Mummy," a sovereign medieval medicine for many ailments, was obtained from the scrapings of the bitumen-saturated clothes and visceral cavity-fillings of mummies of the Ptolemaic era in Egypt.

If Marco Polo was not aware of the use of petroleum in battle, it was not because he had not seen the finished product in action. The famous "Greek fire" was employed in warfare for hundreds of years after its invention, or development, probably by a Greek architect, Kallinikos, who lived in Constantinople about 650 A.D. It is supposed to have been a mixture of petroleum and quicklime. It was ignited spontaneously by the simple addition of water, and was projected against the enemy from pumps or siphon-like structures at the prows of war galleys. A quaint picture of the fleet of Michael II (826-829) spraying the vessels of the rebel Joannes with this terrible substance appears in Vatican Code No. 1605. Its use rapidly spread as far as China in the eighth century—another evidence of the intercourse between East and West in the Middle Ages. A variant way of using Greek fire was to load it into pottery hand-grenades, which were then flung upon the enemy's decks or into the midst of his advancing host. The Arab armies of the fourteenth century had special "naf-fatyn" or "naphtha throwers," who, wearing fireproof clothes, threw jars of burning naphtha from catapults. Finally, because of the great suffering and useless loss of life entailed by the use of Greek fire, the Second Lateran Council decreed in 1139 that it should no longer be

used in European warfare. This ruling of the Supreme Pontiff was obeyed for several centuries, and after 1400 Greek fire is seldom if ever mentioned in accounts of warfare.

The next city mentioned by the Venetian travelers is Mosul, where "all the most beautiful cloths of gold and silk which are called 'muslin' are made." Mosul stands on the western bank of the Tigris, opposite the site of ancient Nineveh, and was so famous for the fine stuffs woven on its looms that we still use the word "muslin" to designate certain finely woven textiles.

In describing Mosul, Marco mentions the Nestorian Christian Church. This sect took its name from Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who had been deposed in 431 as a heretic by the Council of Ephesus. His heresy consisted in his belief that in Jesus there were two persons, one the divine, the other the man, the one dwelling in the other. After the deposition of their Patriarch, many of Nestorius' followers wandered out over Asia, teaching, converting, and founding churches as they went. In the year 735 a band of them under A-lo-pen reached Ch'ang-an, the capital of the T'ang Dynasty. There they petitioned the Emperor T'ai Tsung for permission to build a church. The broad-minded, tolerant Chinese monarch generously granted their request, and for many decades they taught and obtained converts. They later set up a tablet inscribed in both Chinese and Syriac, reciting part of the Old and New Testament versions of world history and Christian origins, and describing the coming of A-lo-pen and his band to China.

During the religious persecutions of the later T'ang era (ended in 907), the community was evidently dispersed and its church destroyed. The so-called "Nestorian Tablet" was buried, perhaps by the priests, who hoped for better times, when they could restore the shrine of their faith. It was not heard of again until 1625, when it was unearthed during some excavation work being done on the foundations for a new viceregal yamên. News of the find, with rubbings of the inscription, was then brought to the Jesuits at Peking. Further investigations were made, and the inscription was translated. Though controversies raged for many years as to the authenticity of the relic, scholars are now generally agreed that the stone is genuine and that it constitutes one of the most unique religious monuments of the world. It still stands very near the place where it was brought to light over three hundred years ago.

It is not at all certain that the Polos visited Bagdad, as Marco's description of the city is most vague. Bagdad had been destroyed by Hulaku Khan in 1268, and, as it was rapidly losing its commercial importance, it was perhaps no longer on the main caravan route. Be this as it may—and scholars are by no means in full agreement—Marco tells us the wondrous tale of a miracle which occurred "between Bagdad and Mosul."

It appears that about the year 1275 there was a very cruel Caliph ruling in Bagdad. He hated the Christians and wished to do them great evil. His wise men informed him that in the Christian Gospels was a passage which stated that if a man had as much faith as a mustard seed he could command a mountain to move and it would move. The Saracens perceived in this the opportunity they had been seeking. The Caliph summoned the Christians before him and demanded that such a miracle be performed by someone among them under pain of extermination, "by an evil death," of all the worshipers of Jesus. He offered them but one alternative if the miracle were not performed—conversion to Mohammedanism—and granted them a respite of ten days in which to prepare. The Christians were terrified, and prayed most strenuously that they might be delivered from such a cruel fate. They fasted and prayed, "both men and women for eight days and eight nights." And at the end of that time an angel from Heaven appeared in a vision to one of the bishops, "a man of very holy life." The angel spoke and commanded the bishop to seek out a certain Christian cobbler who had but one eye. He described the cobbler and where he lived. Thereupon, with the assurance that the miracle would be wrought, the divine messenger vanished into thin air. The same vision appeared unto the good bishop several times before he accepted it and bestirred himself.

Now I must tell you of this cobbler, and why he came to have but one eye. He was very honorable and lived a chaste and pure life. He fasted much, committed no sin, and had perfect faith. He went to services every day and prayed often, and gave of his food and his earnings to charity. He had often heard in church the admonition that if a man's hand sinned he should cut it off and cast it from him, and that if a man's eye sinned it should be plucked out or blinded, "because," as one manuscript has it, "it is better to enter Paradise with one eye than hell with two."

Now it happened one day, before the Caliph had issued his cruel

and inhuman decree, that a comely and beautiful young woman entered the cobbler's shop to purchase a pair of shoes. The cobbler beheld her beauty, and asked to see her foot and leg in order to fit her properly. The young woman thereupon unhesitatingly lifted her skirt, removed her shoe, and revealed her leg and foot. One could not ask to see anything more beautiful, and the simple cobbler was seized with carnal desire at the sight and was sorely tempted to sin. But after a moment's weakness he recovered his self-control and purity of mind and let the woman go without even selling her any shoes. And then, alas, the poor man remembered the Gospel teaching, as his naïve mind interpreted it. His conscience smote him, for he felt that he had grievously sinned with his eye. So he seized an awl from his workbench, sharpened it to a fine point, and plunged it into his right eye, so that its sight was totally destroyed. In this way did the good man purge himself of his sin and regain his pristine virtue.

So the bishop and his followers summoned the holy cobbler to them and told him of the vision. After many protestations and lamentations on both sides, the cobbler finally consented to pray for the miracle to happen. On the tenth day the whole congregation went forth to the mountain, and the cobbler fell on his knees and prayed and cried aloud to the mountain to move. And, behold, the mountain moved forthwith of itself with a great roar and rumble and trembling of the earth, and betook itself bodily to the spot designated by the Caliph, a full mile from its original position. Whereupon the Caliph was amazed, and many of his followers became Christians. And in an epilogue Marco tells us that the Caliph himself was baptized, but in secret, lest the Saracens revolt. Moreover, when he died a gold cross was found hanging about his neck, and he was buried apart from his ancestors, who were heathens.

The traveler's next important stop was at Tabriz, a very large trade center, where men gathered from all parts of the earth and where the Genoese had a flourishing colony of merchants. The Spaniard, Clavijo, who visited Tabriz not long after the Polos, has left an interesting description of it. It was a city without walls, lying in a valley among mountains, some of which were snow-covered.

The city has many beautiful streets and lanes and great market places whose entrances resemble shops. And inside the markets are houses and stores laden with goods, as well as passages and gates which lead from one street to the

other, and there are sold there woven stuffs of silk and cotton, sandalwood, taffetas, silk and pearls. In one of the arcades of the market place are merchants who sell perfumes and cosmetics for the women, who come themselves to buy these products. The women are wrapped in white veils and wear horsehair nets before their eyes. In the streets and squares of this city there are many wells and fountains. In the spring lumps of ice are put in these, and goblets of copper or pewter are placed on the well curbs, so that all who pass may quench their thirst.

In Tabriz Marco beheld for the first time the world's greatest pearl market, for thither were brought the great stores of pearls obtained from the fisheries on the Persian Gulf. There they were polished, matched, bored, and strung, and from there were distributed throughout the world. The youth—he was now very rapidly approaching man's estate, even by our standards of maturity—was fascinated by the strange method employed in buying pearls: After appraising the precious objects with the eyes of experts, the buyer and the seller would squat opposite each other, throw a cloth over their hands, and then argue price and quality by pressure of the hidden fingers and wrists, thus keeping bystanders ignorant of the terms of the transaction.*

So the Polos continued on their way, buying, selling, gathering in profits, and making the stock of money and merchandise which they had brought with them from faraway Venice turn over and over to their advantage. And all along the way Marco was learning the ways of men, of travel, and of trafficking. He gradually acquired enough words to express himself adequately in the Tartar dialect used by Nicolo and Maffeo, not only in transacting business, but more and more among themselves. He picked up, too, words and phrases of Arabic and Persian, and of the other tongues spoken along the great Asiatic highways.

Our Marco was rapidly becoming a man of the world, and his remarks show that women were no longer objects of indifference to his

* This method of bargaining is common in the Orient today. At the auctions of jade in Canton, from where most of the jade mined in Yunnan and Burma is distributed through China for carving and sale, something of the same procedure is followed. The auction is conducted in silence. After the piece of jade to be auctioned has been examined, each bidder steps up to the auctioneer, thrusts his hand into the latter's wide sleeves, and by pressure of different finger-combinations on his arm makes known his bid. After these have all been made and entered on paper, the auctioneer looks over the list and without further ado announces the successful bidder. The practice of silent, hidden bidding within the sleeve still obtains throughout China in many mercantile transactions where prices are not fixed.

keen-seeing, all-appraising, young eyes. His greatest joy, however, was in hunting, and he had his fill of the sport in a land swarming with game. Many a fine day he spent on horseback with bow and arrow and falcons while his father and uncle were busy with their eternal bargaining.

Slowly the caravan wound its way along the well-worn, age-old road, leaving Venice and the sea ever farther behind. In Saba he saw the tombs of the three Magi who had set out from there to visit the infant Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem. He assures us that the bodies of Balthasar, Gaspar, and Melchior were still preserved just as they had been in life, with hair and beard intact. Whereupon he weaves a weird, involved, and vague tale to prove that the fire-worship of the Persians (still surviving among the Parsis of India) grew out of the visit of the Magi to Palestine. For the infant Jesus gave the Three Kings a stone to remind them to be as strong and firm in their faith as it was when they departed from him. In mockery they flung the stone down a well, and forthwith fire came down from heaven and entered the well, and a great flame sprang up therefrom. And the Magi took of the fire and carried it home with them and set it up in their churches and worshiped it.

Marco tells at length of the industries of the country, and the fruits and grains and birds and beasts, and of the cunning embroidery of the women. There, too, he saw much turquoise (the "Turkish stone") brought from the mines of Kerman. It was a stone much valued by the ancient peoples of Persia, and is still mined in the region. The common people considered it a stone of evil omen and believed that it came from the bones of peoples who had died from unrequited love. Therefore, they reasoned, the stone would bring bad luck in love to the wearer. Marco also mentions the fine steel of the region. He, in common with most of the people of the Middle Ages, believed steel to be an entirely different metal from iron and not derived from the same ore.

On the travelers rode for seven days from Kerman to the top of a mountain pass. This took them two days to traverse, and they suffered much from intense cold. Thereafter they crossed a great and fruitful plain, where Marco saw and described the white-humped cattle and the great fat-tailed sheep—"and their tails are so large and fat that one tail may weigh thirty pounds."

Now the Venetians were entering a dangerous region, for this part of Persia was infested with bandits, called Caraunas. Marco states that they are the sons of Indian mothers by Tartar fathers. Because of them the merchants nearly lost their lives and the world one of its most fascinating books. Nogodar, leader of the banditti, fell upon their caravan with his men in one of the fogs prevalent in the region (but which Marco ascribes to the black magic of the Caraunas). The members of the party, taken unaware, fled in every direction. Marco, together with his relatives and some of his men, seven in all, escaped to a village near by. All the others were caught and put to death or sold into slavery. "Thus," says Marco in the simple, reserved, impersonal style with which he refers to so many of his most exciting adventures, "I have recounted the matter to you just as it occurred. And now we shall go on to tell you of other things."

After collecting such of their belongings as had been left behind by the bandits, and reorganizing their caravan, the indomitable Venetians pushed on toward their goal, the city of Hormuz, on the Persian Gulf. There they planned to embark for China, as that medieval city was the terminus of the maritime trade between the Far East and Persia. The journey lasted seven days, of which the first part was a steep descent from the Iranian plateau through a mountain pass infested (and still infested) by bandits. The remainder of the journey to Hormuz was over a beautiful well-watered plain, full of dates, pomegranates, oranges, and other fruits, and swarming with bird life.

Hormuz was situated on the mainland during the time of the Polos' visits. It was later destroyed by raiding tribes, and "the inhabitants moved their city to an island five miles distant from the mainland" as it is described by Odoric de Pordenone, who visited the place in 1321. It was an ancient city; there Nearchus, the leader of Alexander the Great's forces, had beached his fleet to allow his sailors to rest on the return from the great Indian expedition of 327-325 B.C. Long after Marco visited Hormuz it was captured (in 1507) by the Portuguese under Affonso Albuquerque, the founder of Portugal's Eastern Empire. With the discovery of new sea routes to India it rapidly lost its importance, and became a tiny, obscure town.

The Polos found Hormuz, where they had planned to take ship for China, not at all to their liking. The heat was excessive and the land unhealthy. If a foreign merchant happened to die in the country,

the king seized all his possessions for himself. The wine made from dates and spices was good to drink, but it acted as a violent purgative upon those who, like the Polos, were not used to it. "The people do not eat bread or meat when they are well, as it will make them ill. If they are ill then only do they partake of meat and bread. Their customary diet consists of dates, dried tunny fish, garlic, and onions." Ibn Batuta, who visited the place about the year 1325, tells us that the people of the city had a proverb to the effect that "fish and dates make a meal fit for an emperor." But Marco and his companions found the diet monotonous and unwholesome.

He describes the people as black worshipers of Mahomet. He found the hot winds in summer intolerable, and tells of the way in which the inhabitants, when such a wind sweeps down upon them, stand neck deep in water until the wind passes by. Marco further recounts that during his stay in the city a force of 6,500 men sent by the King of Kerman arrived to enforce the collection of tribute. They were caught by the dread simoon or hot wind while encamped in the wilderness not far from the city, and every man of them was suffocated. In connection with this he recites the curious fact, corroborated by later travelers, that the bodies of people who die thus decompose so rapidly that it is almost impossible to handle them for burial.

The light-hearted Italian was much disturbed by the elaborate mourning of the widows of Hormuz for their husbands, and notes that they met with their kinfolk every day for four years to indulge in loud wails and lamentations. In addition they hired professional women mourners to help them.

Probably Marco Polo would not have expatiated as he did on the unpleasantness of Hormuz had it not been that all his plans and those of his father and uncle were upset, and much time thus lost, by what they found in the city. Their abrupt return inland after arriving at the seaport, and the consequent loss of months of time, plainly indicate that something happened to cause them to renounce the journey to China by sea. The probable reason is to be found in the contemptuous description given by Marco of the ships in which the Chinese trade was carried on in the Indian Ocean.

"Their ships are very bad and dangerous for navigation, exposing the merchants . . . to great hazards." He describes in some detail the way in which they were built. "No iron nails are used, as the

wood is too hard and splits and breaks. The planks are bored with augers of iron at the ends, and fastened together with wooden pegs. They are then sewn together with a kind of yarn made from the fibers of coconut husks, thick as horsehair. This fiber is soaked in water until the softer parts rot away, and the threads are then spun. These threads are not affected by seawater, but cannot weather a storm." These ships had one mast, one sail, and one rudder. They had no decks, but the cargo was loaded on the ship and covered with hides. They used no iron anchors, so that in bad weather they were often driven up on the shore and lost. "And because of this it is a very dangerous venture to set sail in these ships, and I tell you that many of them are lost, for great storms often occur in the Sea of India." These stitched vessels of Hormuz have been described by many authors of the ancient and medieval world.

The travelers evidently came to the conclusion that the risks of a long voyage by sea on such a frail craft, particularly as a cargo of horses was often carried loaded on top of the hide-covered merchandise, were too great; and they turned back northeastward into the country, heading for the Pamirs.

The road to the northeast led through a desert country of bitter green waters for over a week to Kuhbanan, "the hill of the wild pistachio," then on again for days across the desert wastes to Tunocain. Marco found the people thereabout much to his liking. The spring of life was stirring within him, and he here makes the first of many observations about women. The impression made upon him by the women of Tunocain must have been very profound, for when he wrote his reminiscences twenty-five years later, after having visited many countries, having known many women, and doubtless having had many a romance in his life, he still could say that the Mohammedan maidens of Tunocain were beautiful beyond measure, or, as Ramusio's version has it, "in my opinion the most beautiful in the world."

At this point in his narrative Marco pauses to tell the strange tale of the "Old Man of the Mountain" and his murderous sect of Assassins. As the Polos do not appear to have come into personal contact with the band—which has given the English language its word "assassin"—their story need not delay us here. Marco speaks of the Assassins as though they no longer existed in his day. He was sadly mistaken. After their strongholds had been destroyed in 1256 by Hulaku the Tartar, they

fled into the neighboring mountains, and have maintained a precarious existence ever since. In fact their titular leader today is the Agha Khan, a graduate of Oxford, and the head of the pan-Islamic league.

The Venetians continued for many days on their journey across parched deserts and fertile lands, to the city of Sapurgan (Shiburgan), where Marco found plenty of game and good hunting. From Sapurgan the caravan continued on to Balkh, in northern Afghanistan. It was one of the oldest cities in Asia, once the capital of Bactriana. Although it had surrendered without resistance to the Mongol conqueror, Genghis Khan, its young people had been sold into slavery, the older members of the population had been done to death with unspeakable cruelty, and the city had been burned to the ground. The Polos found the place blackened and in ruins, though such of its inhabitants as had survived the Tartar scourge had begun to creep back and settle in their old abode.

This was the city where, according to the legend, Alexander the Great took Roxana, daughter of the Persian King Darius, to wife. And amid the smoke-blackened ruins and calcined marble palace walls the travelers still could read the mocking words of an ancient Moslem inscription: "This city was erected to the glory of God. By the will of the sultan it was converted into a veritable paradise." A gloomy silence reigned in the city. Grass was growing in the deserted, debris-strewn streets, and wild goats and other animals browsed in the abandoned fields and orchards all about.

From Balkh the travelers continued on for many days through a region teeming with game, rich in fruits, nuts, and vines, salt mines, and corn. After leaving this pleasant land they again crossed desert country for several days, finally arriving in Badakhshan (Balashan), a Mohammedan province near the River Oxus. There they saw the great mines of spinel rubies, called "balas rubies" after the name of the country, the sapphire workings, and the veins of lapis lazuli, for all of which the district of Badakhshan has been famous through the centuries.

The Ramusio edition of Marco Polo and the Zelada Latin manuscript have preserved a passage which does not appear elsewhere, but which is admitted as authentic by later editors. It is one of the few passages in the entire book touching on Marco's personal adventures. In describing the mountains of Badakhshan he tells in it that the cities

of the country are built in high places for protection. He then continues: "They [the mountains] are so high that a man must travel from morning even until evening to reach their summits. On the tops are broad plains and a great abundance of grass and trees, and abundant springs of the purest water which flow down through rocks and ravines. In these streams are found trout and many other delicate fish, and the air is so pure on these heights, and living there is so health-giving, that if the people who dwell in the city, on the plain, and in the valleys, are seized with a fever of any sort, or by chance are afflicted with any other sort of sickness, they immediately ascend the mountain and remain there two or three days and find themselves well again, because of the excellence of the air; and Marco says that he proved this, because while in these regions he was sick nearly a year, and that after he was advised to ascend the mountain [and did so] he recovered his health at once."

This brief statement—all in one long sentence in Ramusio's Italian text—throws a tiny ray of light on the personal experiences of Marco Polo and indicates but one of the many hardships that he and his father and uncle must have suffered on that long thirteenth-century journey across Asia. It also accounts for a whole year of the three years consumed in going from Venice to Peking. The caravan was delayed either because of the sickness of the young man or because the Polos had decided to remain in the healthful climate of Badakhshan to assure his complete recovery.

Marco's illness, however, did not cause him to avert his eyes long from the ladies of Badakhshan. He was particularly taken with a certain peculiarity of their dress, one which has remained the fashion from ancient times down to the present, if we may accept the testimony of coins. The men of Badakhshan were enamored of women with amply developed buttocks. This predilection, which from time to time has brought the bustle into style in the West, caused the women of the region to make their customary breeches or trousers so voluminous that they often swathed themselves in two hundred and fifty to four hundred feet of cotton or silk, thickly pleated and scented with musk. When they did so, "she who appears more stout below the girdle is reputed the most glorious."

From Badakhshan our travelers continued on up over the Pamirs, ascending ever higher, and following the course of the river Oxus,

finally passing through part of the vale of Kashmir. According to Marco, who seems to have been deeply impressed by what he saw, the inhabitants practiced sorcery and the other black arts. He believed that they could make idols speak, vary the weather according to their desire, and change the darkness into sunshine or vice versa. Though the people of Kashmir have always been notorious for their depravity, fraud, and trickery, Marco found their women "very beautiful for dark women." As a matter of fact the beauty of the Kashmiri women has been famous throughout India for centuries, and they were much sought after as wives and concubines. Dr. François Bernier, who traveled extensively in the Mogul Empire in 1656-1668, in a curious paragraph notes:

The people of Kachemir are proverbial for their clear complexions and fine forms. They are as well made as Europeans The women especially are very handsome. . . . I had recourse to a little artifice, often practiced by the Mogols to obtain a sight of these hidden treasures, the women [of Lahore] being the finest brunettes in all the Indies and justly renowned for their fine and slender shapes. I followed the steps of some elephants, particularly one richly harnessed, and was sure to be gratified with the sight I was in search of, because the ladies no sooner hear the tinkling of the silver bells suspended from both sides of the elephants than they all put their heads to the windows The indulgence of my curiosity left no doubt in my mind that there are as handsome faces in Kachemir as in any part of Europe.

The Venetian of the thirteenth century and the Frenchman of the seventeenth seem to have had much in common.

Leaving Kashmir, the caravan traveled northeast, reaching the summit of the Pamirs, which Marco was assured by his guides was the highest place in the world. He noted that at the time of his visit the air was so cold that no birds could be seen flying anywhere in the region. The tales of numerous early Chinese pilgrims who have crossed this same country confirm Marco's recital, and it has been corroborated by modern explorers. The Venetian's powers of observation were keen, and his memory of the ascent to the eaves of the world was so vivid that he recalled when preparing his narrative in far-off Genoa nearly thirty years later that the fires lighted by the travelers at these great heights did not burn as brightly as elsewhere, nor with the same color, and that it was far more difficult to cook food there than it was in the lower altitudes.

Here also Marco saw and first described the great wild sheep which

have been named *Ovis Poli* in his honor. He describes them as having great horns, from four to six palms in length, from which the shepherds made bowls and other vessels. The sheep were so plentiful in spite of the depredations of wolves that the shepherds built sheepfolds and huts for themselves from the great horns, and bones were heaped in high mounds along the roads to guide travelers when snow was on the ground and hid the path from view.

Descending from the Pamirs through the defile of the River Gez, the Polos reached the broad plains of Eastern Turkestan, or, as it is now called, Sinkiang. The region is partly desert, partly rich oasis fertilized by the many rivers flowing from the south and west.

The Polos first visited Kashgar, which Marco found temperate in climate and productive "of all sorts of necessaries of life." From Kashgar they continued onward toward the northeast. Though his father and uncle Maffeo had probably visited Samarkand on their previous journey, there is no evidence that Marco was ever there. Since he was not in a position to describe it accurately, he filled the lacuna with another of his tales of Christian miracles. The story goes that in the eleventh century Chagatai, lord of the country, was converted and baptized by Christian missionaries in Samarkand. In their rejoicing over the conversion, the Christians of the city built "a very great and noble round church . . . to the honor of Master Saint John Baptist." In its construction they used as the base of one of the marble columns "a very beautiful and great square marble stone which belonged to the Saracens," and the Church was made in such a way that this column supported the whole roof of the Church! This proceeding greatly angered the infidels; and, as they were obliged to remain silent through fear, they hated their Christian neighbors the more. At his destined hour Chagatai was called to his fathers, and his minor son was placed on the throne under the regency of Chagatai's nephew, a Saracen. Thereupon his co-religionists, who had patiently bided their time, raised a great clamor and demanded the immediate return of their stone. They refused to compromise for money, for they wished to tear away the stone and cause the whole Church to fall into ruins, that the hated Christians might suffer grievously thereby. An order was issued by the regent that in two days' time the stone was to be given back to the Saracens. The good Christians "prayed devoutly and with many tears to Blessed John Baptist that he must help them in this their great trouble." And

behold, when the Saracens came to the Church on the appointed day to remove the stone, they found the column which rested on the stone had "lifted itself from the stone . . . , and was raised up quite three palms" and that it carried its heavy load suspended in the air with no apparent support from below.

It is curious to note that a Chinese description of Sinkiang written in the fourteenth century states that "there is a temple [in Samarkand] supported by four very large wooden pillars, each forty feet in height. One of these pillars is in a hanging position, and [its base] is more than a foot from the floor."

The whole story recalls the Corn Exchange which was built by Sir Christopher Wren at Windsor. The architect designed the building without interior columns supporting the roof, but the good people of the town insisted that columns be used. Sir Christopher acceded to their request; however, not only do the columns which run the length of the chamber bear no load, but there is a space of a couple of inches between the tops of the columns and the roof whose weight they are supposed to support. Mayhap some future credulous age will tell of some miracle which caused the roof of the Windsor Corn Exchange to lift and maintain itself with no visible columnar support.

From Kashgar our travelers proceeded through Yarkand, where the keen-eyed, observant Polo noted that a large proportion of the population suffered from goiter. He hazarded the guess that the disease was caused by the water which the people used for drinking. This keen observation has been corroborated by every later traveler. Both Sir Percy Sykes and Sven Hedin make special mention of the prevalence of the disease in the Yarkand region, the latter ascribing it, as did Marco Polo, to the bad quality of the drinking water supply of the district.

The next place of note on the route was the ancient city of Khotan, where for hundreds of years emeralds have been found. But a far more important trade was in jade, which Khotan has supplied to the Chinese market for many centuries. The travelers could see the workers digging for the precious boulders in the dry river beds as they do to this very day. From Khotan the jade was taken by caravan over the deserts to Peking and Soochow, there to be carved and polished into objects both sacred and profane. The Chinese could never obtain enough of this, to them the most precious substance in the whole world, the very quintessence in tangible form of the Yang principle of the universe.

From Khotan the Polos traveled on through the monotonous heaped-up desert dunes, camping at the rare oases and wells. Marco was impressed with the morals and manners of the oases towns, which have changed no whit since his day. For he tells us that when a woman's husband is forced to journey to another place, and is to be away for twenty days or more, the woman at once takes another husband until his return, and the husband is likewise allowed to take a temporary wife. One wonders why Marco, after all that he must have witnessed, both in his own city and everywhere among the merchants en route, found this custom strange enough for even a brief comment in his book. In this connection it may also be of interest to notice a fascinating Italian guidebook to Eastern countries written in the first half of the fourteenth century. This book, entitled "La Pratica della Mercatura," was written by one Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, a much-traveled Florentine employee of the banking house of the Bardi of Florence.* In chapter ii of this curious work, the merchant who planned to travel to Cathay, "to go there and to return with merchandise," was advised to let his beard grow long and not to shave. Then, after admonishing the prospective traveler not to try and save money in the matter of a dragoman, Pegolotti adds:

and if the merchant wishes to take a woman with him from Tana, he may do so, and if he does not wish to do so it is not obligatory; but indeed if he does take one he will be cared for in a much better manner than if he does not take one. But if he does take one it would be advantageous if she as well as the servant were acquainted with the Cumanian tongue.

Such being the usual custom of Europeans traveling to Cathay in the days of the Polos, it is strange that Marco should have been surprised at a like custom indulged in by an obscure Central Asian barbarian tribe.

The region through which the caravan was now passing consisted of wide stretches of desert, sparsely sprinkled with oases and inhabited by Mohammedan Tartar tribes. It became necessary to carry enough food and water to last several days from one oasis to another. At Lop (the modern Charklik) the travelers remained a week to rest and prepare themselves for the crossing of the Gobi, which is Mongol for "desert." Their camels and asses were laden with great quantities of food. It was customary, Marco tells us, either to eat the draught animals if other food was exhausted before the fertile country, China,

* The husband of Dante's Beatrice was a Bardi.

on the far side of the desert was reached, or to turn them loose so as not to have to feed them. Camels were preferred "because they eat little and carry great burdens." The Venetian was informed, moreover, that to cross the desert at its widest part was a journey of at least a year, and that even in the narrower parts it was unwise to travel in a company of more than fifty persons, as sufficient water to supply a greater number was not procurable anywhere en route. He tells us, too, that neither birds nor beasts are to be found there because of the lack of food and drink.

At this point we learn from Marco that in the Gobi dwell evil spirits, who devise illusions—mirages, and the like—to lead the unwary traveler to destruction if he lags behind or becomes separated from his companions. The spirits will surround the luckless wight, calling upon him by name, and, speaking with the voices of his companions, lure him on to his death from thirst, starvation, or exhaustion. This happens not only during the night but even in the broad daylight. And not voices alone but the beating and throbbing of drums, and the sounds of other musical instrument as well, are heard. To escape this calamity all the caravan animals wear bells that tinkle and announce the whereabouts of each.

The Gobi's reputation as a place of terror and the abode of evil spirits is far older than the tale of Marco Polo. The Chinese monk Fa Hsien, who passed through the region in A.D. 399, records that "in this desert there are numerous evil spirits and also hot winds Wherever one looks, as far as the eye can reach, the only guides in following the path are the decaying bones of men who have died along the way." Hsüan Tsang, another Buddhist monk, while journeying across the desert in 629, encountered "all sorts of demon shapes and strange goblins, which seemed to surround him behind and before." And in the night "the demons and goblins raised firelights as many as the stars."

After thirty days' journey the caravan reached Shachou ("Sand District") on the edge of the desert. Here it was that Marco first came in contact with essentially Chinese manners and customs. What particularly impressed him in Shachou were the funeral customs—the method of making coffins, the keeping of the confined body in the home, the offerings made to the spirit of the dead, the burning of paper images, and the like. These age-old customs, unchanged since the days

of the Polos, are observed in every Chinese town and village on such days as have been designated for such ceremonies by the *fêng shui* practitioners. Marco also describes the custom of breaking a hole through the wall of the house for the removal of the coffin, to avoid the bad luck that would be caused by carrying it through the main door. Though this custom is not universal in China, it is mentioned by several travelers and is still followed in many places.*

It is very questionable whether or not Marco visited Kamul, the next province mentioned by him. Perhaps his father and his uncle had been there on their earlier journey. He refers to it only long enough to discuss quite at length the moral laxity of its inhabitants. He found that the generous hospitality of the good folk of Kamul included the free offering of the wife, daughters, or sisters of the host. Moreover, if a stranger came to a man's house to sojourn for some days he would leave his home and go to work elsewhere, leaving the field open to the traveler and not returning until the latter had departed. This custom was believed to bring the people of Kamul much wealth, fine crops, and healthy children. The Venetian recounts further that the Great Khan Mongka tried to abolish this free and easy reception of the stranger but met with such opposition that he revoked his edict angrily in the following sentence (according to the quaint text of Ramusio): "Go, and live according to your customs, and act so that your women may be charitable gifts to wayfarers!" And with this response [to their petition] they returned home with the greatest rejoicing of all the people, and so they observe this custom up to the present time."† Marco then dismisses the whole subject with the words: "now let us leave Kamul, and we shall tell you of the others"—but not without making the statement, in one of the old French texts, that "*les femes sunt beles et gaudent et de soulas.*"§

Following the account of Kamul is a short description of the district

* The writer remembers seeing, during a residence in Hong Kong, a hole cut in a second-story wall and the confined body lifted through it and lowered by ropes to the ground, where it was received by the funeral cortege waiting on the street below. This was on the crowded main thoroughfare of the city.

† "Andate, & vivete secondo i vostri costumi, & fate, che le donne vostre siano limosinarie verso i viadanti & con questa risposta tornarono à casa con grandissima allegrezza de tutto il popolo & cosi fino al presente osservano la prima consuetudine."

§ "And the women are beautiful and sprightly and complaisant, and derive much pleasure from this custom."

of Bankul. The principal product of this district was asbestos, and Marco takes great delight in exploding the current medieval belief that asbestos was the wool of the salamander, a lizard-like creature. In his desire to convince his readers he assures them that “io stesso ne fui testimoniao”—and Marco seldom speaks of himself in the first person. He adds an interesting detail, one of the few direct references to the earlier voyage of his father and uncle:

And I shall tell you, moreover, that there is one of these napkins [of asbestos] at Rome, a magnificent gift sent by the Great Kahn to the Pontifex when he sent as ambassadors the two Polo brothers, that it might serve to wrap the holy handkerchief [sudarium] of our Lord Jesus Christ. And on this napkin are written in gold the following words: “*Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram edificabo ecclesiam meam.*”

On the caravan route Marco found the extensive cultivation of rhubarb most interesting. The next city of importance reached was Canpichu (Kanchau). Here again he was disturbed by the lax morals of the people. He tells of the manner in which the inhabitants of Kanchau salved their consciences in case they fell from grace: “*nam hec est eorum conscientia ut si mulier eos amore requirat possunt cum ea absque peccato coire si vero ipsi primo mulierem requirant tunc reputant ad peccatum.*” The Polos subsequently had much time to study the manners and customs of Kanchau, for Marco notes that later on, he, his father, and his uncle Maffeo lived in the city about a year “transacting their business, which is not worth the mentioning.” Here we find the Venetian showing that same reluctance to disclose the details of his private affairs which is so characteristic of his whole narrative.

Several chapters of Marco’s book following the description of Kanchau consist of digressions and interesting notes about the peoples, manners, and customs of many Central Asian districts not visited by the Polos, at least on their second journey. We are also given a sketch of the war waged between Genghis Khan and “Prester John.” This historical dissertation—far from correct—is followed by several interesting notes on the manners and customs of the Tartars, their religion, etc. As these may be found in full in every edition of Marco Polo, there is no need to quote them here.

One paragraph, however, which appears in a single Venetian manuscript, is of great value. Since there are no contemporary documents which have preserved for us the physical and mental characteristics of

Marco Polo, it is largely necessary to seek for such light as may be thrown on him by his own statements or by comments in his text. We must ever keep in mind that the book was dictated or written some years after his return to Venice, where he found the ways of life far different from those which he had known for nearly a quarter of a century in East Asia. All was strange to him, and toward some of the social practices of his native city he shows a very great resentment, particularly in the matter of the conduct of women. The gentleness, discipline, reserve, and modest dignity of the women he had known or observed in the realm of the Great Khan contrasted most sharply with the bold, impudent, flaunting manners of the Italian women of his day. The loose morals of his native city shocked him as they never would if he had lived all his years in Venice. So we get a glimpse of Marco's attitude of mind in the following passage:

In my judgment they [the Tartar women] are those women who most in the world deserve to be commended for their very great virtue; and they are all the more worthy . . . because the men are allowed to be able to take as many wives as they please, to the very great confusion of the Christian women (I mean in these our parts). For when one man has only one wife, in which marriages there ought to be a most singular faith and chastity, or [else] confusion of so great a sacrament of marriage, I am ashamed when I look at the unfaithfulness of the Christian women, [and call] those happy who being a hundred wives to one husband keep [their virtue] to their own most worthy praise, to the very great shame of all the other women in the world.

From Kanchou the travelers continued on their way to what is now the city of Liang Chou Fu. The yaks encountered on the route impressed Marco because of their great size and economic value. The valuable little musk deer, which is still found in great numbers in this region, was of such interest to him that he carried with him on his return voyage all the thousands of miles to Venice "the head and feet of the said animal, dried."

The Venetians were rapidly approaching the regions where the inhabitants were pure Chinese; he observed that the people had small noses and black hair, and "they have no beard, save four hairs on the chin. The honorable ladies are hairless, save for the hair of the head, and are white, and of fair flesh, and well-formed in all their members, but are most voluptuous." Our Marco has grown up, and seems to be more observing of the women at this period of the journey than of trade and the profit therefrom.

The road now passed through a country belonging to the Great Khan but supposedly the domain of the legendary Prester John. At this point of the narrative, scholars, in great wonderment that Marco Polo never mentions the Great Wall of China, which he must have seen again and again, try to find a reference to it in Marco's allusion to "Gog and Magog." Their conclusions are based on the famous Catalan map of 1375, where Gog and Magog are located, shut up behind a wall built by Alexander the Great, in the northeast corner of the world.

At last the Polos were nearing the end of their travels across the plains, mountains, and deserts of Asia. They had been traveling for three and a half long, wearisome years, and Marco had seen much, experienced much, and learned much. The callow boy of seventeen had rounded out and developed both physically and mentally. His faculties had ripened, his intelligence was keen, and he missed nothing of all that went on about him. But now he, like Messer Nicolo and Messer Maffeo, was heartily sick of the seemingly never-ending journey. It was with unbounded joy, therefore, that one day they saw a great cloud of dust appear afar on the horizon, draw ever nearer, and resolve itself into a body of horsemen sent by the Great Khan to escort the Venetians to his court. From the leader of the band they learned that they were still "forty days marches" from the great monarch—presumably at Shangtu, his summer residence—and that he had been charged to see to it that the travelers were safely conducted to Kublai's presence. "After all," said the officer, "were not the noble Messer Nicolo and Messer Maffeo his lord's own accredited envoys to Master the Apostle, and should not they be received in the manner befitting their rank and station?"

The remainder of the journey passed quickly, for at every stage they found royal entertainment awaiting them and generous supplies of all things needful. On the fortieth day the city of Shangtu appeared on the horizon, and ere long the travel-stained caravan entered its high gates. Marco must have visited the city often during his seventeen summers in the service of the Great Khan. The palace especially impressed itself on his memory, and he has left a very vivid description of it:

It was built of stone and marble, with halls and rooms gilded and painted with hunting scenes and landscapes, birds and beasts, trees and

flowers. The great surrounding wall embraced an area of sixteen square miles, which could be entered only by the palace gates. Therein were rivers and fountains and fair stretches of lawn and groves of beautiful trees. And in it were kept beasts for the chase, but only such as were not dangerous to men; and there the Great Khan went hunting at least once a week with his falcons or tame leopards. In the middle of the park was set a palace or pavilion built of bamboo, its columns lacquered and gilded, with dragon capitals, and its lofty roof of gilded and varnished bamboo tiles. The pavilion was braced against the wind with more than two hundred ropes of twisted silk, and it was so constructed that the whole could be taken down and moved hither and thither at the will of the monarch. And the Lord of the Mongols came from Cambaluc, his capital, to dwell in one or the other of these palaces that he might escape the great heat of the three months of summer. In order to insure perfect weather during his sojourn at Shangtu Kublai employed "wise astrologers." At the first sign of storm cloud or mist they mounted the roof of the palace and there by means of their incantations drove off the evil influences, so that, whatever bad storms there might be all about, the palaces and the surrounding park enjoyed nothing but the finest weather, with warm suns and tempering winds.

Samuel Purchas, in his ponderous *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, written in 1616, paraphrased the description of Shangtu (Xandu) from the text of Ramusio. One day in the summer of 1798 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the English poet, who had taken a large dose of laudanum to relieve the raging pain of an aching tooth, sat in his garden at Porlock. On his lap was a copy of *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, open at the passage which begins: "In Xandu did Cublai Can build a stately Palace, encompassing sixteen miles of plain ground with a wall, wherein are fertile Meddowes, pleasant Springs, delightfull Streames, and all sorts of beasts of chase and game, and in the middest thereof a sumptuous house of pleasure, which may be removed from place to place." As he was reading this chapter, he was gradually overcome by the opiate, his head sank on his breast, and he slept profoundly for three hours and dreamed. On awaking, the images of his dream were still before him. Paper was at hand; he seized his pen, and, while the vision was still vivid and etched clear in his mind's eye, he hastily scribbled the immortal lines of "Kubla Khan."

The vision of the poet lives for us, and will live on; but Shangtu

and its palaces are naught but heaps of ruins. During the rebellions against Mongol rule in China which terminated in the victory of the Ming dynasty, the magnificent summer palace of Kublai was looted and burned to the ground. The capital has been deserted for centuries, and the site of all the pomp and ceremony of the most magnificent of the Mongol monarchs is "the abode of foxes and owls." The dilapidated walls of the city are still standing, together with the remains of its six great gates. The Mongols of the region still cherish memories of the Great Khan and regard the place with awe and reverence, though they wander at will with their flocks and herds over the plain strewn with the remains of palaces and temples. And amid the tangled weeds and shattered stones a solitary broken inscription stands, erected long ago by Kublai Khan, and telling the tale of the abbot of a monastery which once reared its proud towers there. All else is forgotten in silence and decay, a mournful reminder of the brief material glory of men that swiftly passes and is not.

Marco's description of the traveler's reception by Kublai Khan is surprisingly simple and restrained. Elsewhere he does not hesitate to expatiate on the magnificence of the Great Khan's receptions and banquets, processions and festivals. But—though he never forgets to place himself, Marco, in the center of the stage—the welcome accorded the Venetians is recorded in one short unadorned chapter. Upon their arrival at Shangtu the Venetians "go off immediately to the chief palace, where they find the Great Khan with a very great company of all his barons." They knelt and prostrated themselves flat upon the earth before the Emperor. Kublai graciously bade them rise, received them with "the greatest honor, and makes very great rejoicing and great feasting for them."

After the formal reception the monarch engaged the brothers in a long conversation, for he was desirous of learning about their adventures since they had left the Mongol court so many years before. They then presented to him the gifts and documents with which they had been entrusted by Pope Gregory (and by the two timid Friars who had turned back), and placed in his hands the vessel of sacred oil which they had obtained at his behest from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem and had zealously guarded through all the vicissitudes and dangers of the long journey from the Mediterranean coast.

Kublai, after all these matters had been settled, looked about him

and perceived the young Marco, who had, as was proper, been standing apart, silent and respectful while his elders conversed, one Venetian manuscript adding at this point that Marco "was a young bachelor of very great and noble aspect." Upon the Emperor's inquiring as to who the youthful stranger might be, Messer Nicolo replied: "Sire, he is my son and your man, whom, as the dearest thing in the world, I have brought with great peril and ado from such distant lands to present him to thee for thy slave." "Let him be welcome," said the Great Khan, and forthwith had the young man inscribed in the list of the members of his household, and, adds the same Venetian manuscript, "he was held of great account and value by all those at the court."

There was great rejoicing and feasting at the court in honor of these distinguished foreigners from a distant land, and thereafter they held a high place in the esteem of their Mongol lord. Marco closes this short account of his reception modestly enough with the remark: "and why should I make you a long story?"

Chapter Four

Cathay

MARCO has left a very interesting description of the personal appearance of Kublai Khan. "The great lord of lords who is called Kublai is like this. He is of a fair size, neither short nor tall but of middle size. He is covered with flesh in a beautiful manner, not too fat or too lean; he is more than well formed in all parts. He has his face white and partly shining red like the color of a beautiful rose—the eyes black and beautiful, the nose very beautiful, well made and well set on the face."

After describing the Great Khan, Marco gives a detailed and intimate account of the method of selecting his wives and concubines, and of his marital relations. As all this may be read in Messer Marco's book it would be imposing on the reader's good will to recount it here. And so it is with the description of the Khan's palace and the magnificence of his capital of Cambaluc. The things which most impressed the Venetian were those which differed from what he had observed in his home city and in the places visited en route. He marveled at the way the capital was laid out in a geometric pattern, the main streets of which "from one side to the other of the town are drawn out straight as a thread—and in this way all the city inside is laid out by squares, as a chess-board is." How different all this was from the narrow, twisting, dark streets with their overhanging houses which he had seen in the towns of Italy and the Levant. He describes the bell and drum towers which are still standing in Peking, though to the south of the places where they were erected by the Mongol emperor. Until very recent years they daily boomed out the curfew and the alarm, just as when Marco Polo trod the streets and lanes of the city. He informs us



Return of the Polo brothers to Kublai Khan with the holy oil and letters from Pope Gregory X. Bodleian MS 264, folio 224. (Courtesy of the Bodleian Library)

that when the curfew sounded three times from the bell tower none might go forth nor dare leave his dwelling, until daylight, "except the nurses who go for the needs of women in childbirth and physicians who go for the needs of sick men; and those who go for this good purpose must carry lights with them."

And why should I fill these pages and tell you of the Great Khan's feasts and overflowing riches, and the ceremonies of his court, and of his going hunting with his barons and his court, when Messer Marco has woven it into his book in a wondrous tapestry of scarlet and purple and many brilliant colors, all shot with threads of gold and silver, the like of which had never been revealed to Western men before?

An interesting account is given by Marco of the women "che servono gli huomini per danari."* In this account he appears to compare the severe regulations of prostitution in the realm of the Khan with the open, flagrant promiscuity displayed in the Venice of his day. He tells us that they numbered twenty thousand, and assures us that indeed they were necessary because of the vast number of merchants and foreigners who entered the city every day. But no such woman dared live inside the city (unless it be secretly) but all dwelt in the *borghi* (suburbs). And he naïvely adds that all twenty thousand of them "find a living." There was a "captain" appointed for each hundred and each thousand, and they were all responsible to a "general captain." The reason for this was that when ambassadors came to the court of the Great Khan and were lodged at his expense, this captain general was obliged to supply to the ambassador and to each of his retinue "one harlot each night; and they are changed every night, and they have no pay because this is the tax which they pay to the great Khan."

It would appear from the great number of Marco's references to women—the intimate descriptions of their persons, their various aptitudes in sex-relations, and many other details not usually told even by hardy travelers of a later day (unless it be those having the courage and wide knowledge of a Sir Richard Burton)—that they were largely, if not entirely, called forth by the frank curiosity and continual questionings of the stay-at-home Italians for whom his tale was told and set down in writing. Travelers from foreign lands are still plied insistently with inquiries to which the answers are not set forth in books

* "The women who serve men for money"—the prostitutes of Cambaluc.

for the masses. We may be very sure that human nature has not greatly changed, and that not all, or even the greater number, of Marco's listeners were interested in the prices of musk and rhubarb, or the dimensions of the palace of the Khan, or the quality of the goods sold in the markets of far-distant China. They asked other questions, nearer their own interests and experiences, and Messer Marco accommodated them, and set down for them the facts they desired most to know. As to his own diversity of interests, we may note that in this same long paragraph describing the *feme pecherise*, or "sinful woman," as a French manuscript has it, Marco tells of the burial places of Cambaluc, of the hunting and hawking of Kublai and his barons, of the precious merchandise brought into the capital for sale, and of the villages surrounding the city.

All of this calls to Marco's mind the matter of the Khan's mint and his paper money, which he tells us he will describe in his next chapter, with the assurance that he will not recount all of the wealth and spending of "the great lord," since no one would believe that he is speaking "truth and reason." This remark seems to be an intimation that Marco himself realized that his tale would not be entirely acceptable to his fellow-Venetians. Not being able to conceive of the richness and magnificence of the Mongol ruler and his empire, they would dismiss simple statements of sober fact as staggering inventions of the author's active imagination.

The mint of the great lord of all the Tartars stood in Cambaluc, and there Marco saw the paper currency of the country printed and issued.

The Chinese were the first people to use banknotes. Setting aside the stories of the use of deerskin and other materials as currency, Chinese authorities agree that the Chinese Imperial Treasury issued the earliest paper money about the year 650. This currency bore the delightfully suggestive name of *fei ch'ien* (flying money). It soon fell into disuse, and we hear no more of it until the tenth century, when it was re-introduced by banking guilds of Szechuan Province. Shortly thereafter the state suppressed these private issues and printed its own notes. Their use continued throughout the Sung Dynasty, and the amount of paper currency in circulation was swelled enormously by the Mongols. Kublai Khan went so far as to prohibit the use of metal coin altogether, in order to accustom the people to accept his notes. At first

they were partly guaranteed by metal reserves. When these were exhausted, however, more notes were issued without any metal backing whatsoever. This, of course, caused a disastrous depreciation in their value, though Marco Polo, evidently not understanding such a complicated financial system, makes no mention of it, and implies that the notes were equivalent to their face value in metal.

Marco was not the only medieval traveler who noted the paper money of Cathay. Friar William of Rubruck, who was in the country some twenty-five years before the Venetians' arrival there, recounts that "the common money of Cathay is a paper of cotton, in length and breadth a palm, and on it they stamp lines like those on the seal of Mongka [Khan]." Odoric de Pordenone, who was in China at the time of Marco Polo's death (1324), speaks of a certain tax being paid in "five pieces of paper like silk." Elsewhere Odoric tells the reader not to wonder too much at the magnificence of the ruler of Cathay, "for there is nothing spent as money in his whole kingdom but certain pieces of paper which are there current as money." Ibn Batuta, the great medieval Arab traveler (1304-1378) says: "the people of China do not use either gold or silver coin in their commercial dealings Their buying and selling is carried on by means of pieces of paper about as big as the palm of the hand, carrying the mark or seal of the Emperor." Pegolotti in his guidebook (*ca.* 1340) tells the would-be traveler to Cathay that in that country "the money is made of paper."

When Marco told of the use of paper money in China, his account was looked upon as another of his fables; and William of Rubruck's remarks remained long buried in ecclesiastical records. No advantage appears to have been taken of this method of state finance by the Italians of the period.

Marco has described the method of manufacturing Kublai Khan's paper money in detail, prefacing his remarks with the quaint observation that "the great lord has the alchemy perfectly." The most ingenious device in the whole financial scheme was in manufacturing the notes of such flimsy material that they soon wore out and fell to pieces. When the notes were torn or spoiled they could be exchanged for new and clean ones, a fee of three per cent being charged by the mint for the exchange. This method of redemption, which netted the Imperial treasury a handsome profit at a trifling cost—that of printing the notes—is confirmed by a document preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale at

Paris. It is a French translation (by John the Long of Ypres) of a lost Latin letter supposedly written by John de Cora, Archbishop of Sultanieh, about the year 1330. This letter, replete with interesting information, records, among other things, that on

the Estate and Governance of the Great Caan of Cathay, the Emperor Suzerain of the Tartars, the Grand Caan there maketh money of paper. And this hath a red token right in the middle, and round about there be letters in black. And this money is of greater or of less value according to the token that is thereon And they fix the value of their money of gold and silver with reference to their paper money The emperor above mentioned hath very great treasuries; indeed it is a marvel to see them; and these are for this paper money. And when the said money is too old and worn so that it cannot well be handled, it is carried to the King's chamber, where there be moneyers appointed to this duty. And if the token or the king's name is at all to be discerned thereon, then the moneyer giveth new paper for the old, deducting three in every hundred for this renewal.

Continuing his narrative, Marco describes some of the foods consumed by the subjects of the Great Khan. The statement is often made that the Venetian introduced macaroni (or spaghetti) into Italy on his return. This erroneous information is based (as far as the writer can ascertain) on the following paragraph found in complete form only in Ramusio's edition of Marco's narrative:

As for foodstuffs, they have plenty of them for they use for the most part rice, panic and millet They do not use bread, these people, but they simply boil these three kinds of grain with milk or meat, and eat them And wheat with them does not give such increase [as in the case of the three grains mentioned], but what they reap they eat only in strips of macaroni (*lasagne*) and other kinds of paste.

In like manner the ridiculous claims that Marco brought the knowledge of ice cream to Europe is probably derived from his description of the use of dried milk by the Mongols, also told in detail in Ramusio:

Moreover they have dried milk like unto paste. And it is dried in this manner: They boil the milk and then the richest part which floats at the top is put into another vessel, and from this they make butter, for as long as it remains in the milk it cannot be dried. They next place the milk in the sun, and thus it is dried. And when they go forth to war they carry with them about ten pounds of this milk. And in the morning each takes of it half a pound, and puts it in a small leather flask, made like a bottle, with as much water as he pleases. And as he rides his horse the milk in the bottle is churned up and becomes like syrup. This they drink, and it is their meal.

Coal was another product of China at which Marco marveled greatly. Though coal was mentioned by Theophrastus about 371 B.C. and probably was burned by the Romans in Britain, its first common use as fuel in the West is recorded in the Saxon Chronicle of the Abbey of Peterborough in 862. Marco had probably never seen it burned before his arrival in Asia or he would not have described it as "a kind of large black stones which are dug from the mountains . . . which burn and make flames like logs and . . . keep up the fire and cook better than wood does." Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II, 1405-1464) relates, as a "miracle" which he beheld with his own eyes in Scotland, that the beggars at the churches rejoiced when they were given stones, which they burned, in a country where there was no wood. The Chinese, on the other hand appear to have used coal as fuel at least one hundred years before the Christian era, according to a historian of the Early Han period.

The almanac used by the Chinese from very ancient times is described in great detail. Besides the usual astronomical data for the year drawn up by the Board of Astronomy, the official almanac contained a carefully compiled list of *dies fasti et nefasti*, like that of the ancient Romans. This list indicated which days were favorable for certain enterprises, and others where specified acts or undertakings should be zealously avoided. In the words of Ramusio's version:

Thus, if anyone has proposed in his mind to undertake some important work or to go to some far place for trade or for some personal business, and wishes to know the outcome of the affair, he will go to find one of these Astrologers and will say to him: "Inquire into your books how the sky is now, for I desire to go to enter upon such and such an affair or business transaction." The Astrologer will speak to him, informing him moreover that he should tell him the year, the month, and the hour of his birth, and when this is told him he will see how the constellations of his birth correspond with those which are in the sky at the hour of his request, and so he will predict what will happen to him in the future of good or of ill, according to the way in which the sky is disposed.

The Zelada manuscript adds that by this means the astrologer can advise his client whether or not he should await a more propitious moment for his business or his journey, by which gate he should go out of the city, where he may expect to meet with robbers, where he may encounter bad weather, where his horse will break a leg, and whether the business contemplated will result in a profit or a loss.

These almanacs with their forecasts of days good and evil are still in use in China, though the republican government has made strenuous efforts to suppress them. However, until the fall of the Empire the government itself published the almanac annually in the name of the Son of Heaven, in several editions, large and small. They were issued in enormous quantities, and existing records of the Yüan Dynasty for 1328 contain a notation of the printing and sale of 3,123,185 copies of the almanac—and a further 5,267 especially issued for the *Hui Hui*, the Mohammedans of the Empire.

Following this interesting sketch, Messer Marco goes into more or less scattered details about the Chinese religion and the etiquette followed by the nobles when they appear before their monarch. After describing their wearing of "certain beautiful slippers of white leather," which they carried with them and put on when they entered the audience chamber, so as not to soil the beautiful carpets of silk and gold, he makes an observation in which he seems mentally to compare the nicety of the manners of the Chinese with the vulgarities and grossness common in his own Venice: "Each baron or noble carries with him continually a vase, very small and beautiful, into which he spits while he is in the [audience] chamber, because no one would dare to spit on [the floor of] the [audience] chamber. And when he has spit he covers it and keeps it by him."

We are told in the same paragraph of the quaint decree by which Kublai Khan forbade gambling in his dominions: "I have vanquished you arms in hand, and all that you possess is mine. And if you gamble you are gambling with my property."

At this point in his narrative Marco makes an end for the moment of his desultory notes—which, strangely enough, fail to mention many common things in Chinese daily life, such as tea, footbinding, and printing—remarking:

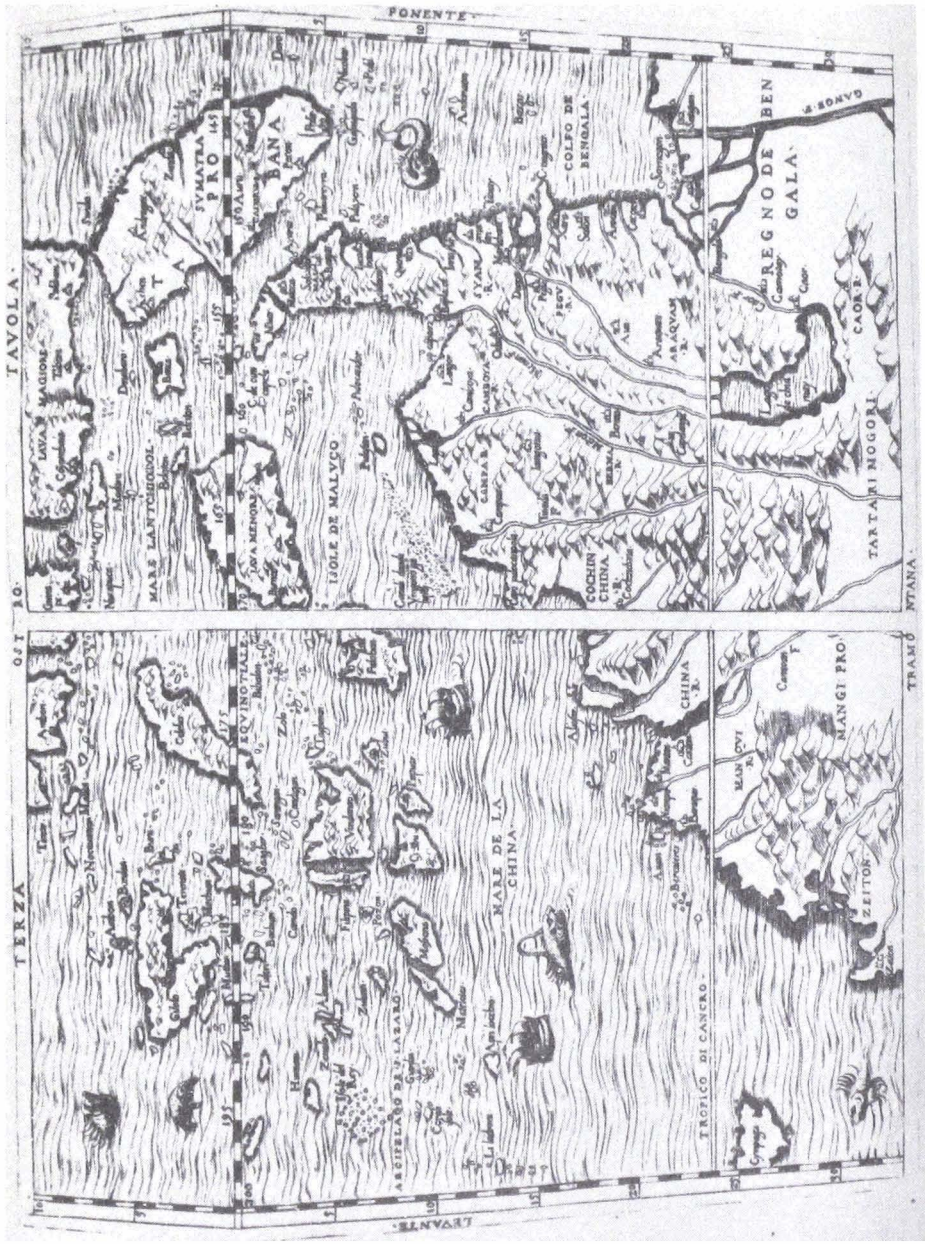
And now that there has come an end to telling of the government and administration of the province of Cathay, and of the city of Cambaluc and of the magnificence of the great Can, you will be told of the other regions into which Messer Marco went on the official business of the Empire of the great Can.

For [and here we quote from the Latin edition of 1671]

when the great Chan sent me, Marco, to remote regions on certain business of his realm (which kept me on the road for a period of four months), I observed all things diligently which came to my attention either in going or in returning.

This paragraph definitely marks the end of one part of the narrative and the beginning of another. The mission which Messer Marco describes appears to be the one referred to by him in the very brief outline of his travels at the beginning of his book. There he modestly says that he was "of a very distinguished mind" and that he learned the languages, manners, and customs of the Tartars so thoroughly "that it seemed a wonder to all." Other manuscripts record that "Dominus Marco," while he was in the court of the Great Khan, learned the Tartar language and four other diverse languages in such a manner that he could read and write in any of those languages. "No other surpassed him in virtue and noble manners," they state. "He was wise and prudent beyond measure." Such phrases as these may well be interpolations of later editors; for although Messer Marco nowhere seems to be too anxious to hide his light under a bushel, it is difficult to believe that he would use such fulsome praise of himself in his book. Moreover, the paragraph in question varies in many details and in its phraseology, no two manuscripts seeming to agree on more than a phrase or two. What does appear clear is that the young Venetian very speedily brought himself to the attention of Kublai by his keen wit and intelligence, as well as by the speed and facility with which he made himself thoroughly familiar with economic and political affairs at court and throughout the Empire. He had observed with what avidity the monarch seized upon any information about his subject states, their people, products, and ways of life, and had also noted his impatience with returned envoys who seemed to have carried out their missions successfully without noting or observing anything aside from the strict demands of their duties. Shrewdly making use of this knowledge, Marco set about acquiring and accumulating information and making note of each place he visited, and never hesitated to acquaint his master with these details. To his diligence and zeal in these investigations Marco owed his success at court, and to them the great value and interest of his book are due.

According to Marco's own statement, the Great Khan decided to try out his abilities as a "messenger" and sent him to the distant city of Caragian (in Yünnan Province), a place so far from Cambaluc that "he can hardly make the journey in six months." The young man carried out his commission most satisfactorily, and brought back in addition much information of great interest to his lord. His report was fascinat-



Map of East Asia from Ramusio's *Delle Navigazioni et Viaggi* (Vol. I, Venice, 1613)
 From the author's collection

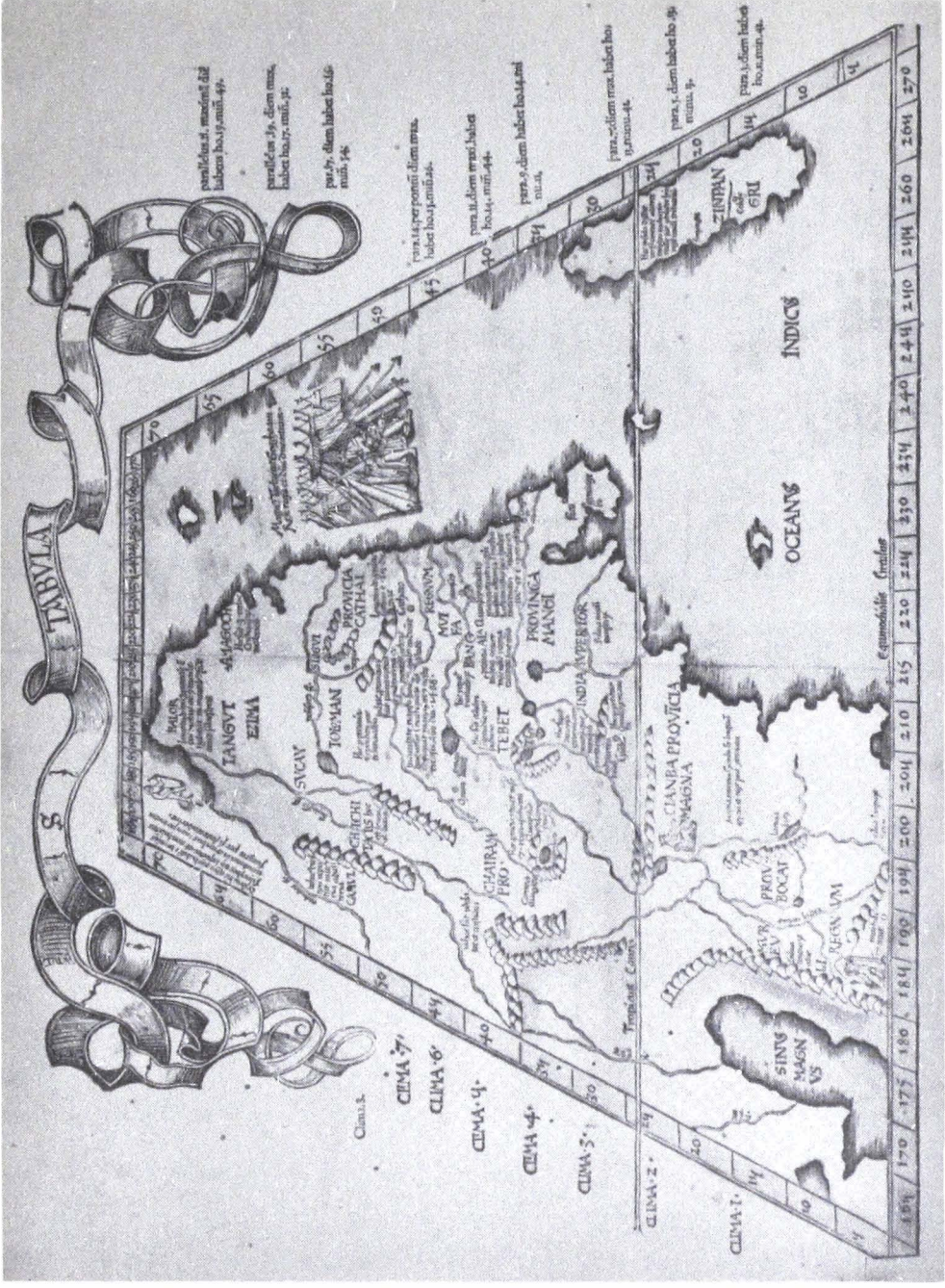
ing and detailed: "To the lord this noble youth seemed to have divine rather than human understanding, and the love of the lord increased . . . until by the lord and the whole court there was nothing more wonderful told than of the wisdom of the noble youth." And practically every manuscript adds that the nobles told each other that if he, Marco, should live for long, "he could not fail to be a man of much sense and great valor." Then follows the naïve rhetorical question which Marco uses so frequently and so delightfully, as though to take breath before continuing his narrative: "*Et que vous en diroie?* [And what shall I tell you of it?]" We are told in the next sentence that thenceforth the young man was called "Messer" Marco Polo ("Mesere Marc Pol" in the French texts): "and thus our book will henceforth call him. And this is indeed very right, for he was wise and experienced."

"And for what reason should I make you a long tale?" we are asked, and are told in the same breath that after that Messer Marco remained in the service of the Great Khan for seventeen years. The Elizabethan translation of a Spanish manuscript (made by John Frampton in 1579) recites:

He [Marco] was in the greate CANES Court XVIJ yeares, and when anye great Embassage or businesse shoulde be done in any of hys Countreys or Provinces, he was alwayes sente, wherefore, divers great men of the Court did envie him, but he alwayes kepte thys order, that whatsoever he sawe or heard, were it good or evill, hee alwayes wrote it, and had it in minde to declare to the great CANE in order.

The narrative takes occasion to point out that Marco's notes, investigations, and reports on these missions explain "why Messer Marco knows more of these things of this country than any other man, because he explores more of these strange regions than any other man who was ever born, and moreover because he gave his particular attention to learn this." And, adds Ramusio, "The things which Marco thus learned are those about which he has written so carefully and in order in his book."

Nowhere in his narrative does Marco inform the reader specifically of the nature or number of the missions on which he was sent at various times during the seventeen years of his service as an official of Kublai Khan. It is thus impossible for us to reconstruct his itineraries. Since this is so, we are not at all sure when or how information given us about any particular country or region was acquired. It may have been from

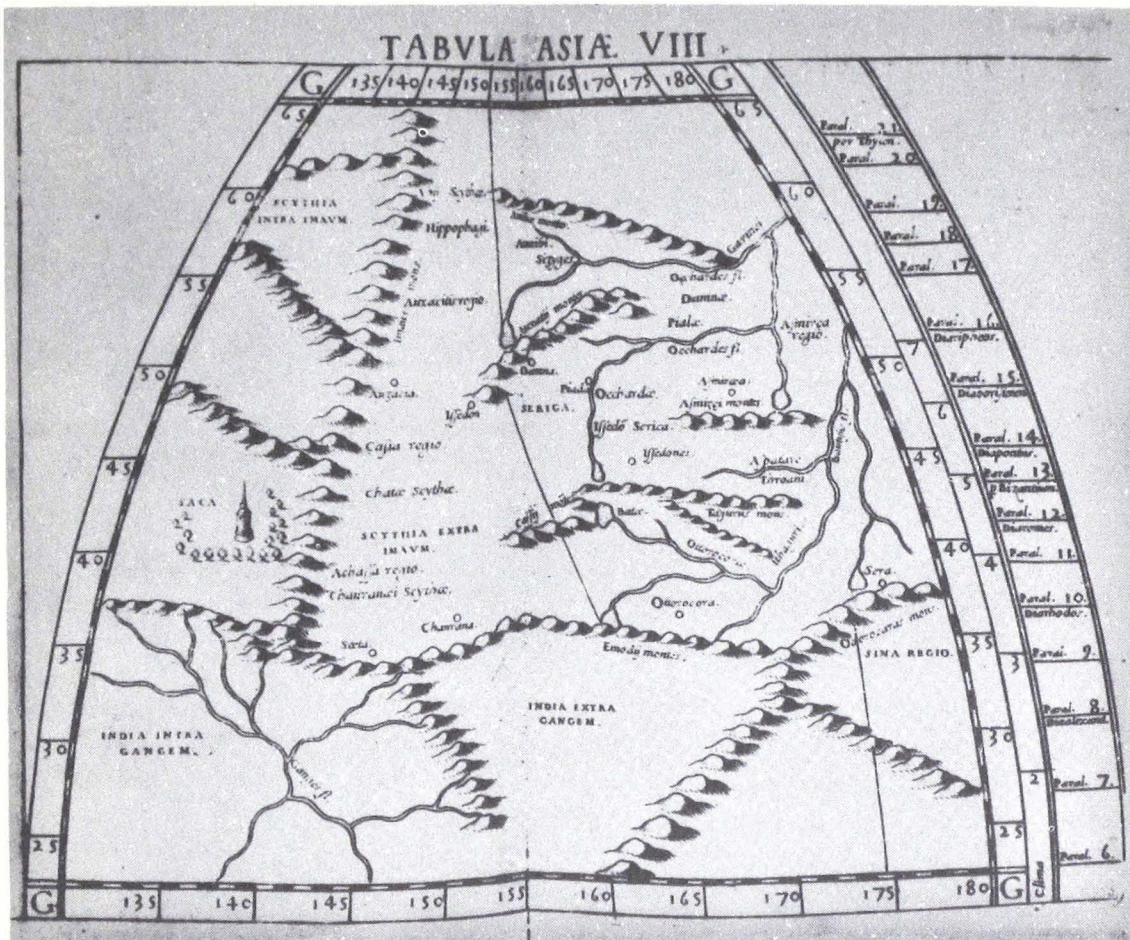


Map of China from Ptolemy's Atlas (1522 edition). From the author's collection

notes jotted down during his numerous journeyings back and forth on diplomatic or other missions, on expeditions made by him when engaged in his own private affairs, or from observations made during the long journey home. The information is usually given under the heading of the particular place, with no remarks on how it was obtained. We must not cavil at Marco's failure to recount what was evidently unimportant in his eyes—eyes which looked out upon the world with thirteenth-century selectivity and interests—for what he has given us is precious material about Asia, which is still full of rich unexplored veins and pockets of golden ore.

The accounts given of the peoples and tribes of China and the neighboring countries, the strange ideas of the Tibetans in the realm of morals, the descriptions of the aborigines of Yünnan and other provinces, the existence of the widespread custom of the *couvade* among the "Gold-teeth" people on the Burmese frontier, and countless other bits of information have been of inestimable value to successive generations of ethnologists and anthropologists. Everywhere we marvel at the observing eye, the keen intelligence, and the accuracy of the descriptions of the untrained mind of the medieval Venetian. It makes us accept as valid the death-bed declaration attributed to him by Jacopo of Acqui—that "he had not told one-half of what he had really seen."

As for regions represented in his account of the raw-meat eaters of Yünnan, the age-old use of cowrie-shells for money, the crocodiles of the south (which Marco believed were serpents with two legs) and the way in which they were captured, fill one interesting chapter. Another section describes the conquest of Burma and a description of that country together with adjacent Indian states. It is not certain that Marco visited all of these places in person. Among the diverse notes on Yünnan is the observation that the natives dock their horses' tails so that they cannot swish them and injure their riders. Marco also describes a custom of the Yünnanese: If a handsome or "gentle" stranger, or one "who had a good shadow and good influence and valor" came to lodge in the house of one of the natives, he was killed during the night by poison or otherwise; and "this they used to do, not for money or for any hatred which they had against him" but in order that his soul might remain in the house where he had died to bring it good luck. The natives believed, moreover, that the handsomer and more noble the murdered stranger the more fortunate would they be there-



Map of Asia from Girolamo Ruscelli's *Espositioni ed Introduzioni Universali* . . . sopra tutta la *Geographia di Tolomeo* (Venice, 1573). From the author's collection

after because of the presence of his soul in their house. But, adds our author, "indeed the great Khan, when he conquered the kingdom and brought it under his dominion, drove out that impiety and that exceeding folly."

A full description of Burmese tattooing is given, with details of how the victim was bound hand and foot and held motionless while the master tattooer, with an instrument holding five needles arranged in a square, pricked the pattern on him and then rubbed in indelible ink on the design. Marco adds that the person undergoing the operation suffers so that "it might be thought enough for them for purgatory" and that many die from loss of blood; and he ends by telling us that he will "leave you then from this province and from the men who are painted with flowers and with animals."

After describing the countries bordering China on the south as no one had ever done before his day and as no other single traveler has since, Marco continues with China proper and describes some of its provinces. In the Zelada manuscript, lately discovered, there is a unique and lengthy discussion of manners and customs of the Chinese, many of which are identical with those of today.

The first is a tribute to the grace and virtue of the women of China, famous through the ages:

You should know also that the maidens observe decorum. They indeed do not skip and dance about, or leap or burst into a passion. They do not hang out the windows scanning the faces of the passers-by or exhibiting their own faces to them. They do not lend a ready ear to unseemly conversation, and they do not frequent feasts or celebrations. And if it happens that they go to any decent place, such as by chance to the temples of the idols, or to visit the homes of their blood relations or other kinsmen, they go in the company of their mothers, not gazing boldly at people, but wearing on their heads certain beautiful hats which prevent a glance upwards, so that always in walking they cast their eyes on the road before their feet. They are indeed demure in the presence of their elders, and never utter empty words, indeed none save when questions are asked of them; and they remain in their rooms at their tasks and seldom appear in the sight of their fathers and brothers and the elders of the household. And to suitors they give no ear.

It is difficult not to perceive the expression of Marco's personal attitude of mind in these sentences. After twenty-three years in Asia, most of them spent in China, he had learned to know and respect Chinese customs and manners. He had observed the position of women



Map of China by Ludovico Giorgio, 1584. From the author's collection

in Chinese society, and was deeply impressed by their sweetness, dignity, modesty, and retiring disposition. On his return to Venice, thoroughly Orientalized as he must have been after his long sojourn, he could not avoid observing the daily life of his fellow citizens from a new viewpoint. His keen mind made mental comparisons at every turn, and here, as in numerous other instances in his book, he appears to reach the conclusion that his townsfolk had much to learn of gentility, breeding, and ethical attitudes from the peoples of Eastern Asia.

In like manner he observed the conduct of the boys and young men.

And likewise we may say of the boys and young gentlemen that they never presume to speak in the presence of their elders unless they are asked. And what more? So great is the modesty among them, that is to say among blood relations and kindred, that in no way would two attempt to go together to the cold or hot baths.

Here follows a long and interesting discussion of the Chinese ways of marrying and giving in marriage, with guaranties, tests, and proofs of the virginity of the bride. In this intimate description, reminiscent of the customs of many ancient or primitive peoples, and throwing light on certain age-old methods of practicing deceit, Marco may refer to the practice of footbinding, not otherwise mentioned by him, in the remark:

And you should know that for the preserving of this virginity the maidens walk so gently in their progress on the road that one foot is never advanced before the other by more than the measure of a finger In like manner it is to be understood that this [custom] is of those whose origin is Cathayan, for the Tartars do not care for this kind of convention.

It may be observed that Marco is more nearly correct in his inference as to the origin of footbinding than are most of the dissertations written on it; and it is further to be noted that footbinding appears to be entirely a Chinese custom, never adopted by their Mongol or their Manchu conquerors.

In this same section, also preserved in the Zelada manuscript, is a very interesting description of a temple erected to two "idols" who presided over the finding of lost things. These idols were small statues of boys, covered with ornaments, and the temple was presided over by an ancient dame whom Marco calls the "sacristan." If a person loses anything, by theft or otherwise, he comes to the temple and tells his tale to the old woman, who orders him to burn incense before the gods.

Then the sacristan asks the gods about the thing lost, and they tell her what will be the outcome. Then she will direct the petitioner where to look if the article has been misplaced. If, however, it has been stolen, she tells him to whom to go, instructing him to warn the thief to restore the thing, with the admonition that "otherwise I shall bring it about that he shall cut his hand or break an arm or leg by falling, or in some other manner he will come to harm, so that he will be compelled to restore it to you." And we are assured that this always happens, be the thief a man or a woman: "And because by experience people know that this may happen to them because of their denials of thefts, they immediately restore the stolen goods." At times, however, the gods do not respond at once, in which case the sacristan announces that they (the gods) are not present, and requests the petitioner to return at a certain hour. At that time she has the answer, "which answer they [the spirits] give in a gentle, low voice, whispering after the manner of a hissing [or whistling]." The old woman thanks the spirits in ritualistic fashion, and conveys the necessary information to the petitioner, who upon recovering his property is expected to make an offering to the idol of fine cloth or silk.

In the midst of his notes Marco admonishes his reader that he should not "believe that we have treated in orderly fashion of the whole province of Cathay, indeed not of the twentieth part [thereof] and only according to the journeys that I, Marco, used to make across the province. Thus the cities are described which are on the way across, omitting those which are at the sides or in the middle, to tell of which would be too long."

As a reward for his faithfulness, his administrative ability, and his knowledge of the country, Marco was appointed by Kublai Khan governor of Yang Chou, in Kiangsu Province, on the Grand Canal, near its junction with the Yangtze River.

This city was an important trade center from earliest times until its destruction by the T'ai P'ing rebels in the middle of the nineteenth century. Yang Chou must have been the rendezvous of many European merchants during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; for the monk Odoric de Pordenone informs us in his "Travels" that he found there "a house and a convent of our minor friars" and also "in this city one finds all things necessary for the bodies [i.e., the living] of Christians."

In view of the commercial importance of Yang Chou and his long residence there, it is most surprising that Marco devotes but one short paragraph to the city. After stating that "the said Messer Marco Polo, he of whom this book speaks, ruled this city for three full years" (approximately from 1284 to 1287), he informs us tersely that its inhabitants "live by trades and crafts" especially in the manufacture of arms and armor. That is all, together with the remark that "there is nothing else which is worth mentioning." This failure to enter into a more detailed description of the great city—it was estimated to contain over two hundred and fifty thousand families in his time—which he must have come to know well is one of the lacunae in Messer Marco's book.

Continuing his desultory notes on China, Marco describes the Yangtze River most vividly as "the greatest river in the world, requiring a journey of one hundred and twenty days to its outlet in the sea." As a matter of fact, it was the greatest river ever seen by any European before the discovery of the Americas. He was amazed at its size, remarking that it was so broad that it seemed to be the sea, rather than a river, and that he himself saw at one single time in Wu Chang (?) fifteen thousand boats. And, he adds: "this shipping is not sufficient to transport the aforesaid [goods], but indeed much merchandise is carried on rafts." He also describes the towing of boats upstream by means of ropes of twisted bamboo strips—a practice still pursued in the same manner on the upper reaches of the river.

Some paragraphs are devoted to Soochow and many pages to Hangchow, which he calls Quinsai. His description, enthusiastic as it is, is but a faint echo of that voiced by generations of Chinese writers, who never wearied of singing the praises of both cities in prose and in verse. One of the best-known Chinese proverbs is: "Shang, T'ien t'ang, hsia, Su Hang" ["Above, the halls of Heaven, below, Soochow and Hangchow"]. The women of Soochow have been famed down through the centuries as the most beautiful in all China. Even the boatmen on its canals have been entranced by them, as in the "Song of Soochow" by Chang Min Piao:

A boat goes by,	The passing boatmen
Poling slowly to the east.	Heed not each other;
Another comes,	They have eyes only
Faring its way to the west.	For the girls of Ku Su T'ai.*

* *A Garden of Peonies*, by Henry H. Hart (Stanford University Press, 1938).

It may be added that Ku Su T'ai was the terrace at Soochow's water-side, where the "green houses" stood, and where the young women were wont to walk to solicit and entice strangers into their abodes.

Marco too pays his tribute to the beauty and gentility of Hangchow's women, as witness the testimony of Ramusio and some of the other editions of Marco Polo:

And their ladies and wives are also most delicate and angelique things, and raised gently, and with great delicacy, and they clothe themselves with so many ornaments of silk and of jewels, that the value of them cannot be estimated And they love one the other in such a manner that a district of the city, because of the amiability which exists among the men and the women of the neighborhood, may be counted as a single household. So great is the familiarity that it exists among them with no jealousy or suspicion of their women, for whom they have the greatest respect, and he would be considered a most infamous person who would dare to address improper words to a married woman.

Ramusio has preserved an interesting note not appearing in other early editions:

In other streets dwell the "donne da partito" ["courtesans"] in such numbers that I would not dare state it And they live in a most showy manner, with great perfumes and many maidservants, and the houses all adorned. These women are very clever and versed in knowing how to flatter, and caressing with ready words, and suited to every kind of person, in such fashion that foreigners who have once partaken of their favors remain, as it were, in a sort of ecstasy, and so much are they taken by their sweetness and charm that they can never forget them. And from this it happens that when they return home they say they have been in Quinsai, that is, in the city of Heaven, and cannot [wait to] see the hour when they may again return there.

It is in speaking of Hangchow, too, that Marco gives us further interesting details of Chinese life, some of them customs peculiar to that city, others prevalent throughout the Empire. The Great Khan tolerated neither beggars nor vagabonds in Hangchow, for if the city guards "by day see any poor man who because of being crippled cannot work, they make him go to stay in the hospitals, of which there is an infinitely large number throughout the city, built by the ancient kings, [and] which have great incomes. And if he be sound of body they compel him to do some work."

Another custom of the people of Hangchow, and one which Marco asserted was followed throughout China, rendered the locating of any citizen comparatively easy and facilitated the taking of the census.

Each person inscribed over the door his own name and those of his family and slaves, as well as the number of horses owned by him. Names of deceased persons were erased and those of newborn children added. Another statute required innkeepers to write on the doors of their houses the names of all who came to lodge with them, with the date of their arrival and the day and the hour of their departure, so that the officers of the law could know the whereabouts of all travelers throughout the land. "And," adds Marco, "this is a good thing, and one that befits wise men."

After describing Hangchow and the surrounding district, many entertaining details are given of Fukien Province. Of these the most interesting is the sketch of a numerous Christian sect then living in the province. This is not only of value in itself, but it throws light on Marco's extensive wanderings in the domain of the Great Khan which are not mentioned elsewhere. The description begins with the statement that the discovery of these Christians was made "when indeed Master Maffeo, uncle of Master Marco Polo, and Master Marco himself were in the said city of Foochow and in their company a certain wise Saracen."

That Marco Polo was speaking, as far as China is concerned, mainly from knowledge gained from personal observation and experience is proved by his frank statement that he had described three of the nine provinces of "Manzi"

because Master Marco made his crossing through them, for his way led thither. Indeed he heard and learned much about the other six, but since he did not travel through them he could not have told as fully about the others. Therefore we shall cease about them.

At this point Marco terminates his discursive description of China, its people, government, religions, economics, manners, and customs.

His journeyings to and fro, his government service, and his wanderings in his own behalf seem to have been unceasing from the time of his first arrival at the court of the Great Khan. Meanwhile many months and seasons had come and fled. The boy had become a youth, and the youth had developed into a stalwart man, intelligent, alert, self-reliant, and wise in the ways of the world. Seventeen long years had slipped by, and the Venetians began to long for home. After all, they were strangers in a strange land, and dreaded the thought of never returning to the home of their fathers. Memories of faraway Venice haunted their dreams, and, happy though the years had been, bringing

them riches and high honors, the Polos began to seek for a plan by which they could return to Italy and their families.

Other considerations, too, weighed heavily with them, and made a departure from the court of the Great Khan advisable. They had found great preferment at the hands of the mighty monarch, and had waxed rich and powerful in his service. But the sunshine of the imperial favor had bred jealousy and envy of them and their good fortune, and the number of their enemies at court became ever greater. With troubled minds they watched the great Kublai growing ever older and more feeble. They dreaded his approaching end, for their experience and observation had taught them too well that with his passing the strong wall of his protection would fall. They would be helpless in the presence of their foes, and their accumulated wealth would mark them the more certainly as victims, once their lord had "mounted on high" on the dragon.

That this fear was not without good foundation is attested by Francesco Pegolotti, who in 1340 in his *Practica della Mercatura* warned the would-be traveler to China that one of the dangers of the journey was that

when the lord [the Khan of the Mongols] dies, and until the other lord who should rule is proclaimed, in this interim sometimes irregular acts have been done to the Franks and to other foreigners And the road will not be safe until the other lord who is to reign in the place of him who is dead is proclaimed.

Departure from the court of Cathay was not as simple as was the arrival there. The trials and tribulations of their long, wearisome journey eastward were as nothing compared to the network of interests which bound them close to Kublai's throne. Moreover, the Venetians feared greatly, and with good reason, that rebellion might break out all over the dominions of the Mongols, once the hand that controlled from Cambaluc was relaxed in death. Then the caravan routes would again be beset with a hundred perils, and even if they succeeded in leaving the court it was very doubtful if they could escape the dangers that would threaten them on their long journey homeward.

Ever wise, ever shrewd, well-versed in the moods of the aged Emperor, the elder Polos bided their time.

And so, Messer Nicolo one day, seeing the Great Khan in high good humor, seized the occasion, and, on bended knee begged him, in the name of all three, for permission to depart. At these words he [the Emperor] was much disturbed.

And he spoke to him, asking him what reason moved him to desire to set out on such a long and perilous journey, during which they could all easily die. And if it were because of wealth [goods] or of anything else, he would gladly give them the double of what they had at their home, and heap upon them as many honors as they might desire. And, for the great love which he bore them, he refused them flatly the right to depart.

A Venetian manuscript records a further plea by Messer Nicolo. For he assured the Great Khan that he did not desire to leave for want of gold, "but it is because in my land I have a wife and by the Christian law I cannot forsake her while she lives." This from the man who had remained away from home on his first journey fifteen years in the pursuit of gain, and who, after he had taken unto himself a second wife on his return to Venice, had left her after two short years to answer the call of the East, and who had bestirred himself with thoughts of his homeland only after a life of riches and honor for seventeen years in China—and then seemingly from motives of personal safety!

But the Great Khan was obdurate—perhaps he saw through the flimsy pretext—and told them that, though they might wander where they pleased in his realm, "on no condition in the world could they leave it." We are given no reason for this harsh ruling except, as reiterated by Marco, that "the Great Khan loved them so much." And repeated petitions met with the same refusal.

But again the good fortune which seemed ever to watch over the Polos rescued them in this dire emergency. It came in an altogether unforeseen and unexpected manner, and just at the right moment, too. When they could least foresee it, kind fate placed in their hands the long and eagerly awaited opportunity to return to Venice.

Chapter Five

Homeward Bound

THE VAST EMPIRE of the Mongols was very loosely knit together in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, and the descendants of the great Genghis Khan held a vague sort of sovereignty over many vassal states or virtually independent territories by ties of marriage only. The giving of a princess royal (for the most part adopted) to a distant sovereign in marriage was often the only political bond between outlying parts of the empire and the capital.

Death had robbed Arghun, Khan of Persia and grand-nephew of the Great Kublai, of his wife. There was a strange custom among the Mongol-Persians of the time, by which a Khan upon ascending the throne took his mother to wife. Thus the Khatun (Lady) Bolgana who had died was both mother and wife to Arghun. She was of Mongol lineage, and "This Queéne ordeyred in hir testamente, that hyr Husbande shoulde not marrie, but with one of hyr bloud and kynred." She died on April 7, 1286, in Georgia, and shortly thereafter Arghun dispatched three envoys, Uladai, Apushka, and Koja, to his great-uncle in Cambaluc, with a large retinue, asking him to select and send him a wife from among the women of the line of the deceased Bolgana.

The three ambassadors arrived in due time at the court of the Great Khan, where they were received with much pomp and ceremony and feasting. The Emperor then set about selecting a successor to Bolgana from among her relatives. His choice fell upon a young girl of seventeen named Cocachin, "the whyche was verye fayre," amiable, and charming. She was summoned to court and presented to the three ambassadors as his selection as wife to fill the place of the dead Bolgana.

The envoys on meeting her expressed themselves as well pleased with the woman chosen as their future queen, and forthwith prepared to depart overland with her on the long return journey to Persia.

Leaving the city of Cambaluc, escorted by a great retinue sent to do honor to Arghun's new bride, the caravan crossed the Great Wall and started with its precious charge on its long and arduous journey over the desert highway to Persia by which they had come to the court of the Great Khan. Many weary months dragged by en route, and the envoys were looking forward with joy to beholding their homes again, when war suddenly flared up among the Tartar tribes of Central Asia. Attacks on travelers and raids on towns along the caravan route inevitably followed. The ambassadors found it impossible to continue on their way, and were forced to turn back to China. After eight months of absence they again beheld against the sky the crenelated walls and high towers of Cambaluc. Once more the cortege wound its way through the streets of the capital city, which the Persians had never expected to see again, and a second time they sought and obtained an audience with the Khan of all the Mongols.

Kublai heard the tale of the dangerous journey and its unfortunate interruption, and was sorely perplexed as to how he could send the maid, Cocachin, with speed and safety to his kinsman in distant Persia. By a stroke of good fortune Messer Marco had just returned from an expedition by sea to India "as the Lord's ambassador"—one manuscript states that he was accompanied by his father and uncle—and had made a detailed report to the Great Khan concerning his mission and all the peoples and things he had observed en route. At that time the three "barons" saw the Venetians "and had great wonder" because of their wisdom. They were particularly interested because they realized that the Polos must have a knowledge of the sea route for at least part of the way to their own country of Persia.

A carefully devised scheme was speedily worked out between the Venetians and the Persians. The former were shrewd enough to see in the predicament of the envoys the long-sought opportunity to return to their home. The officers of Arghun on their side perceived a way of reaching their home by sea, thus avoiding the necessity of waiting an indefinite time at Kublai's court until the land route should be safe enough for their return by caravan. They had already been on their journey three years, and had no stomach for further delays. The Per-

sians and the Polos thus found that their interests were identical, and after much discussion it was agreed that the envoys and Cocachin should present themselves before the Great Khan and point out that it was far safer to proceed to Persia by sea than by land. Moreover, they were to point out that the journey would be both cheaper and shorter by water than by caravan. Finally, and most important to the Venetians, the envoys were to ask that the Polos be ordered to accompany them "to the lands of the lord Arghun" because of their knowledge and experience in sailing the southern seas, "and especially Messer Marco." Moreover, the sending of such prominent men as the Venetians would show that much honor was being paid Arghun, lord of Persia, by his great-uncle, Kublai.

The Great Khan "showed great displeasure on his countenance" at their request, for the three Latins were of real value to him because of their ability and wide experience in his service. (This is far more likely to have been the reason for his desire to retain them than "the great love" which Marco repeatedly says he bore them.) Arghun, however, was a powerful ruler, and one whom Kublai could ill afford to offend or neglect. In fact Marco (in the Ramusio version) frankly admits that "as he could not do otherwise, he consented to as much as they requested of him, and had not the reason been so great and cogent that compelled him, never would the said Latins have departed."

Kublai then summoned to his presence Marco, his father, and his uncle,

and spoke unto them many gracious words of the great love which he bore them, and that they should promise him that after having been some time in the land of Christians and at their own home they would wish to return to him. And he caused them to be given a tablet of gold whereon was written a command that they should be free [from all interference] and secure throughout all his domains, and that in every place all their expenses should be provided for and for their retinue also, and that they should be given an escort, in order that they might pass in safety, decreeing also that they should be his ambassadors to the Pope, the King of France, [the King] of Spain, and to other Christian Kings.

One manuscript even includes the King of England!

At the command of the Great Khan fourteen great ships were fitted out for the expedition, probably at Zaiton (Ch'üan Chou), each having four masts and such a spread of sails that it was a marvel to Marco as it was to all medieval travelers to the Far East. Marco was so impressed

by "the great ships in which merchants go and come into India by sea" that he has given full and very interesting descriptions of them.

They were built of fir and of pine, and though they had but one deck the larger vessels contained as many as sixty cabins, "and in each can a merchant dwell alone at his ease." In this description appears the first mention of watertight compartments in ships, a device seemingly entirely unknown to European shipbuilders until modern times. The larger ships had thirteen divisions in their holds, made of closely fitted planks, so if by chance it happens that the [hull of the] ship is damaged in any place either if it strikes on a rock or a whale fish the water entering through the hole will run to the bottom, which is never filled with any other things. Then the sailors seek out in what compartment the ship is damaged, and then that compartment [i.e., the goods stored therein] where the break occurs is emptied into others, for the water cannot pass from one compartment into the other, so strongly are they enclosed. And then they repair the ship there and replace [therein] the goods which have been removed.

The ships were manned by from two hundred to three hundred sailors. This remark of Marco Polo taken together with others of the period seems to indicate that these Chinese vessels were far larger than the ships used at the time in European sea-borne commerce. It confirms similar information left by Odoric de Pordenone, Friar Jordanus, and numerous other travelers. Ibn Batuta, in his description of Chinese shipping, states that the largest junks—the ships were called "junks" or "gonk" as early as his time—carried

six hundred sailors and four hundred warriors The sailors have their children who live in the cabins, and they sow kitchen herbs, vegetables, and ginger in tubs of wood The captain of the ship resembles a great emir; when he disembarks the archers and Abyssinians [African slaves?] march before him with spears, swords, drums, horns and trumpets.

Before describing the long voyage from China to Persia, with notes on the islands and countries visited en route, Marco devotes an entire chapter to Japan. He did not visit the islands himself, and his account of the country, which he called Cipango (or Cipingu), is a farrago of fact and fancy which need not detain us long here. Suffice it to note that he placed the islands on the high seas fifteen hundred miles from the mainland of China. "The people are white." They have much gold; in fact the roof of the palace of their king is covered with plates of gold and the floors within are of gold tiles two fingers thick. And great pearls of red and white colors abound, so that the dead

are buried each with a pearl in his mouth. These were some of the stories which fired Columbus with such zeal for discovery that he carried a copy of Marco Polo, which is still in existence with copious marginal notes in his own handwriting, with him on his first voyage. Of course the incorrect distances noted by Marco Polo upset all his calculations and conjectures as to locations and mileages.

Following the fantastic description of the islanders we are given a hasty sketch of Kublai Khan's historic efforts to subdue the Japanese in several successive expeditions, the last one terminated in its preliminary stages only by his death.* Again into this story of the defeat of the Mongols Marco weaves a tale of men who could not be wounded by the sword because of the magical protection afforded them by certain precious stones inserted in the right arm between skin and flesh. And this stone, "enchanted by the devil's art," rendered them immune from death or wound by iron. However, we are told, their precious stones availed them nothing, for "the barons caused them to be beaten with clubs of thick wood, and they died at once." Friar Odoric tells of the same custom in one of the islands of the Indies (Borneo?), where, he says, certain stones are found in reeds that grow along the ground: "And they take their sons and cut deep wounds in their arm, and in these wounds they place these stones . . . and by the virtue of these stones . . . they know that iron cannot injure them." Marco ends his account of the Japanese by describing the delightful way in which one captured an enemy, invited all his friends to come to his home, and cooked and served the flesh of the enemy as "the best flesh which there is on earth."

The first country described by Marco Polo after sailing from China is the kingdom of Champa (in Indo-China), a tributary to the Great Khan. Marco states that he visited the kingdom in the year 1285 (in some manuscripts the dates vary from 1275 to 1288). He found prevailing in the kingdom the *droit seigneurial* or *ius primae noctis*, that much-debated medieval European custom which Beaumont and Fletcher held up to such derision in their *The Custom of the Country*.

Marco had learned during his earlier visit that the king of Champa had three hundred and twenty-six children, of whom more than one hundred and fifty were men capable of bearing arms. This statement

* A very full and interesting account of this unsuccessful effort of the Mongols to bring Japan under their domination will be found in Nakaba Yamada, *Ghenko: the Mongol Invasion of Japan* (John Murray, London, 1916).

is corroborated by Odoric de Pordenone, who was informed when he visited the country that the king had two hundred children and fourteen thousand elephants. Such a great number of children is not an uncommon phenomenon, at least in Asia. One of the recent kings of Persia was reputed to have had nearly three thousand children. The Chinese emperor K'ang Hsi had twenty-four sons, and Ch'ien Lung abdicated in favor of his fifteenth son.

The accounts given of Java and the islands and countries passed on the journey to Sumatra need not detain us. The fleet made a long stay at different ports on that island, which Marco calls "Java the Less," and several pages of the tale are devoted to it. He informs us that he himself visited six of the eight kingdoms into which the island was divided.

Marco first records his astonishment at discovering that the island lies so far to the south that the North Star is to be seen "neither little or much." He found the inhabitants of the kingdom of Ferlac (Parlak) all converted to the "abominable law" of Mohammed, and that many of them were cannibals. This custom still prevails among some of the hill people of this region. In Bassa (Pasei) the animal which most attracted the interest of Marco was the rhinoceros, which he describes so accurately that he must have seen specimens himself, though in spite of the fact that he calls it a "unicorn" the Sumatra species is the only one which bears two horns. Marco assures us that the animal is not at all like the unicorn of which the tales of his day declared that it could be ensnared by a "pucelle vierge."

At this point Marco Polo waxes so wroth over the deceptions of the Arabs and other traders who offered for sale in Europe preserved bodies which they represented as the mummies of a pigmy people that he describes the whole process of preparing them:

And we shall tell the method. On this island there is a type of monkey which is very small, and they have faces like the faces of men. And when the men capture them they remove all the hair from them with a certain unguent and fix certain long hairs on their chin in place of a beard, and while the skin is drying the openings where the hairs are fixed shrink so that it appears as though they had grown there naturally. And the feet and hands and other members which do not conform to human members they stretch and shorten and by handling make conform to human likeness. And then they cause them to be dried, and then they treat them with camphor and other things so that they appear to have been men. And they sell them to merchants, who carry them throughout the world and cause men to believe that they are such small men. And this is a

great deception [*deceverie*], for they are made in such fashion as you have heard. For not in all India nor in any other more savage parts were there ever seen men so small as those appear to be.

From the description of the kingdom of Basman, Marco passes to the kingdom called Sumatra, which was not then the name of the entire island. There, we are told, the expedition was detained for five months because of bad weather and contrary winds. They built five "towers" of logs, surrounded by ditches, as a defense against the man-eating natives; and all these appear to have been constructed under the direction of Marco himself. The members of the expedition remained in these shelters until the changing winds permitted their departure. While here Marco saw and described the making of palm wine, also the coconut and its uses for both food and drink.

After describing in disgusting detail the cannibalistic habits of the people of Dagroian, Marco retails an account of the "tailed men" of Lambri. Probably these were orangutans. As all people from China to England have their legends of tailed men, this matter need not detain us. More interesting is the description given of the cultivation of the sago tree and the way in which its flour is produced. Marco informs us that not only did he often eat cakes made of sago but that he took some of the flour with him to Venice.

The ships finally departed from Java the Less and passed near the Andaman Islands, whose inhabitants, according to Marco, had heads and features like dogs, and who indulged in cannibalism. From the Andamans the expedition continued on its route to Ceylon, where a landing was made and where Marco beheld "the largest ruby that is to be found in all the world." The story of this ruby was current throughout the whole East in the Middle Ages. Friar Jordanus, who visited East Asia in 1321-1324, tells of two rubies owned by the King of Ceylon: "He wears one of them hung about his neck, and the other [he carries] in the hand with which he wipes his lips and his beard. And it [the ruby] is longer than it is broad, and when it is held in the hand it can be seen a finger's breadth on either side." Hsüan Tsang, the Chinese monk (602-664), records that on the top of the pagoda of the Sacred Tooth of the Buddha in Ceylon there was an arrow surmounted by a stone of great value, called "Padmarâga"—ruby. This precious stone, he says, constantly gives out a brilliant flashing light. Day and night gazing on it from afar, one thinks he is look-

ing at a luminous star. It will be recalled that when Sinbad the Sailor visited Sarandib (Ceylon) on his sixth voyage, the king presented to him a ruby cup a span high, adorned inside with precious pearls.

From Ceylon the ships proceeded to the mainland of India, touching first on the Malabar (southwest) Coast. There Marco visited and described the pearl fisheries in detail. The industry seems to have changed its methods but little since he wrote of it six hundred and fifty years ago. The Hindu princes with their retinues and attendants, their wives and concubines, their practice of burning the dead, suttee, self-decapitation with a two-handled curved knife, and sacredness of the cow, and the non-eating of beef—these and many more customs of the Indian peoples are described in fascinating detail, the more interesting since many of these customs still survive in whole or in part in various parts of India.

Interspersed with this more or less impersonal account are anecdotes of Messer Marco's own adventures among the people. One delightful remark is about suretyship: "He who drinks wine is not accepted as a witness, nor is he who navigates upon the sea. For they say that [a drinker of wine] and he who navigates upon the sea is a desperate fellow and therefore they do not receive him as a witness or place any value on his testimony."

The descriptions of the superstitions of the country, the nautch girls, the "brides" of the temples, and many of the matters which are found only in the Zelada manuscript have preserved for us most valuable records of the medieval customs of southern India. One interesting paragraph describes the method of placating the angry gods:

Then indeed the aforesaid maidens [i.e., the nautch girls] go to the monastery in the aforesaid manner, and they are all of them naked except that they cover their natural parts, and they sing before the god and goddess . . . and then those maidens come thither to pacify them [the gods] and when they are there they sing, dance, leap about, and tumble and make various diversions . . . and the maiden [who has addressed the god] . . . will lift her leg above her neck and will execute a spin about . . . and when they [the gods] have been mollified enough they go home . . . Indeed those maidens (while they are maidens) are so firm of flesh that none can in any way seize them or pinch them in any part. And for a small coin [denario] they will allow a man to pinch them as much as he is able. When they are married they are then also firm of flesh, but not so much.

Messer Marco's eyes missed nothing.

In spite of his acute powers of observation and his shrewd judgment, the Venetian was sometimes "taken in" by weird tales, as in his sober explanation of why the skins of the natives of southern India are dark. At least, according to one of the manuscripts, he solemnly asseverates that when the Indian infants are born they are fair, but their parents anoint them weekly with sesame oil, so that they become *si noirs comme dyables* ("as black as devils").

Returning to speak again of the island of Ceylon, Marco gives a rather detailed account of the life of the Buddha, whom he calls Sagamoni Burcan (Sakyamuni Buddha). He must have found the tale most fascinating, for the account is lengthy and circumstantial and indicates a genuine interest on the part of the narrator. Marco is most generous in his estimate of the character of the great sage of the Sakyas, which impressed him profoundly. He treats him very gently, and declares, most boldly for a European of the thirteenth century, that "most certainly if he [the Buddha] had been Christian, he would have been a great saint, because of the good and honest life which he led." Messer Marco did not know that a century before his time the Buddha had already been enshrined as a saint in the Catholic Church under the name of Saint Josaphat of India, and his date on the ecclesiastical calendar was November 27.

Marco also describes the mythical "male and female" islands. His story is seemingly a variant of the age-old fable of the Amazons, which was accepted even by Sir Walter Raleigh over three hundred years later, and which was related by him as truth in his *Discoverie of Guiana*. Indeed, this belief gave the Amazon River its name.

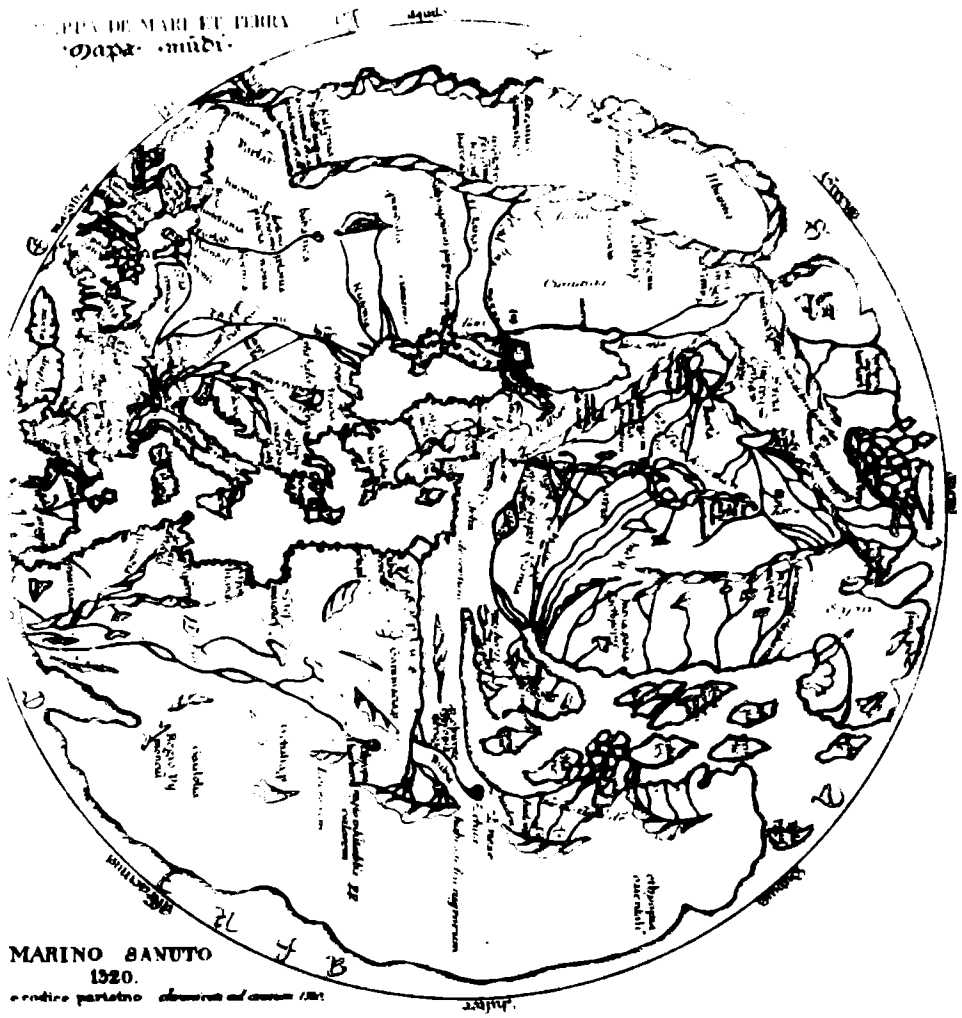
Messer Marco mentions ambergris as one of the products of this island, and of others in the Indian Ocean. He records that it is found in the belly of the whale—a fact now proved by science—and the frequency of his references to it as an article of commerce shows that there must have been a considerable traffic in it in his day. There is no early evidence of the use of this strange pathological intestinal secretion of the whale in the manufacture of perfumes, but other medieval uses of it are known. The Chinese called it "Lung Yen"—dragon's saliva—and it was in great demand by them as a medicine, especially as an aphrodisiac. The Hindus used it so, and Burton found it used for the same purpose, mixed with coffee, among the Arabs of the African coast. Arabian medieval medicine held it a valuable heart stimulant as well

as a distinct and delectable flavor in cooking, and even Western medicine once placed great faith in its healing properties.

In the chapter on Socotra, lying according to Marco Polo about five hundred miles south of the "male and female" islands, the Zelada manuscript has preserved a long and very interesting description of the taking of whales by harpoon in the Indian Ocean. The medieval methods of whaling seem to have differed in only a few details from those of modern times.

The next description of interest in the tale of the wanderings of the three Venetians on their journey homeward is of a place they did not visit—the great island of Madagascar. Though it is noteworthy that Marco is the first traveler who mentions and describes the island, the narration is full of errors, probably the result of the hearsay information on which he draws for his notes. He speaks of the entire population as "Saracens who adore Mohammed," and mentions lions, elephants, giraffes, camels, etc. Much of this information is either incorrect or an indication of a confusion in his mind of Madagascar with other African coastal regions about which he had been told. In discussing Madagascar he tells of the "grifons"—the mythical *roc* or *rukh* of the *Arabian Nights*—to which reference is made by numerous writers of medieval Europe, Asia, and Africa. Though the form of the tale would make it appear that Messer Marco had heard it together with many others, from Arab seafarers, he informs us in all seriousness that the Great Khan himself had sent messengers to inquire about the giant birds. He further states (according to one Venetian manuscript) that the messengers had brought a wing feather of the *rukh* to the Great Khan, and solemnly deposes that he, Marco Polo, measured it himself and found it ninety handbreadths long and two of his palms in circumference. What the object which he thus saw and measured with his own hands at the court of Kublai Khan actually was we shall probably never know. Perhaps it was in the class of the dwarf mummies of the Malay Archipelago which had incensed him so much.

After the description of Madagascar and its wonders, the next notes of the traveler concern Zanzibar, a place most likely never seen or visited by him. It was a very important center of the ivory trade, as it still is. Marco's description of the African Negroes is so vivid that there is no doubt that he saw some of them in the course of his voyages:



Map of the world by Marino Sanudo (ca. 1320), from Lelewel's *Geographie du Moyen Age*. (Courtesy of the Library of the University of California)

And they are all black and go naked (except for a small covering) And they have the hair curly and black so like unto pepper-corns that even with water could it hardly be straightened. They have so large a mouth and the nose so flat and turned up and the lips and the eyes so large and so bloodshot and so red that they are a very horrible thing to behold For whosoever should see them in another land would say of them that they are devils. And again I tell you that the women of this island are a most ugly thing to behold. For they have great mouths and large eyes and large noses. They have breasts four times as large as have other women. They are a very ugly thing to behold.

Our adventurer then bids farewell to Zanzibar with a most intimate, amusing, and altogether erroneous account of the love life of the elephant, a description of the way in which the elephants are used in war, and how the natives make them drunk before riding on them into battle.

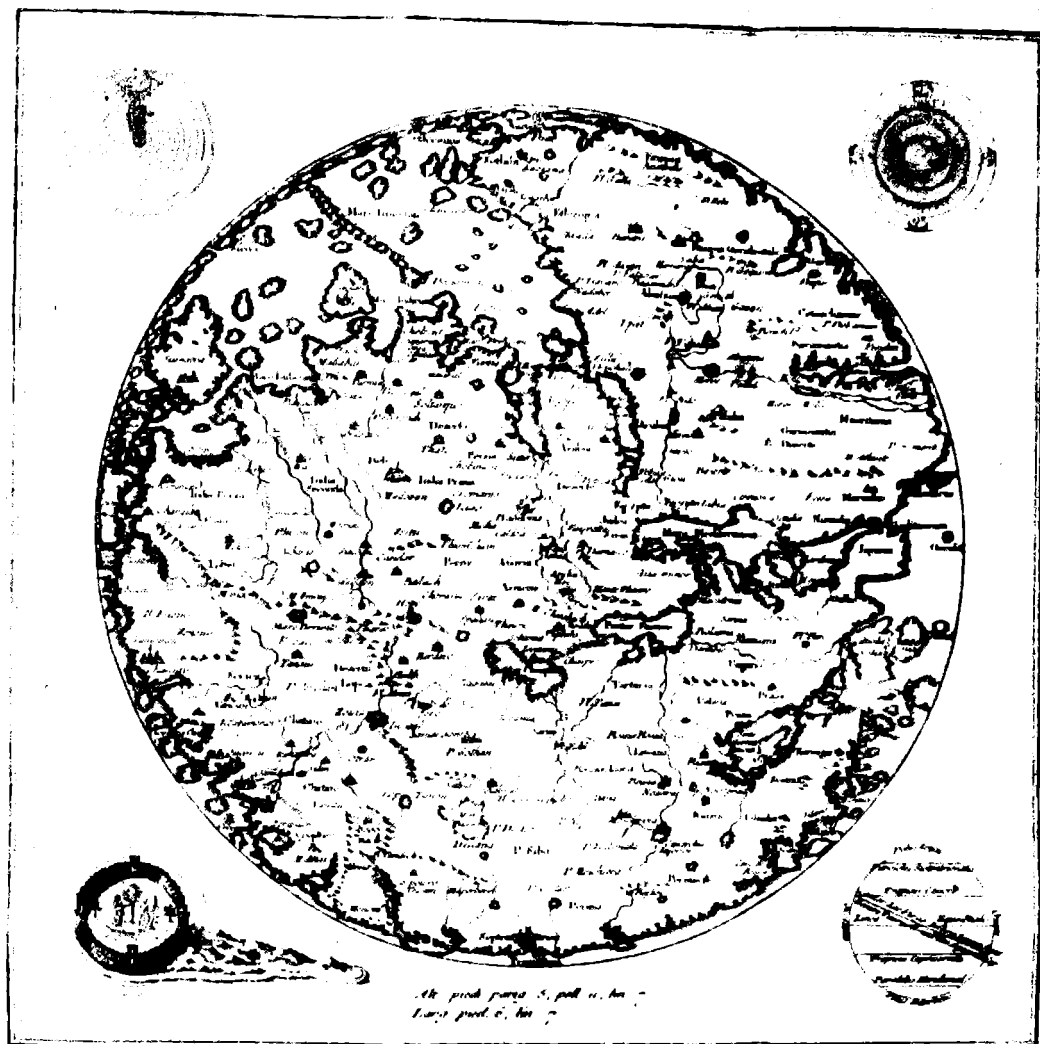
Marco realized that his survey of the lands visited by him was a cursory and insufficient one, for he says: "you should know truly that we have not told you of the isles of India except of the most noble provinces and kingdoms and isles which are there, for there is no man on earth who can tell the truth about all the lands of India."

The land next described is Abyssinia, which, curiously enough is designated as part of "Middle India." This confusion of parts of the northeastern portion of Africa was common from classic times down to the time when the various regions were finally explored and mapped.

In describing Abyssinia, "ostriches hardly smaller than an ass" are mentioned, with no further description or exclamation of surprise. Evidently the Venetians of the period were well acquainted with the bird, or Marco had seen them so often that they were no longer noteworthy enough for him to describe them at length.

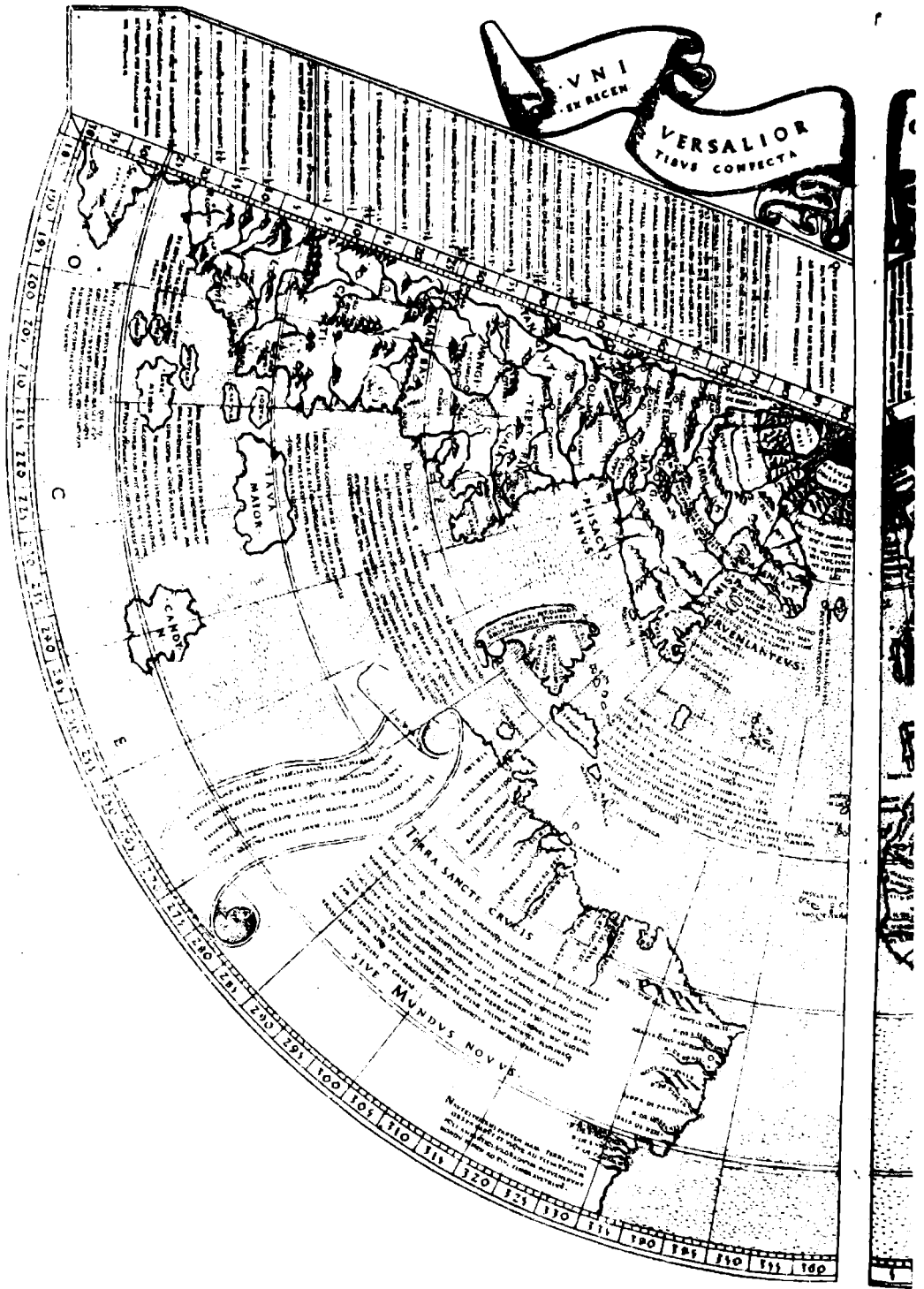
The expedition was finally drawing near its destination, and the third division of the book closes with a summary sketch of Aden and the southern regions of the Arabian Peninsula. The final notation of the voyage consists of a very short additional description of Hormuz, that Persian port which the Polos had found so distasteful and disappointing on the outward journey. Then follows a fourth division of the narrative, introduced by the words, as found in several fourteenth-century Latin manuscripts: "now I shall touch upon certain noble and especially fine provinces and regions which are in the farthest parts of the north, about which, for the sake of brevity, I omitted to tell in its proper place above in the first part of the book."

The opening pages of this book consist of an account of several



ABBOZZO DEL MAPPAMONDO DI F. MAURO CAMALDOLESE.
 Cosmografo incomparabile alla metà del Sec. XV.
 ESISTENTE NELLA BIBLIOTECA DI S. MICHELE IN MURANO PRESSO VENEZIA.

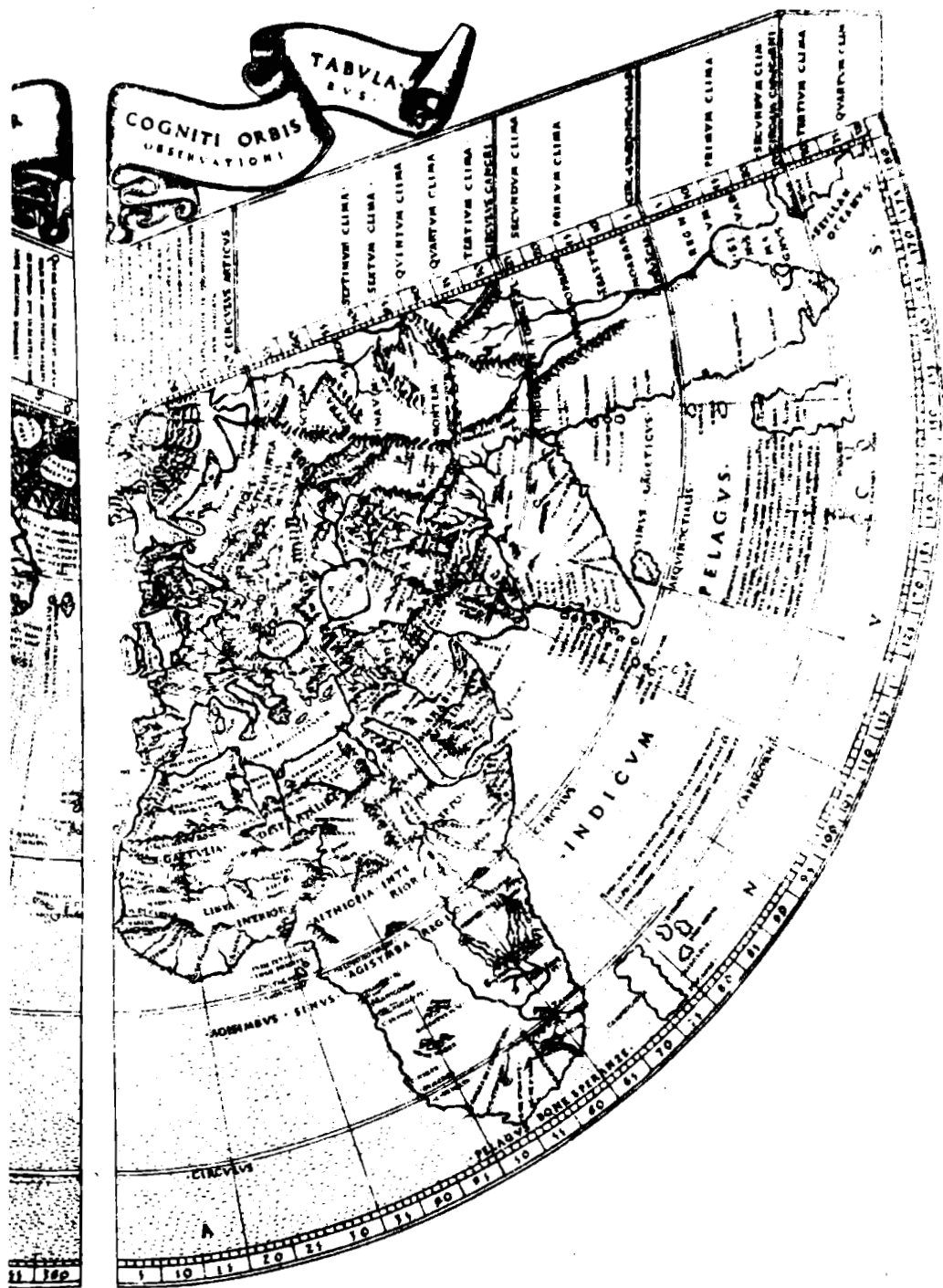
Map of the world by Fra Mauro (middle of the fifteenth century), in San Michele di Murano, Venice. From the author's collection



RUYSCH, UNIVERSALIOR COGNITI ORBIS TABULA
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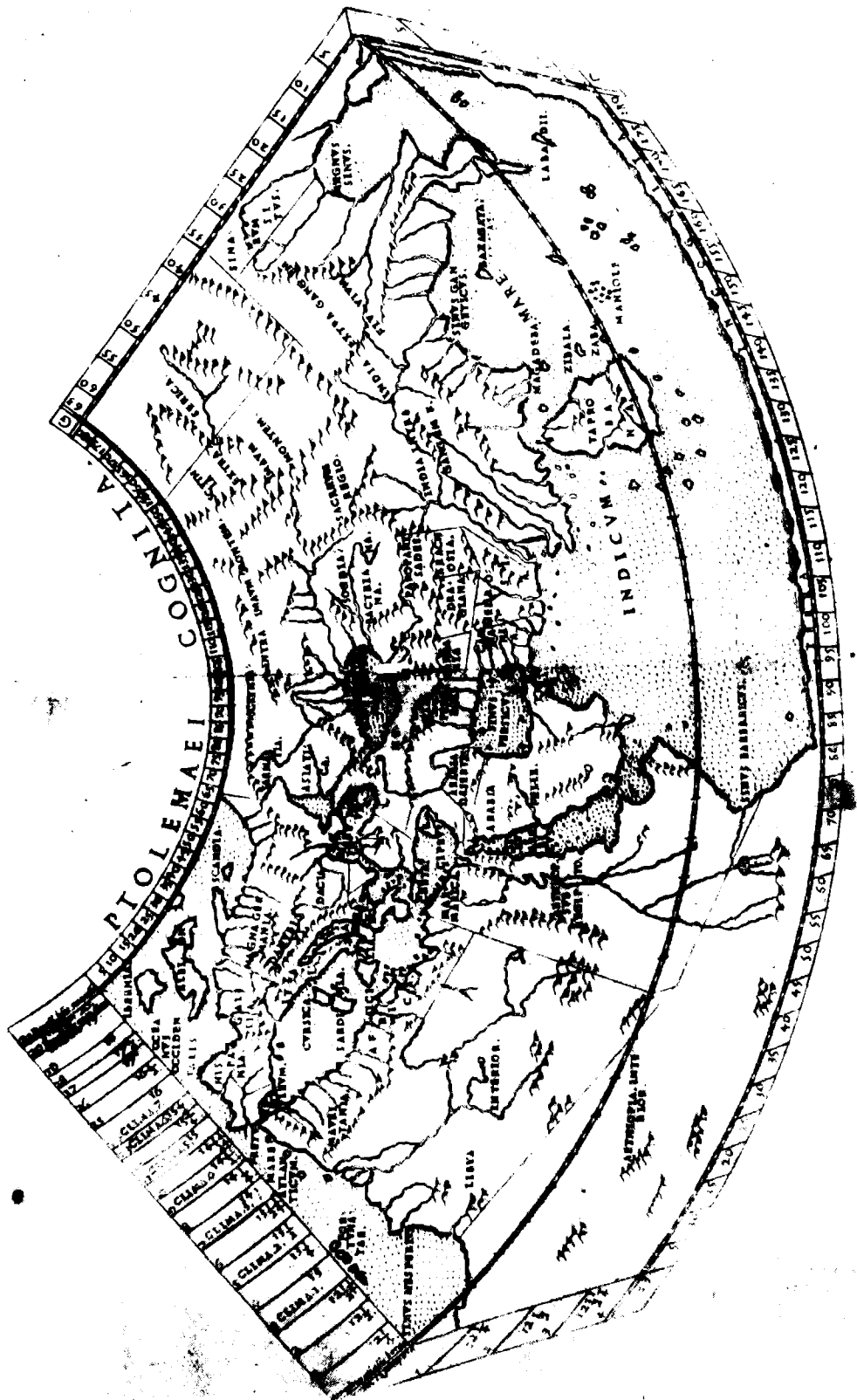
EX
ROM

Map of the world by Johann Ruysch, from the *Nova Universalis Orbis Cogniti Tabula* (Rome, 1522). Reprinted from A. E. Nordenskiöld,



TABULA EX RECENTIBUS CONFECTA OBSERVATIONIBUS
 ROMÆ 1508

Facsimile Atlas to the Early History of Cartography (Stockholm, 1889). (Courtesy of the Library of the University of California)



Map of the world, from *La Geografia di Claudio Tolomeo*, ed. by Giacomo Contarini (Venice, 1574). From the author's collection

obscure wars of the Tartars, all of which adds but little to the interest of the tale and throws no light either on Marco himself or on the lands actually visited by him. Following this outline of the Tartar wars is a description of Russia and Siberia. Though there is absolutely no evidence that Marco Polo visited Russia, the chapter is full of detail, partly accurate, partly quite erroneous. A large section of this account remained unknown until the recent discovery of the Zelada manuscript. This section supplies, together with a scabrous story quite unworthy of Marco Polo, some interesting information on the customs of the medieval Russians. After a further account of some long-forgotten Tartar wars, Marco's story ends very abruptly in all manuscripts except one early Tuscan copy, which contains an additional paragraph possibly ascribable to some anonymous translator. This paragraph reads:

Now you have heard all the facts, as much as can be told of them, of the Tartars and of the Saracens, and of their customs, and of the other countries which are throughout the world, as much as is possible to search out and to know, except that of the Greater Sea we have spoken or said nothing, nor of the provinces which are around it, although we have visited it all well. Therefore I omit telling of it, for it appears to me that it would be wearisome to recount that which would be neither necessary nor useful, nor that which others know each day, for there are so many who explore and navigate [on] it every day, as is well known, such as the Venetians and Genoese and Pisans and many other folk who make that voyage often, that everyone knows what is there; and therefore I remain silent and tell you nothing of that. Of our departure, how we took our leave of the Great Khan, you have heard in the beginning of the book in one chapter where it is told of the trouble and weary time which Messer Maffeo and Messer Nicolo and Messer Marco had in asking of the Great Khan permission to depart, and in that chapter is told the good fortune we had in our leaving. And know that if that good fortune had not come to pass, we should [not?] have ever gotten away [even] with great weariness and much trouble, so that hardly should we have ever returned to our country. But I believe that it was the pleasure of God, our return, in order that the things which are in the world might be known. For according to the account which we have given in the beginning of the book under the first title, there was never a man, either Christian or Saracen or Tartar or pagan, who ever explored so much of the world as did Messer Marco, a son of Messer Nicolo Polo, noble and great citizen of the city of Venice. Thanks to God . . . Amen Amen.

Thus ends the story of Marco Polo's travels through Asia and the Indies, together with the descriptions of the people and countries visited by him or about which he heard along the African coast.

For our knowledge of the arrival of the expedition in Persia and the subsequent adventures of the three Polos we must rely on the short and extremely meager account in the introductory chapters of Marco's book, supplemented by such information as may be gleaned elsewhere. He says: "I tell you that they sailed the sea of India a full eighteen months before the arrival there where they wished to go . . ." The whole journey from China had consumed two years and a half, and the travelers had suffered much from adverse winds, sickness, and other misfortunes, which Marco, with his customary reticence about his trials and tribulations, omits to mention. When the ships sailed from China they carried six hundred souls, in addition to the hundreds of sailors. Of these passengers all had perished but eighteen by the time the ships arrived at the Persian port of Hormuz. And only one of the three ambassadors who had journeyed so long and striven so faithfully to bring home a bride for their king had survived the hardships of the voyage.

The landing at Hormuz was far different from the earlier visit of the Venetians on their outward journey, when, for some unknown reason, they had changed their minds about sailing from Hormuz to China. Arriving as envoys from the Grand Khan, the Polos saw the city through rosier glasses. They marveled at the great number of vessels loading and unloading in the gulf ports—Chinese junks, Persian vessels of all kinds and sizes, and swift Arab boats, which were gradually monopolizing all the sea-borne traffic between the Red Sea and the China Coast.

The streets of Hormuz were swarming with people from every quarter of Asia, and now and then even Genoese, Pisans, and Venetians were to be seen. Every tongue of Asia could be heard—Persian, Arabic, Hindu, Chinese—for mainland Hormuz, in these last years of its glory, was one of the busiest entrepôts for the sea trade between India and Europe. Heaped high on the wharves and along the shores of the port, or drawn in wagons with creaking wheels slow-moving through the hot, dusty narrow streets of the water front could be seen the wares of the Indies and the Levant. There were spices and drugs and pepper, dates and raisins and sulphur, nutmeg and cloves, cinnamon and ginger, sandalwood and saffron, sugar, rice, mace, and camphor. The bazaars were heaped to overflowing with musk and rhubarb, turquoises and emeralds, rubies, sapphires and amethysts, topazes, hyacinths and zircons, porcelains, gum benzoin, and quicksilver. Traffic was

brisk in brocades and silks, vermilion and attar of roses, pearls and chrysolites. From hand to hand passed rich cotton cloths and fine gauzes, daggers and knives and swords, all inlaid and decorated with gold and silver. And over the crowded streets and shops hung the acrid dust, the heavy odors of incense and sweltering humanity, of animals and garbage, which pervade every market town in the East—an odor once experienced never forgotten, an odor ever nostalgic to the traveler and the wanderer.

How the crowds must have amused him—the Persians, very white and fair, fat and luxurious, with their beautiful dark-eyed women, the dark Arabs from the Yemen and the desert, tall, thin, nervous, aquiline of nose, sharp of eye, often wearing proudly the green turban of a hadji, or one who had made the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca. There were people of every color—tall tribesmen from Abyssinia, Copts from Egypt, Jews from every land, Hindus with their caste marks, Mongols from the steppes, and—to Marco like a glimpse from home—Chinese; also sailors gathered from every port between Canton and Alexandria, slaves, soldiers, water carriers, fruit vendors, and merchants.

The travelers were met by an escort of soldiers in long white cotton shirts, with thick sashes wound about their waists, and wearing daggers and knives and heavy short swords. They were equipped with large round shields and powerful Turkish bows of hard wood, re-inforced with laminated strips of buffalo-horn. Some carried maces, others battle-axes, all inlaid or enameled. They made a fine show, and never had the Polos felt so much at home since they had left the imperial guard of honor which bade them farewell at faraway Zaiton.

Upon landing at Hormuz the Venetians learned of many events which had taken place during their long absence. They were much distressed at the news that death had carried off the Lord Arghun before they had sailed from Cathay, even that Arghun who had dispatched the three ambassadors from Persia to his kinsman Kublai to seek a wife to succeed the Lady Bolgana. The maid Cocachin was thus bereft of her affianced bridegroom, and the Venetians were sorely puzzled as to what to do with her.

Arghun's brother Kaikhatu was ruling as regent in his stead, for Arghun's young son, Ghazan, an insignificant-looking youth but one well endowed with energy and intelligence. The leaders of the expedi-

tion presented themselves before the sovereign and gave a report of their journey from far-off Cathay. After a state reception and the usual wearisome Oriental exchange of amenities, Kaikhatu directed the Polos to escort the maid Cocachin to Ghazan, who was away with his army guarding the passes on the Khorasan frontier. The young girl was far more suited to be the wife of the youthful Ghazan than of his father. They were evidently satisfied with each other, for they were married shortly thereafter.*

There is a curious additional passage at this point in two of the oldest manuscripts of Marco Polo's narrative. This passage informs us (although she is mentioned nowhere else in his book) that in addition to Cocachin the Venetians had been entrusted with the daughter of the King of Manzi (perhaps a daughter of the conquered Sung monarch) and that she, too, had been brought by them safely to Persia. Perhaps she also had been sent as an additional wife to the Khan Arghun. We know nothing further of her subsequent fate.

And I tell you indeed that these two great ladies were in the care of these three messengers [the Polos], for they caused them to be saved and protected as though they were their daughters, and the ladies who were very young and beautiful held these three as their fathers and obeyed them thus. And these three placed them in the hands of their lord. And indeed I tell you in all truth that Cocachin who is wife to Ghazan wished such great good to the messengers that there is nothing that she would not do for them, as her father himself. For you should know that when these three messengers departed from her to return to their country she shed tears for grief at their departure. Now I have recounted to you a thing which is well worthy to be praised, how unto these three messengers were entrusted two such ladies, to be escorted to their lord from so distant a place. Now we shall leave you with this, and will continue to tell you our story.

And in these few short, simple, unadorned, and dispassionate pages Marco dismissed his account of what must have been a long and arduous voyage, one crowded with perils of shipwreck, hunger, thirst, heat, and the attacks of savage and unfriendly tribes. Nowhere in the annals of exploration is there such a terse, impersonal record of so adventurous a journey by land and by sea. The entire story of the ven-

* In 1295 Ghazan succeeded to the throne of his father after his uncle Kaikhatu had been murdered in a revolt. His reign, though short, was one of distinction and progress for his country. Poor Cocachin did not survive to enjoy her throne long. She died in 1296, just about the time the Polos finally reached Venice.

turesome voyage with its dangers and its inconveniences is told in half a dozen pages, all in that quiet, impersonal fashion so characteristic of those portions of Marco's tale which refer to his personal affairs.

Marco concludes these few paragraphs, which so reticently tell of a journey with which many another traveler would fill a closely written volume, plentifully sprinkled with the pronoun "I," with "*Et que vous en diriez?*"—"and what shall I tell you of it?"

After having safely delivered the Lady Cocachin into the hands of her future husband Ghazan, the three Venetians returned to Kaikhatu, who was probably residing at the time in his city of Tabriz. The city lay on their route homeward, and they were glad to take advantage of its comparative security and comfort to recuperate from the long sea journey. We are nowhere told why they postponed their return homeward to Venice, but their sojourn in Tabriz lasted nine months. It may be that they were retained by Kaikhatu for reasons of state. It may be that they were awaiting the arrival of their goods or servants on other boats from China. Perhaps local wars were blocking the caravan routes over which they would have to pass. It may be that they were awaiting letters from Venice or elsewhere, or that there was sickness among them. Perhaps the keenness of all three of the Polos for trade and bargaining made them unwilling to forego another opportunity of adding to their capital or of exchanging bulky possessions for wealth which could be more easily carried on their persons or more surely concealed from marauders. One may speculate on these or other reasons for the delay at Tabriz; but nothing certain is known, nor is the exact reason ever likely to be revealed to us.

However, one event of their stay has been recorded. From a clause in Messer Maffeo's will we learn that his servant Marcheto died during the stay at Tabriz, and that he entrusted to Messer Maffeo certain moneys to be taken with him back to Venice, a part for his natural son Mayço, a part for the mother of the boy, one Juça.

Finally, however, the Polos decided to resume their journey toward Venice and appeared before Kaikhatu to bid him farewell. As part of the reward for their great services the regent presented to them "four golden tablets of authority," two decorated with gerfalcons, one with the figure of a lion, and the fourth plain. And each "was a cubit long and five fingers wide, and weighed from twenty-four to thirty-two ounces." These tablets were worth far more to the Venetians than their

mere weight in gold, for they bore inscriptions which notified all subjects of the Khan "that by the power of the eternal God the name of the Great Khan must be honored and praised for many years, and that every person who does not obey shall be put to death and his goods confiscated, and, moreover, that these three ambassadors should be honored and served throughout all the lands and countries as though they were his [the Khan's] own person, and that their expenses should be met, and horses given them, and such escorts as might be necessary."


These tablets proved to be of inestimable value to the Polos; for, adds Marco, "through the land they were treated most liberally, and were supplied with horses and all else required for the journey. Moreover, escorts, sometimes numbering over two hundred horsemen, accompanied them" through the parts of the country where danger threatened. This was the more necessary because Kaikhatu's authority was not accepted unquestioningly in all parts of Persia and a strong guard was often needful to insure the safety of the merchants and their retinue.

It was perhaps during this part of their journey that news was brought to the Venetians that their great and good friend Kublai Khan, Lord of all the Tartars, "was cut off from this life," information which snatched away from them all hope of being able to return to those parts. They were mightily disturbed and genuinely grieved at this bad news, for the all-powerful monarch had consistently been their protector and patron from the day of their arrival in his domains many years before. They had grown rich in his service, and he had showered upon them honors and distinctions with a liberal hand. But mingled with their perturbation was a note of self-congratulation and thankfulness that they had escaped the evil fate which would surely have overtaken them had they remained in the Great Khan's service. Their good fortune seemed to have served them well once more, and to have contrived their escape with their lives and their fortunes when they had given up all hope of being able to return to the West again.*

* That this information was brought to the Polos while on their homeward journey, or if they received it later, or ever, is questionable. Marco everywhere in his book speaks of Kublai Khan as though he were alive when the book was compiled. It is another of the numerous small difficulties in the Polo story which have not been elucidated, for the manuscripts differ, and without doubt suffered the usual interpolations, excisions, revisions, etc., of the copyists and editors of the Middle Ages. Moreover, in some cases the statements of the manuscript reveal anachronisms which are at present inexplicable.

Chapter Six

From Tabriz to Venice

ONTINUAL PETTY WARS between Persia and Egypt made the caravan route impassable from Tabriz to the Syrian coast, where the Venetians had planned to take ship for Italy. The Sultan of Egypt at the moment held all of the Syrian seaports, and it would have been folly to proceed thither. The Polos therefore chose the well-traveled caravan route which led in a more northerly region. This itinerary brought Marco into regions which he had not visited before, and his description of the country fills several interesting chapters of his book. As the caravan slowly drew nearer the Euxine the Venetians crossed historic ground with each day's march, the battlegrounds of ancient empires, and the sites of long-dead cities. Their anxiety and longing to reach home grew ever more intense as they traversed country which was more or less familiar, at least to the two elder Polos. They were now in the lands where since the beginning of man's struggle on earth the East had come in contact with the West and one merged into the other almost imperceptibly.

Though Marco had probably never heard of Xenophon and the famous march of the Ten Thousand, he and his caravan were hastening over the territory traversed by the ancient Greek mercenaries, and with the same aim in view—to reach their native land as quickly as possible, and with whole skins. So too, though he and his companions did not cry “thalassa! thalassa!” when they beheld the sea from the mountain-tops, they must have been uncommonly thrilled at the first sight of the waters of the Black Sea and at the realization that at last they were really drawing near the land of their birth, to which they had been complete strangers for more than twenty-five years.

Finally, after much time and many difficulties, "by the grace of God they came to Trebizond," the ancient Greek colony on the Euxine, the city where Xenophon had rested his weary troops full seventeen hundred years before. Trebizond was more nearly like Europe than any other city upon which they had laid eyes for many a year. It was spread out before them on a tableland beside the sea, a Byzantine wall encircled both it and the sloping hills behind it, and all about stretched fertile orchards and a smiling land. It had been the dwelling place of the Greek emperors after their flight from Constantinople when the city was stormed by Baldwin and Dandolo, and was still cherished by them. Their Genoese allies had been granted a special quarter and a great castle with high walls, and Genoa's merchants controlled the greater part of the city's trade. Though under Greek rule, the town was full of Turks, and Turkish influences could be seen everywhere in the people's manners and customs and dress. Even the Emperor's soldiers carried Turkish shields and bows and swords, and rode their horses short-stirruped after the fashion of the Ottoman Turks.

Venetian merchants still dwelt and trafficked in Trebizond, and the Polos met many on the great broad main business thoroughfare which skirted the seashore on the city's lower edge. They learned from them what had occurred in Europe and in the Levant since they had left it all behind in 1271 when they had turned eastward to further their fortunes in Cathay. They picked up, too, all the current news of politics and of business.

The three travelers must have remained for a considerable time at Trebizond, or at least in the adjacent Black Sea regions, for Marco acquired much knowledge of the territory and told of it in his book. Perhaps it was a trading venture, or the delayed arrival of a ship, or political matters which again postponed for a time the resumption of their journey homeward. As before, we are left with nothing but speculation and mere surmise. During their stay at Trebizond, however, the Polos seem to have had some serious difficulty and to have suffered a heavy monetary loss. Marco does not refer to this matter in any way in his own narrative, and the knowledge of it comes from an unexpected source—the will of his uncle Maffeo.

It will be remembered that the short-lived Latin kingdom of Constantinople had been established by Baldwin with the help of the Venetians and that their overthrow was accomplished by an alliance

between the Greeks and the Genoese, Venice's most powerful and most hated commercial rivals in the Eastern Mediterranean world. The Genoese were now in the ascendancy in all the Levantine ports, and the ousted Venetians were probably most harshly treated by both Greeks and Genoese—though probably not more harshly than they had treated the Genoese, the Pisans, and the merchants of Amalfi in the days gone by. Perhaps this unfriendliness of the Greeks and Genoese was to blame for the disaster which befell the Polos. Messer Maffeo's testament, dated February 6, 1310, and making Marco Polo one of his executors, records that he has

satisfied the aforesaid Marco Polo my nephew . . . finally with reference to those three hundred and thirty-three and one-third pounds which were owing to me from those thousand pounds which the aforesaid Marco Polo received from the Lord Doge and from the Commune of the Venetians for a part of the loss inflicted on us by the Lord Comnenos of Trebizond as well as in the territory of the same Lord Comnenos and also in others of our transactions, and I testify with regard to all other accounts which I might have to adjust with the said Marco Polo that I have reimbursed him in full, and, as for the rest, that I ought to have a third part of all that which may be received or recovered in whatsoever way or title, and I testify that the aforesaid loss inflicted on us as well by the aforesaid Lord Comnenos of Trebizond as in his territory was in the sum of about four thousand hyperpera.*

Thus the will of one of the travelers, written fifteen years after the return to Venice, and studied but recently, has brought new light to bear on the lives of the Polos, about which we know as yet far too little.

The journey from Trebizond to Constantinople was made by sea. After a brief stay at the Byzantine capital, where the Venetians were neither as powerful nor as welcome as in the days when the elder Polos had lived there thirty-five years before, the travelers again embarked with their servants, their merchandise, and their numerous slaves. It was the last stage of their arduous journey, begun in 1292, and they were impatient of each delay, of every unfavorable wind which might hold them back. After a short stopover made by their vessel at the Venetian trading port of Negropont, in Euboea, the weary Polos continued on their way, past the foam-girt green isles of the Aegean, skirting the rocky headlands of the Greek coast, and on past Corfu,

* The hyperpera, or solidus, was a gold coin of the period worth about \$3.00 in United States money.

their prow pointed north, their keel now cleaving the home waters of the Adriatic.

At last the day of days arrived. There lay Venice before them, the home of which they had so long dreamed, the home so often envisioned by them in the chill long watches of the night, under strange, bright stars and amid alien folk. Venice, glorified and exalted in their homesick hearts by years of absence and seen through the golden mist of tender memories. Venice, their mother-city, which had given birth to them, and nurtured them and set their feet upon the path. There she lay in the distance, a jewel set in a sparkling sea, proud and arrogant as ever, with her innumerable high palaces and tall towers, St. Mark's swelling domes reflecting the sun's hot glare, San Giorgio seen as though afloat on the water inside the Lido, the Campanile appearing to reach to the very heavens, and far away the faint blue mountains in the north. There was the harbor, now that they drew nearer and could distinguish things more clearly. It was as busy as ever: ships moving to and fro, coming in like their own or departing heavy laden for foreign lands, or rocking at their anchors as though impatient to be off. The same small boats and gondolas moved swiftly about the port or appeared and disappeared in the canals and about the quays, the same familiar odor, the same musical voices and cries borne to them on the soft wind. Somehow they had expected to find their city different, changed with the passing years. Yet there she was, the same tight cluster of islands, bright in her blue and gray and silver garments, the same beautiful and seductive bride of the Adriatic, her vows renewed each year by her Doge, still undisputed mistress of the seas and of the hearts of men.

Then the Polos realized that they had expected a change in their city because they themselves had changed. A quarter of a century had passed over their heads since last they had seen the unfinished top of the Campanile sink swiftly beneath the northern horizon. Nicolo and Messer Maffeo had grown old. Now they sadly realized it, gazing furtively one at the other. Marco, too, had become a sober, grave-eyed man past forty, heavier, preoccupied, made older and wiser than his years by what he had experienced and learned. For he had beheld what was given to but few human beings to behold, and now he was coming back to the home of his childhood, a stranger. His boyhood friends had probably forgotten him—how many of our companions of

fifteen are still our friends in the forties? His real friends, those of his youth and his mature manhood, were far away, many thousands of miles away, dwelling in strange lands, speaking strange tongues, living strange lives. The men, and the women too, who had shaped his character and who had set his standards of life and of action were now but wraiths of the past. He was cut off from them forever; return was impossible.

Yet Marco feared this city of his, this great Venice, proudly silhouetted against the sky. It too was strange. Removed from all contacts with her and her people since boyhood, speaking his mother tongue with a thick accent born of years of disuse of the Venetian and the constant use of the language of the Tartars even in converse with his father and his uncle, Venice seemed almost as foreign to him as did Cambaluc when first he rode in through its high gates and past its bastioned walls in the morning of his years. A vague feeling of resentment crept over him, for arrival in Venice meant beginning a new life among unknown people whose ways were no longer his ways, whose thoughts were no longer his thoughts. He may have had a premonition that the curtain had fallen on the better part of his life, that thereafter would come anticlimax and decline, that shortly the tide would turn and ebb. What would it mean to begin life anew at forty, to settle in a sea-girt town after wandering up and down on the winds of the world for years, to draw the curtain irrevocably on the glittering pageant of the medieval Orient with its vivid memories of life and perhaps of love? Surely these thoughts and questions must have surged in upon the mind of Messer Marco, as he stood at the ship's prow and watched her slowly creep in past the Lido and finally drop anchor in the shallows.

The wearisome voyage was over, the longest journey ever made and recorded by any man in all the world's history. As that anchor sank to the bottom in the tidal channel of Venice, the gates of his life in Asia clanged to with its splash, even as the great city gates of far-away Cambaluc were swung shut when the drums boomed out the hour of twilight and the coming of the night, and just as the great bars were dropped in their sockets by the Mongol guards inside, so in Marco's soul the bars dropped which locked out from his life forevermore that dream-world of his youth which had become the real world of his manhood, and now was once more become a land of dreams, but this

time irrevocable, irretrievable, all belonging to the past. One wonders if his joy at arriving at Venice in safety with a fortune in his hands was not shot through and made somber by an aching homesickness for the lands he had left in the Far East with his dead youth.

And so "they returned unharmed to Venice, with great riches and with an honorable retinue. Which was the year of the Lord 1295, giving thanks unto God, who had conducted them to their home safe, and rescued from many dangers."

DISILLUSIONMENT

Slowly and sadly
 The river flows
 On its long journey
 To the sea.
 A solitary wild goose
 Calls under the moon,
 And the night
 Is a gleam with frost.

If for ten long years
 You have wandered
 In the distant lands
 Of the earth,
 Be not in too much haste
 To seek
 News of your faraway home.*

WANG TSO (*fl. ca. 1368*)

* *A Garden of Peonies*, by Henry H. Hart (Stanford University Press, 1938).

Chapter Seven

Venice

SUPERIOR HISTORY has recorded nothing of the landing of the Polos in Venice, nor of their reception by their family and fellow citizens. But legend and editors and commentators have preserved some pretty stories to ornament the wondrous tale of the wanderers. If they are not true, well then—as Giordano Bruno has it—*se non è vero, è ben trovato*. So let us recount the incidents. They may have happened. Who knows? The skeptic is not half so happy, nor perhaps half so wise, as he who accepts with reservations, in lack of further proof of what is false and what is true.

Followed by their slaves and servants carrying their gear and merchandise, Messer Maffeo, Messer Nicolo, and his son Marco disembarked and once again set foot upon the stones of their native city. As they did so they may have recalled the ancient Venetian proverb, "Beware of three things in Venice: slippery steps of stone, priests, and women of easy virtue." Their legs were stiff and aching from long days in cramped quarters, and the pavement seemed to heave up toward them like the deck of a ship at sea. Once more seated in the familiar gondolas—how unlike the "shoe-boats" of old China—they were conveyed swiftly through the dark canals and under the low bridges—how unlike the quaint structures that arched the canals and streams of Soochow and Quinsai the magnificent—to the old family residence. Could they see nothing without recalling the sights and odors and sounds of old Cathay? Would they never be able to speak or think or even breathe in this Venice of their fathers without mental comparisons with the lands and peoples and customs of the gorgeous East? Would they always be haunted by clamoring ghosts of the past?

At last they reached their home, which was, as Ramusio quaintly states,

in the district of San Giovanni Chrisostomo, as today it can still be seen, which at that time was a most beautiful and very high place . . . and when they arrived there the same fate befell them as befell Ulysses, who, when after twenty years he returned from Troy to Ithaca, his native land, was recognized by none.

They knocked at the door, for they had learned that some of their relatives had moved in and were dwelling there comfortably as in their own homes. Those who responded to their summons did not know them. The travelers had been away nearly twenty-six years, and, though vague reports of their wanderings may have drifted back to Venice during the earlier part of their protracted absence, as the years had rolled by and they had never returned they had long been given up as dead.

The Polos found it almost impossible to convince their kinsfolk of their identity. The long duration of their absence, the many hardships and worries that they had suffered, had changed their faces and their appearance entirely. "They had an indescribable something of the Tartar in their aspect and in their way of speech, having almost forgotten the Venetian tongue. Those garments of theirs were much the worse for wear, and were made of coarse cloth, and cut after the fashion of the Tartars." The dwellers in their house refused to believe that these rough men, who in no way resembled the handsome, well-dressed gentlemen who had sailed from Venice to Acre in 1271, were Messer Nicolo Polo, his brother Messer Maffeo, and his son Marco. No, they were too shabby, too down-at-the-heels, and all in all too disreputable to be taken at their word. One of these who met them at the door was most likely Maffeo, the young half-brother of Marco. They had never seen each other, nor did Marco know that Maffeo existed. For Maffeo, like Marco himself, had been born after his father had left Venice. Finally, with much misgiving and doubt, the doors were grudgingly thrown open, and the three adventurers were hesitatingly permitted to set foot once again in their own house.

"And what should I tell you?" For strange tales like unto those of "The Thousand and One Nights" are told of the homecoming of the three.

The story has been handed from father to son that the sordid and tattered clothes of Messer Maffeo sorely irked his neat wife—who must



Calle dei Milione, Venice, in 1940. From the author's collection

after all have recognized and received him as her husband. One day, even though he seemed to treasure and watch over them as something most precious, she gave his Tartar rags in disgust to a beggar who had come to her door and moved her to pity. And when Messer Maffeo asked that evening for his clothes—for you must know that all his jewels were sewn therein, in the seams and under the patches thereof—she confessed that she had given them away to an unknown beggar. Messer Maffeo flew into a towering rage and became as one possessed. He tore his hair and beat his breast and paced the floor for hours, thinking up some stratagem whereby he might recover his lost riches. At last he decided upon a plan. Early the next morning he betook himself to the Bridge of the Rialto, where the stream of Venetian life pulsed back and forth at every hour and where one could, if one waited long enough, be sure of finding his man. Messer Maffeo carried a wheel with him, and sat him down in a corner and set about spinning the wheel aimlessly, like unto one whose brain is addled. And all the while the crowd milled around him and men cried, “What do you thus, and why?” and his only reply seemed inane and meaningless, the echo of an empty brain. “He will come, God willing,” he answered unto each of his questioners—only that. And from mouth to mouth and ear to ear the word flew through the canals of Venice, and into the market places and the churches, and wherever men and women gathered to talk one to the other. For Venetians have been wont of old to gossip, and scandal and tittle-tattle are the life-breath of idle folk. And all the city flocked to see the strange sight at the Rialto. But Messer Maffeo was neither dolt nor idiot. On the third day one came in his turn to see the foolery of the madman spinning his wheel; and, behold, it was the same beggar to whom Messer Maffeo’s wife had shown charity, and on his back were the very Tartar garments that she had given him! With a cry of triumph Messer Maffeo leaped up and seized the hapless man, and so recovered his coat still intact, with the treasures it contained all untouched. Then indeed did Venice learn that in Messer Maffeo they had no mad fellow citizen but one well versed in the ways of men and in wiles to ensnare them.

Of all the fascinating tales of the return of the Polos, the best known is that told so delightfully by Ramusio. The preface to his Venetian edition of Marco Polo, dated July 7, 1553, gives it as a story told him

by the magnificent Messer Gasparo Malpiero, a very old gentleman, and of singular goodness and integrity, who had his house on the Canal of Santa Marina, at the corner of the mouth of the Rio di San Giovan Chrisostomo, exactly at the middle point of the said Corte di Milioni [where the Polos lived, as we shall learn later], and he stated that he had heard it in turn from his own father and grandfather, and from some other old men, his neighbors.

And so Ramusio, having thus valiantly defended his fair name from all imputation of fabrication or exaggeration, sets down the story as he received it.

The kinsfolk of the Polos were, it would seem, still skeptical of the identity of the returned travelers and, even if no longer in doubt as to who they were, appeared to be in no way proud of their seedy, sorry-looking relatives. So the two elder Polos and Marco contrived a stratagem whereby they would secure immediate and unequivocal recognition from the family and at the same time win "the honor" (i.e., the honorable notice) of all the city—in a word, properly and profoundly impress their fellow Venetians.

They sent out invitations to their kinsmen—the most important, we may be sure—requesting them to honor the three returned travelers with their company at a banquet and an entertainment. In all this they were most particular, and all was prepared with great care and splendor, in fact "in most honorable fashion, and with much magnificence in that aforesaid house of theirs." At the appointed hour the canals about the house of the Polos were crowded with gondolas, filled with invited guests in their best finery. They were received with due ceremony, and each was assigned his place for the coming feast. All were curious and expectant, for perhaps the Polos were going to show some of the precious goods which they had brought back with them, or perhaps—who knows?—they were going to distribute gifts of value to their invited guests. You may be sure that none failed to come and greet the two elder Polos and Marco, who were in the great hall to welcome each guest as he arrived. Then they vanished.

When the hour for seating themselves at the table was come, the three came forth from their chamber each clad in long satin robes of crimson hue, reaching even to the ground as was the custom in the Venice of those days. And when the perfumed water had been brought for rinsing the hands, and the guests were all in their proper places at the table, Messer Nicolo and Messer Maffeo and Messer Marco rose

from their chairs, retired, divested themselves of the costly satin robes, donned others, of similar cut but of crimson damask, and reappeared. Then, to the horror and dismay of the invited kinsfolk—what wanton waste, with deserving relatives so close at hand!—they gave the order that the costly robes which they had just removed should be cut in pieces and the pieces distributed among the servants. And this was forthwith done.

A short time later, after some of the viands under which the well-set table groaned had been consumed and the guests had tossed the bones under the table and wiped their hands on the fine tablecloth, and after much wine had been drunk, the three rose once more and retired to their chamber. They emerged after a few moments, this time clad in expensive robes of crimson velvet. And when they had seated themselves once more at the table among their guests they ordered the damask robes which they had just removed to be brought out and cut to pieces before the whole company and the pieces given to the servants. More indignation and shocked and protesting murmurs, more meaningful glances—for kinsfolk are thus everywhere and in every age. But the order was forthwith obeyed, and each servitor received his piece of precious cloth.

The meal proceeded; but by now the family party was full of wonderment as to what might happen next. A buzz of conversation filled the room from end to end: It must be so. These three men rich enough to throw away a fortune in clothes in a few short hours must be their long-lost relatives. There was no doubt about it. The kinsfolk were convinced, and hailed the three by their names and tried to revive talk of old times and ancient reminiscences. The Polos smiled in their beards, looked grave, but said nothing. The dinner drew near its close, and it came time to set forth the sweets and pastries on the tables. Whereupon uprose the three men and retired once again to their chamber. There their servants removed the velvet robes, and the Polos re-entered the banquet hall dressed in the same kind of clothes as were worn by their invited guests. Again the order was given to cut up and distribute the costly velvet fabrics, and again the order was obeyed. "This thing made [all] marvel, and all the invited guests were as though struck by lightning." The cloths were then removed and the servants were ordered to leave the banquet hall.

As soon as they had retired and the doors were closed, Messer Marco

again rose from the table and entered his chamber. He returned without delay, bearing the well-worn garments of coarse cloth in which the three had been clad on the day when they had landed in Venice and sought admission to their home. All present held their breath, for none knew what these eccentric men might do next. Forthwith the three seized sharp knives and without more ado started to rip seams and linings,

and to bring forth from them enormous quantities of most precious gems such as rubies, sapphires, carbuncles, diamonds, and emeralds which had been sewn up in each of the said garments with much cunning and in such fashion that none would have been able to imagine that they were there. For when they took their departure from the Great Khan, they changed all the riches which he had given them into so many rubies, emeralds, and other precious stones, knowing well that had they done otherwise it would never have been possible for them to carry so much gold with them over such a long, difficult, and far-reaching road.

This magnificent and wholly unexpected display of a seemingly inexhaustible amount of precious stones spread so carelessly on the table caused more stir and excitement than ever, and the guests stood about dumbfounded and seemingly bereft of their senses. The tale ends on a sarcastic note, for Messer Giovanni Battista Ramusio appears to have had a rare sense of humor and to have known human frailties full well. His own words are best:

And now they [the kinsmen] knew in truth that those whom they had formerly doubted were indeed those honored and valorous gentlemen of the House of Polo, and they did them great honor and reverence. And when this thing became known throughout Venice, straightway did the whole city, the gentry as well as the common folk, flock to their house, to embrace them and to shower them with caresses and show demonstrations of affection and reverence, as great as you can possibly imagine.

Now that the city folk realized how rich the three returned merchants really were, they outdid themselves in bestowing upon them public dignities and civic offices. They created Maffeo, who according to Ramusio was the oldest, a greatly honored magistrate. What was done for Nicolo we know not. As for Marco, we are told that "all the young men went every day continuously to visit and to converse with Messer Marco, who was most charming and gracious, and to ask of him matters concerning Cathay, and the Great Khan, and he responded with so much kindness that all felt themselves to be in a certain manner indebted to him."

But a little time and the hubbub and excitement and stir that had been caused by the return of the Polos and by their extravagant and impressive banquet with its dramatic climax gradually died away. Their fellow citizens went about their business, and no longer did passers-by in gondolas or on the bridges or fondamenta nudge each other and whisper about them or point them out to strangers. Life settled down again to its normal routine.

Within the city itself the changes, though gradual, had been many. An earthquake had shaken down a number of buildings, new ones were rising in their places, and new parts had been added to many buildings which had been weakened by floods caused by especially high winds. Work on the Campanile in the Piazza had been continuous, and it was even higher than when they had left. St. Mark's seemed unchanged from without, but many more spaces within had been filled with mosaic in gold and gleaming colors.

To the young Marco St. Mark's had all seemed glorious and spacious and brilliant, the most marvelous building in all the world. Now it appeared cramped and low-ceiled and tawdry, and within there was no peace or quiet for the worshiper. He recalled his visits to the high-vaulted Buddhist temples, dark and cool, enwrapped in a silence which became even deeper at the booming of a distant bell. In his mind's eye he saw himself climbing the steep winding path to a Taoist retreat, high in the hills, silent and at peace under ancient whispering trees and by a swift-flowing stream. Again he seemed to stand in the Temple of Confucius in far-off Cambaluc. Though comparatively new—he had often watched the workmen erecting its walls and tiling its roof as he rode to and from the palace in his chair—it was like hundreds that he had seen in other cities. Venerable in their grass-grown courtyards, surrounded by gnarled and ancient trees, the nesting place of innumerable crows, removed from the noisy chatter of the streets, empty save for the tablets of the Great Sage and his disciples, the only movement the lazy curl of smoke from the incense sticks ascending slowly until it merged in a faint blue-grey mist about the blackened gilt inscriptions on the walls, they had often received Marco in their silence and ritual calm. There in the heathen temples, in the faraway lands beyond the deserts and the mountains of Asia, his soul had often sought and found peace, deep, all-understanding, all-soothing peace. But here, in the church of his own faith, all was confusion and bustle and noise—the

hammering of workmen, the chatter of children, the gossip of knots of idlers, while masses and prayers were being conducted in several chapels at once. How was it possible for a man to look inward or to find a few quiet moments for contemplation and self-communion in great St. Mark's?

And the Piazza which had seemed so vast when he played in it as a boy had shrunk and diminished in comparison with the great spaces of the courts of the Mongol Emperor. Marco had often climbed the steep steps of the Bell Tower and the Drum Tower of Kublai's capital. He had seen the sun rise and set over the miles of upturned roofs and glistening tiles and great parks and gardens of Cambaluc. How small—just a handful of houses surrounded by the sea—seemed Venice.

Would the past never cease to rear its head, would the ghosts which haunted him and made him unhappy here in his native city, where all should have been joy and pleasure, never be laid? Marco had lived too long in East Asia. Though maybe he did not yet realize it fully, never could life be the same again. Never could he re-create the Venice of his boyhood. The break had been too great, the time of separation too long. And never could Messer Marco reconcile his two lives, never could he be as his fellow Venetians. The Orient had laid slim and gentle but firm and irresistible hands upon his heart and brain and soul, and had taken him to herself—a mistress whom he could never forget or desert, for her magic was too heady and too potent.

He would roam the streets alone at night, and look up at the moon, swinging in the sky like a lantern, and at the stars, pale silver and gold. And they recalled to him the joy and color of the Feast of Lanterns in Cathay. And when the waters were still and black as velvet, the twinkling reflections of the stars were like the fireflies glowing in the far-off temple camphor trees, or as he had often seen them carried along the streets in tiny cages and boxes by the boys in the hot nights of the Chinese summer. When the rain pattered on the windows and in the canals below, it whispered of those soft rains in Hangchow through which the slender willows and plums and tall bamboos were seen as through gauze, of those hours when life was good, and of whole days passed seated in some sheltered rock garden drinking tea with old friends. And even the canals sometimes became those of Sochow, with their high-arched bridges and their close-crowded boats.

Somehow this strange Venice seemed naked to him, with no en-

circling walls to shield her beauties from the stranger. In China one dwelt always behind walls, and life could be lived where houses did not crowd one against the other and there was breathing space—quite unlike Venice, where land was scarce, and every foot was needed for dwellings or for trade.

The territories of the Republic had expanded, in spite of the debacle of 1261 in Constantinople, and the government, which had undergone some changes, was ever busy in Eastern Mediterranean politics, gaining here by a petty war, there by setting neighbors at each other's throats, and elsewhere by treaties of commerce and friendship.

In his boyhood Marco had never seen gold coins; but during his absence Venice in her pride had ordered struck off ducats of fine gold at the Zecca (the Venetian mint). They had quickly gained currency throughout the East, where they soon became standard and where they were called *zecchini*. The word has remained, though the coin has disappeared, and "sequin" is known in all languages. The word *Zecca* in itself told of Venice's long commerce with the East, for the city borrowed for its mint the Arabic word *sikkah*—a "stamp" or a "seal" or a "die."

Commerce with the West had expanded, too. The quarrels of European princes and kings, the oppression of the people, the scorn and disdain of the nobles for any profession but that of a soldier—all these offered a free field for the Venetian shipmasters and merchants, who had no rivals but the Genoese and the Tuscans. The ways of trade with the feudal lords of the West were strange, for they did not hesitate to rob and pillage whenever they could. Large escorts were necessary at all times. In order to put these feudal barons, their best customers, in good humor, the Venetians took with them on their trading ventures corps of musicians, clowns, acrobats, and rare animals, and thus amused the hosts with whom they would do business or through whose lands they sought safe passage. They wandered everywhere. The Danube was visited from its mouth to its source. Venetian vessels were to be seen in every Atlantic port from the farthest north to the south. Venice bound itself by treaties to Marseilles, to Antwerp, to London, and to other cities where its citizens could sell goods. A curious provision in these treaties of Marco Polo's day was that which exempted the Doge from all customs duties on goods in which he was personally trading. In a time when trade was despised by nobles and kings, the head of

Europe's greatest commercial empire was publicly taking advantage of his high office to satisfy his desire for personal profit.

Anxiety for trade linked Venice even with the infidel who was harrying the coasts and the Christian cities of Asia. Finally the Venetians went so far as to begin their written contracts made with the Saracens with the phrase, "In the name of the Lord and of Mohammed." This was too much for Rome, and in 1307 Clement V forbade all trading with the Moslems. The bull was ineffective but had unexpected consequences. Though willing to violate the decree of the Church, many merchants of Venice repented of their sin at the point of death, especially as their confessor often refused absolution. In order to die in peace the sinner would then will his property to the Church, "so that in less than fifteen years the apostolic government was the creditor of all the commercial capital in the richest city in the universe."

Venice was busier than ever at home, too. For industries were springing up everywhere to satisfy the foreign demand for her goods, and foreign workmen were being brought in, until Venice was one vast workshop, the very names of her streets attesting the diverse occupations of their inhabitants. Her own citizens could not suffice for her needs; Dalmatia furnished soldiers for her and her colonies, while sailors from the islands manned her innumerable ships. Marco looked in vain for the glass factories which he had haunted as a boy. They had vanished under the pressure of progress and by order of the Consiglio Maggiore had been removed to Murano, across the lagoon from Venice.

Little by little Marco realized that he must renounce all thought of wandering back to foreign lands if he was to have any peace of mind. Quiet walks along the quays or in the squares, accepting the clamorous pigeons of St. Mark's in place of those which he used to loose from his windows in Cambaluc with light whistles attached to their feathers—how sweet the sound as they soared high in the air—these were to be his pleasures and his excursions henceforth. His fellow Venetians knew nothing of the refinements of living as he had learned them in China, but he would have to learn to dwell among them on their terms, not his. Gradually he settled down into Venetian life and activities. He was too young to retire, and conditions were not favorable for a return to the Levant. Ever since 1291, when the Saracens had routed the Christians at Acre, commerce at the eastern end

of the Mediterranean had become increasingly difficult. But Marco was not the man to sit back and take no part in affairs about him. In a short time he found himself leading the life of a wealthy bachelor of the city, buying, selling, examining goods and samples in the warehouses or on the quays.

Chapter Eight

Genoa

SCARCELY HAD Messer Marco Polo begun to adjust himself to his new life in Venice when ominous rumblings of war began to be heard over sea and land. Ever since Genoa had aided the Greeks to recapture Constantinople from the hapless Baldwin, an ever increasing tension fraught with great danger had been developing between the two rival Italian cities; and now the trouble appeared to be approaching a crisis.

Venice and Genoa had been foes for decades. Even though both cities were Italian, separated by but a few hundred miles of land, the paramount importance of their sea-borne trade and the fierce determination that each possessed to become the dominant power in the Eastern Mediterranean rendered lasting peace between them impossible. The center of the interests of each city lay in the East, and uninterrupted commercial intercourse with the Levant was the life-blood of their prosperity. These interests clashed at every point. Each of the two rivals was isolated from the remainder of Italy, the one by her lagoons, the other by her mountains; and internal Italian politics and the squabbles of the various other city-states concerned them but secondarily, that is, only when they affected their own interests.

The jealousy and hatred between Genoa and Venice were augmented and made still more bitter by the recapture of Constantinople by the Greeks and their Genoese allies. Rivalry over trade and the control of the Eastern emporia apparently made this enmity incurable except by a decisive war in which one would inevitably be forced to crush the other. It was all an unhappy repetition of the commercial warfare and tragic struggle between Rome and Carthage, enacted on

the same stage—the Mediterranean Sea—nearly fifteen centuries before.

When the Latins and their allies had been circumvented at Constantinople, the Emperor Michael Paleologus had made the serious mistake of presenting to the Genoese the palace of the Pantocratore, where the Venetian representatives had formerly resided in Constantinople. This was a direct insult to the Venetians, for the building was not even in the Genoese quarter. And the Genoese, in order to heap scorn and derision on the Venetians, demolished the palace carefully and shipped its red stones to Genoa, where they were incorporated into the Palazzo del Capitano—now called the Palazzo San Giorgio—which was then in course of construction. Thus they were able to flaunt in the faces of their Venetian foes a permanent trophy of victory—their communal palace, whose lions' heads, once carved for Venice's proud fortress in far-off Constantinople, still gaze down on the passer-by in Genoa as they have for nearly seven hundred years.

This incident and numberless other offenses and quarrels were productive of continual conflicts, sometimes nothing more than riots where Venetian and Genoese met in the East, sometimes naval engagements, in which the Venetians were more often the victors. No conclusive decision had resulted from these fights, and the only lasting effect was a gradual sapping of the resources and energies of both cities. The Polos had learned of these constant quarrels from the visitors who from time to time had come to China by sea and by land. On their voyage home they had found animosity and hostility whenever they entered the Genoese quarter of any Levantine city, and, as has been suggested, they were perhaps the victims of some Genoese attack or intrigue while sojourning in Trebizond on the Black Sea.

In 1291 Acre fell before the attacks of the Saracens. This brought the strained relations between Venice and Genoa near the breaking point, for after the fall of that city Venice concluded a treaty with the Mohammedans whereby she obtained the exclusive right to receive armed escorts for the pilgrims who were continually arriving in Palestine in order to visit the spots sacred to the Christians. This treaty, which bolstered up the waning Eastern trade of Venice, infuriated the Genoese. In retaliation they attempted to persuade the Greek emperor to exclude the Venetians entirely from the Dardanelles. Aroused to fighting pitch by this move, the Venetians hastily raised a fleet of war

galleys. Under the command of Marco Basegio it set sail on October 7, 1294. Basegio fell in with the Genoese fleet under Nicolo Spinola at Layas (Lajazzo), on the south coast of Asia Minor, and attacked at once. Through bad judgment and a mistakenly chivalrous idea of not attacking the Genoese fleet with fire-ships, the Venetians were decisively defeated, losing twenty-five ships and many of their men, including Basegio himself.

This victory encouraged the Genoese to prepare an even larger fleet, said to have consisted of one hundred and ninety-five war vessels with a complement of forty-five thousand men, under the command of Uberto Doria. The first move of the fleet was to swoop down on Crete and seize and burn Canea. The next disturbing news heard on the Rialto, soon after Marco's return to Venice, was that the Genoese had persuaded the Greek Emperor Andronicus to imprison Marco Bembo, the Venetian *bailo* of Constantinople, together with all his fellow citizens resident in the city. These unfortunates were handed over to the Genoese, who first cast Bembo to his death from a housetop and then put the other helpless Venetians to death without mercy. This news spread like wildfire through the lagoons of Venice and brought a realization that some swift and decisive action was necessary to restore Venetian prestige in the East and to safeguard her shrinking commerce.

Rogero Morosini was dispatched in all haste with forty war galleys to join the twenty already in Levantine waters. He boldly sailed through the Dardanelles, reached the Bosphorus, burned all the Genoese and Greek ships he could reach, destroyed the Genoese quarter, attacked a Genoese settlement near Smyrna, and returned in triumph to Venice. Another commander, Giovanni Soranzo, sailed into the Black Sea, destroyed the Genoese stronghold of Kaffa in the Crimea, and burned all the Genoese ships gathered there. The Byzantine chroniclers of the period speak bitterly of the cruelty and rapacity of Morosini and the other Venetian commanders. But war has ever been war, and in medieval times there were no limits to the cruelties inflicted by the conquerors on the conquered. For instance, when a Venetian fleet was captured in 1262 by the Greeks and Genoese, the Greek emperor ordered all the captives to be blinded—and the order was executed! Moreover (though the dates in the contemporaneous chronicles are confused), it would appear that the Venetians felt that their acts were

but a just retaliation for the murder of Bembo and his fellow countrymen in Constantinople.

On the Rialto, in the squares, where men gathered in church or in the taverns on the quays, all was excitement. No vessel came in under sail or propelled by oars that did not bear a story of forays on land or sea. The mutual hatred of the two cities became more intense than ever. Ships could no longer venture out on the sea without a convoy, and it became ever more evident to the citizens of Venice that the frequent truces between her and Genoa were of no avail to postpone the inevitable war to the death. Fresh news of destruction and disaster poured into Venice day by day. For once there was less talk of business and a rising feeling that Venice's back was to the wall, that her very life was at stake. The decision could be postponed no longer. Grimly the citizens of the proud "Queen of the Adriatic" settled down to preparations. The Arsenal became a hive of activity. Every blacksmith, every armorer, every shipbuilder began work at top speed. Food and munitions were collected and all Venice talked of nothing but war, war to the death, with the hated Genoese.

But, though Messer Marco was a Venetian, all these events seemed foreign to him, far removed from his interests and desires. War was nothing new to him. He had seen sudden death, battles and sieges, wholesale slaughter and looting, for too many years in Asia, and the feverish activities of his fellow citizens seem to have impressed him but little; for it appears from what follows that he was ever intent upon his personal affairs and absorbed in his personal problems. Evidently he soon found life on the Rialto and in his home wearisome, and sought for a change. He had told his tale again and again. He had shown his "curios" many times to all his visitors—such things as yak hair, sago flour, "the head and feet [of one of the musk deer] dried, and some musk in the musk sac," and the like. He had spent time trying to raise plants from seeds that he had brought home. In this he was not too successful, for he confesses ruefully, speaking of the *brazil* ("sappan," a thorny tree from which a red dye is obtained): "And indeed I tell you in all truth that we brought of this seed to Venice and we sowed it on the earth; indeed I tell you that it grew not at all. And this happened because of the place being cold."

But all these diversions soon palled on him, and he found increasing difficulty in accommodating himself to the ways of business and to

the social life of the Venetians. He was already weary of the dull life amid the dampness of the canals and lagoons, trafficking with small traders, hearing petty talk of politics and domestic scandal. He yearned more and more for the old, free existence in lands beyond the sunrise.

For some reason unknown to us Marco did not marry on his return to Venice, though he was well past his fortieth year. Perhaps he had left a wife or some fair almond-eyed mistress or sweetheart behind him in far Cathay. We know that his father had contracted an alliance or alliances in the Far East, his two illegitimate sons, Stefano and Giovannino, having returned with the three travelers to Venice in 1295. But nothing of all this appears in Marco's own tale, nor is there the slightest hint of any love affair in all of its many pages. After all, Marco was writing a description of the countries of Asia, not an autobiography. So he probably lived, according to the family records, with his father, his stepmother, and his half-brothers.

After they had heard the story of his travels and all his reminiscing and his continual comparison of the grand life and the great riches of the East with the narrow existence and diminishing grandeur of his own land, over and over, the tale grew tiresome and boring to Marco's fellow citizens. Venice was not after all a very populous city—at least as far as free men were concerned—and in a short time Marco's adventures were well known from one end of the city to the other. In fact, men began to avoid him, to escape being forced to listen to another marvelous tale of the East. Most of them were frankly skeptical, and looked upon much of what he told them as romancing and the product of a prodigal and fertile imagination.

And so, for Marco, action and plenty of it was the only remedy, the only escape from himself. To feel the heave of a deck under his feet, to sniff the salt air on the fresh winds of the monsoon, to travel all the long day on camel-back or donkey, to ride a half-wild Mongol pony, to doze to the gentle rhythmic sway of a sedan chair, to sleep out on the great plains under the stars, eyes and nostrils stung by the acrid smoke of the fires of dried cattle dung, the colorful kaleidoscopic pageant of Chinese life, the busy existence of a courtier of the world's greatest potentate, the pomp and ceremony that surrounded an honored official—all these were the nostalgic dreams and longings which haunted both his sleeping and his waking hours.

To his kinsfolk and friends of the Rialto and the Piazza of St.

Mark's this all appeared most strange and curious. They could not understand his apathy toward the struggle between their city and Genoa, the all-absorbing topic of conversation wherever men gathered. But what could they know of high adventure by land and sea, how could they thrill to strange stirrings of the blood, whose lives were spent in the narrow tortuous canals and the high gloomy houses of old Venice? For Marco it would be a change from darkness into light, a return to the hazardous full life which had been his from boyhood, and he rejoiced mightily in the promise of escape from what was becoming an intolerably humdrum existence.

So once more Messer Marco Polo planned a trading voyage, and in due time fared forth upon the sea, this time alone, leaving his family behind in Venice. At last he seemed to be his old self again, as he watched his armed merchant galley draw slowly away from the osier palings that protected the Venetian quays from the constant eroding and scouring of the tides. At last he was outward bound again, to trade, to meet new peoples, to see new sights, perhaps to encounter more adventures to his own liking. Marco was of the breed of those whose whole life is a search for the unknown. And for them the success, the acquisition, are far less important than the quest.

But, alas, the good fortune which had guided him and watched over him all the twenty-six years of his wanderings in Asia seems to have deserted him the moment he set sail. His new adventure was not destined to bring him riches or new honors, even though in the end, all unknown to him, it was to bring him immortal fame—long after he had departed this life.

The seas were swarming with vessels of the Genoese, war galleys and armed merchantmen, the former ready to swoop down on any vessel flying the Venetian flag, the latter not averse to attacking and looting any luckless vessel which offered itself as a prize.

From the time of Marco's return home in 1295 to the mention of his captivity in Genoa the records are silent, except for a few scattered paragraphs. But those few notices are all-important, even in their baffling mystery; for we are here confronted with one of the many unsolved enigmas of the tale of the life and activities of Messer Marco Polo. At this point we find two widely divergent stories of the time and place of his meeting with disaster and captivity at the hands of the Genoese, and we are forced to choose between them.

A little-known Latin chronicle, the "Imago Mundi," written by a contemporary of Marco's, the Dominican friar Jacopo d'Acqui, contains several paragraphs concerning the traveler. He recounts:

In the year of Jesus Christ 1296 in the time of the Pope Boniface VIII a battle took place in the sea of Armenia at a place called Layas between fifteen galleys of Genoese merchants and twenty-five of Venetian [merchants], and after a great battle the galleys of the Venetians were defeated, and all [the crews] were either killed or captured; among them is captured Master Marco the Venetian, who was with those merchants.

On the other hand, Ramusio's introduction to Marco Polo, written in 1553, over two hundred and fifty years after the event, states that Messer Marco Polo was appointed a *sopracomito*, or commander, on one of the galleys of the fleet commanded by Andrea Dandolo, and that he sailed with him in 1298 to attack the Genoese. The fleets, Ramusio says, met off the Dalmatian island of Curzola, and fought a battle on the day of Our Lady of September (September 7) and:

(as is commonly the chance of war) our fleet was defeated and [Marco Polo] was taken prisoner, for having desired to press on with his galley into the vanguard to attack the enemy's fleet, and, fighting valorously and with great courage for his native land and for the safety of his people, he was not followed by the others; he was wounded and taken captive, and, having been immediately put in irons he was sent to Genoa.

No contemporary account contains these statements.

The question arises: which of the two accounts is correct? Without exception every historian of Venice since Ramusio's time has accepted his statement, for which no support is found elsewhere, although a Frenchman, Paulin Paris, writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, judiciously remarks that Marco Polo was held prisoner by the Genoese for unknown motives. Another French biographer, Charles-Victor Langlois, writing in 1921, goes so far as to say only that "it is without doubt legitimate to *conjecture* [italics mine] that Ser Marco, still of military age, had been captured in this 'clean up'."

The question should be approached from the point of view of the known facts and the logical deductions possible from them.

Let us admit that the good friar Jacopo was confused in his account of the supposed battle of Layas and its date. The real battle of Layas took place May 22, 1294, and, as we have learned, resulted in the utter rout of the Venetians. Marco, however, could not have taken

part in this battle, as he, together with his father and his uncle, did not return to Venice until 1295. Moreover, if the battle in which Marco was captured took place during the papacy of Boniface VIII, it could not have occurred in 1294, for Boniface was elected December 24, 1294, and was installed on the papal throne at the beginning of 1295. However, as Luigi Benedetto, the great Italian editor and translator of Marco Polo, significantly remarks, this paragraph of Jacopo d'Acqui should not go unconsidered. There should also be weighed in connection with it the statement of Ramusio himself, that Marco sailed with the fleet *non molti mesi dapoi che furono giunti a Venetia* ("not many months after they had arrived in Venice"). This statement is inconsistent with Ramusio's account of the capture at Curzola, for the extent of time from an unknown date in 1295 to September 7, 1298, is surely far more than "a few months."

On the face of these meager facts one is inevitably led to two conclusions. These are: first, that Jacopo knew of the capture of Marco in an armed merchantman but that he dated the event too early and confused an obscure skirmish with the better-known battle of Layas; second, that either Ramusio is wrong in speaking of the battle in which Marco was taken by the Genoese as occurring very shortly after his return or else his statement that Marco was wounded at Curzola and carried off to Genoa was an error and was perhaps merely the reporting of hearsay or tradition. In any case Ramusio is inconsistent with himself and, if we accept the capture at Curzola, he is also inconsistent with Marco's contemporary, Jacopo d'Acqui.

Further considerations may contribute to the solution of the problem. The manuscripts are almost unanimous as to the date of completion, 1298. Jacopo d'Acqui informs us, in speaking of Marco and the other Venetians incarcerated in Genoa: "*Ibi sunt per tempora multa,*" "they were there for a long time." If Marco was captured on September 16, 1298, and arrived in Genoa with the other prisoners taken at Curzola on October 16, it is manifestly impossible for his long book with all its descriptions and anecdotes to have been written (and that, too, in a language not his own, necessitating considerations of translation and correction) and dated in the same year. This possibility allows less than two and one-half months for the preparation, drafting, and completing of the work. When we consider, too, that, as some of the manuscripts state, Marco sent to Venice for notes which he had made

on his travels, in order to incorporate them in his book, we must conclude that Ramusio's account must be wrong.

The reasonable conclusions from these facts would then seem to be those presented so succinctly and so ably by Moule in his monumental translation of Messer Marco's book. We must henceforth abandon Ramusio's account of the time and place of Marco's seizure by the Genoese, even though the error has been repeated through the centuries. The year 1296 is the more reasonable one to accept, and probably Marco was taken prisoner during some unrecorded conflict between armed galleys of Genoa and Venice. Many such clashes occurred throughout the long years of the bitter conflict between the two city-states, and it is in no way surprising that the chronicles of the period have not recorded every insignificant chance encounter. History had not yet singled out Marco Polo as one of the "immortals," so there was no reason why historians of his time should have made any special effort to record his every move. His capture would have meant little to his contemporaries—who have, with one or two exceptions, been silent about him and his activities.

Moule's analysis of the facts of the enigma and his conclusions constitute an important milestone in our study of Marco Polo, and are a brilliant refutation of such statements as that made as late as 1934 by an accomplished student of Messer Marco and his book, that "nothing new is likely to be discovered about the man." The tale of Marco is not yet complete. Little by little missing pieces of the puzzle are being found and fitted into place. More will be discovered and one never knows when some hitherto unknown document or bit of information—even, perhaps, the original manuscript written in the prison at Genoa—may be unearthed and throw a flood of new light into the many corners which still remain dark in the story of Venice's greatest son.

And so the proud Messer Marco, merchant of Venice, once a favorite of the Great Khan Kublai, was taken prisoner by the Genoese, who had captured his galley in some obscure encounter not mentioned by him in his book. We have no details. All that we are sure of is that he was carried off to Genoa, there to remain a prisoner until his release after the signing of the peace between Venice and Genoa in May, 1299.

Genoa the Proud! So proud that often the historians speak of her as "la Superba," omitting her name. Every reader would know at once

what city was meant. Genoa la Superba! So proud that, as recounted in the fourteenth-century chronicle of the Catalan Muntaner, her admiral, Antonio Spinola, dared in 1305 to sail to Gallipoli with two galleys and order the famous Catalan Company "in the name of the Commune of Genoa, to get out of their garden, namely the Empire of Constantinople, which was the garden of the Commune of Genoa; otherwise if we did not get out, that he defied us in the name of the Commune of Genoa and of all the Genoese in the world."

Genoa from the sea was one of the fairest cities in all the world. Lying at the foot of a backdrop of mountains, crowned with the bluest of skies and the whitest of clouds, clad as in a soft gray-green garment by the broad olive orchards on the slopes about her, her feet bathed in the warm white foam of the Ligurian Mediterranean coast, she was a worthy rival in beauty to many-islanded Venice on the Adriatic.

She, like Venice, had a long history reaching back even beyond the founding of Rome, according to her own chroniclers. At her waterside had gathered the vast multitudes who first took ship en route to Palestine to regain the Holy City from the Saracens. To her shores came the seven thousand children, led by a boy of thirteen years, seeking transportation to the city of Jerusalem, children doomed to death and slavery, the tale of whose Crusade is one of the most tragic and pathetic in all history. It was Genoa that gave to Richard of England, surnamed the Lion-hearted, the eighty galleys to convey him and his ally the King of Spain to the Holy Land. And it was then that in his joy he took for his own the battle cry of the Genoese—"Vive San Zorzo!" ("Long live St. George!") and brought it to England with him. It was of Genoa that Petrarch wrote in glowing words of "towers which seemed to threaten the firmament, hills covered with olives and oranges, marble palaces perched on the summit of the rocks—where art conquered nature." In Genoa the poet was amazed to find "men and women right royally adorned, and luxuries abundant in mountain and in wood unknown elsewhere in royal courts."

To this fair city came Messer Marco Polo, not as a happy visitor seeking pleasure, not as a merchant adventurer in quest of fortune, not as a proud warrior of the Cross, but as a humiliated prisoner of war.

From afar he could see the city sweeping up the slope from the sea and the long curve of the sea westward toward Savona. He could scent the heavy orange blossoms and the varied odors of the quay-sides—tar

and dry seaweed and the refuse cast up by the tides. He could see the deep black shadows cast by the great houses on the narrow streets, and in the dark arches of the doorways bright glints of color—flowers and clothes of men and women and children. But he had no joy in the sight. His head hung in shame. For his galley was not entering the harbor gaily, with oars rising and dipping, flashing happily in the sunshine, the banners and long flags so loved by the Venetians snapping and fluttering in the breeze. He, the companion of great nobles, once governor of a city of hundreds of thousands, he, Messer Marco Polo of Venice, was a prisoner, and that, too, of Venice's most hated enemy, the Genoese. And, to make the Venetian humiliation more complete, the victors were inflicting the supreme insult, towing the captured galley shoreward "stern foremost and banners trailing."

Slowly the vessel drew in past the great breakwater, the Molo Vecchio, which was even then in course of construction, designed to shelter Genoa's great fleet of war galleys and merchant vessels.

To a man from Venice with its silent canals and swift-gliding gondolas, Genoa's water front seemed all noise and confusion. Strings of heavy carts heaped high with bales and bags from the vessels at the quays rattled and rumbled by on the rough stones. Porters and sailors, peddlers and beggars filled the air with their cries, and here and there scraggy fowls scratched hopefully in the dust for food.

From the sea front narrow streets zigzagged up the hillsides. Many of them were flights of stone steps, and in such a maze that a stranger would quickly lose his way, particularly if he did not understand the strange dialect of these fierce Genoese. On both sides of the lanes houses towered eight and nine stories high, making of the streets dark canyons where the sun could seldom penetrate. Everywhere hung multi-colored washing on long poles and lines stretched across the street. Beautiful when seen afar from the galley's deck, Genoa resolved itself on landing into a city of ugly houses crowded on narrow streets, and it seemed as though the inhabitants were intent on shutting out the light of heaven from their homes and churches. And above all, like gaunt fingers pointing to the blue sky, rose numerous towers from the palace fortresses of the nobles of the city. Though in 1143 and again in 1196 strict laws had been passed limiting their height to eighty feet, they still menaced the surrounding buildings, some of them even dominating the Cathedral itself.

The greatest humiliation seemed to Marco to be inflicted when his captors indicated to him the building where he was to be confined. It was not seemly for a prisoner of Marco's wealth and reputation to be cast into a dungeon with the common sailors and fighting men of the Venetian ships. So he was conducted to one of the underground rooms of the Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo, now called the Palazzo di San Giorgio, that same building into which the Genoese had incorporated the stones of the Venetian palace which had once stood so proudly in Constantinople. Built by the Cistercian Fra Olivieri in 1270, it rose in all its splendor a short distance from the landing stage; of red stone and brick, square, with high crenellations on its roof, its arched windows and open arcades at the street level showed the light fantastic influence of the Gothic Venetian style, probably made necessary by the employment of the material taken from the Pantocratore. There it stood, visible to all comers, the dwelling of Genoa's Captain of the People, an enormous and permanent trophy of the triumph of Genoese intrigue and arms over the Venetian Republic. And as Marco passed through its high-arched portals the stone lions, once Venetian, grinned down on him in sardonic humor, while between them hung a fragment of the harbor chain of Pisa, placed there as a memorial of victory after the destruction of Pisa's maritime power by the conquering Genoese in the year 1290.

Messer Marco was not alone in prison. He found the rooms crowded with men who like himself had been taken captive in forays or battles. There were, besides Venetians, Pisans by the score, and men of Leghorn and other cities who had dared challenge Genoa's supremacy on the Mediterranean coasts. Not only was the prison crowded when Marco arrived, but hardly a day passed that he did not see additional long lines of men, chained together by leg irons, dragging their way past the Palazzo. Often the doors of his prison were flung open to admit more unwilling guests of La Superba. At first the prisoners had difficulty in understanding each other, for every city and every district had its own dialect. Dante and Petrarch and Boccaccio had not yet established the classic "Italian" language in their limpid verse and prose, and these prisoners, though often from towns but a few miles apart, were as foreigners to each other. All they had in common were the misery, the bad food, the vermin, the lack of all comforts, and the longing for freedom and for home.

Some there were who had traveled in the south and to France, and many of these could speak more or less French, which even then was the language of the courts of kings and the *lingua franca* of diplomats. Gradually the groups of prisoners became acquainted, exchanged stories, told of the battles which they had fought, grumbled together, and cursed the bad food and water. Some of them, developing real friendships, would sit apart and while away the long days in talk of their home and their wives or sweethearts. And as ever when men gather, there were the loud-mouthed boasters of exploits, martial or amorous; and, as ever, they were in good time singled out and shunned by their fellows.

Marco soon became a great favorite with his fellow prisoners. Time was heavy on their hands, for ordinary topics of conversation were few and were soon exhausted. But here was a man who could spin fascinating yarns of adventure and peril for hours. Had he not traveled to the uttermost ends of the world? Had he not seen great marvels of nature? Had he not been the companion of kings and princes? Had he not traversed all the lands of the paynim and the seas that bound the world? Did they believe him? Dio mio! Why should they believe all the marvels which he unrolled before their eyes? The places he claimed to have seen were peopled with monsters, some having but a single leg, some with heads in the middle of their breasts or carried under their arms. Did he not tell of the Isle of Males and the Isle of Females? Children of their age, knowing but little beyond their own narrow horizon, hardly one of them able to read or write, fed on romances of chivalry, going through the forms of religion often with little or no understanding of the spirit thereof, living hard lives, giving blow for blow, cherishing but few illusions—they could in no wise understand or accept even the half of what he told them. But he was a good teller of tales, one whose humor was broad enough for their thirteenth-century minds, one not too squeamish, a keen observer of women, not afraid to tell what he knew of them. So they rejoiced in their living storybook, and Messer Marco never failed to gather a goodly crowd about him whenever he was in the mood to tell of his exploits and the far lands in which he had dwelt so long.

His jailors welcomed him also. There was little chance of escape for their prisoners, and they had much time on their hands while on

guard. The minutes and hours of their long watches flew as they hung breathless and wide-eyed on his tales of the long trek across the mountains and deserts, of Chinese life and the strange customs and the nomad Mongols. They never wearied of the stories of Cipango and its roofs of gold, of the doings of the people of Manzi, and of the long voyage from Zaitun to Hormuz with the Lady Cocachin.

And the jailors in their turn would speak of him to their officers and tell of him in their homes and over the wine jugs in the taverns. So, little by little, Messer Marco—Messer Marco Milioni, as men were beginning to call him, because of his prodigal use of the word in his narratives—became known throughout the great city of Genoa.

Then, in the quaint words of Ramusio, the only source of information we have at this point,

because, as may be understood, of his rare qualities and the marvellous voyage which he had made, the whole City gathered to see him and to talk to him, not treating him as a prisoner, but as a very dear friend and a greatly honored gentleman, and showed him so much honor and affection that there was never an hour of the day that he was not visited by the most noble gentlemen of that city, and presented with everything necessary for his [daily] life.

This cannot be mere tradition or the fancy of the good Ramusio, who loved his hero well. The liberty which allowed him to prepare his book, the permission which was granted him to send to his father in Venice for his notes, the fact that his fellow prisoner, Rustichello of Pisa—of whom more anon—was permitted to help him; moreover the completion of his book and its circulation while he was most likely still in prison—all these indicate that Marco was not the prisoner chained in a dungeon as he has so often been pictured but rather a gentleman-adventurer who had been captured through the fortunes of war but who because of his talents and “qualities” was granted a generous amount of freedom.

But even the loquacious Venetian—fond as he was of telling his story and probably enjoying being the center of attraction in Genoese high society and thus escaping the hardships which might have otherwise been his lot—finally wearied of repeating his adventures over and over again, and welcomed a chance suggestion to put his tale in writing. In all justice to Messer Marco we should refer to a line in the “Prohemio Primo” which Giambattista Ramusio placed before his edition of Marco Polo’s narrative and which he states that he found in an

earlier Latin edition used in preparing his own work. Therein it is stated expressly of Marco that, "not wishing to remain idle, it appeared to him that he should put together the things contained in this book for the enjoyment of readers."

To account for the presence of Rustichello here in Genoa we must sketch the history of Pisa. Pisa was one of the oldest cities in Italy. Her proud citizens dated her foundation from pre-Etruscan times. Situated on the great Via Aurelia, built in 241 B.C. and still in use, she was always an important trading city in Roman times. A palace of Hadrian once stood on the site of its twelfth-century cathedral and campanile. The city stood on low, marshy ground at the confluence of the rivers Arno and Serchio, once about two miles from the sea; the coast line had gradually changed, however, and the city at the height of its glory was situated about five miles from the ocean, surrounded by extensive pine forests. Pisa early developed a lucrative sea trade and established commercial centers along the Italian coast. The attacks of the Saracens in the eleventh century brought together Pisa and Genoa as allies, but after the common foe had been defeated the two cities continually quarreled.

The profit accruing from the sale of naval armaments and transport and the establishment of new markets for their trade brought increased riches and influence to Pisa. Her harbor, Porto Pisano, received and sheltered galleys, great and small, richly laden with the precious stuffs of East and West. She gradually added to her crown rich jewels—the overlordship of the Balearic Islands, Carthage, Elba, the Liparis, and Palermo.

Pisa's old city walls could no longer contain her population, and were finally actually hidden by the houses clustered inside and out, so that another wall, far greater in extent, was erected. Many beautiful buildings sprang up everywhere, and stately palaces were mirrored in the waters of the broad-bosomed Arno, which flowed through the center of the ancient city in a perfect crescent. Like most Italian towns, medieval Pisa was crowded with the inevitable high towers of the quarreling noble families, so numerous and so close together that the city looked from afar like a group of chimneys huddled inside a wall—so close to each other, in fact, that in times of peace balconies and bridges connected one with another. Four bridges spanned the Arno, and much of the history of the city was enacted on and about them.

The citizens of Pisa had many buildings of which to be proud, and none more wonderful than their Duomo (Cathedral) with its Baptistery and Campanile. The Duomo was planned in the eleventh century, when Pisa had risen to her height as a great maritime power. Begun in 1063 in a corner of the city far from danger of inundation, the great building was consecrated by Pope Gelasius II in 1118. Near by, rising like the half of a giant bubble one hundred and ninety feet above the walls of the city, was the Baptistery, begun in 1154 but not finished until 1278.

Near the Duomo stood one of the strangest buildings ever erected by man, the Leaning Campanile, famous throughout all Italy. In an endeavor to outdo the magnificent Campanile of St. Mark's in Venice, the architect Bonanno made his plans and laid the first foundation stones of the tower in 1174. He had erected hardly forty feet of the structure when it was discovered that the building was slowly sinking in the soft ground and was no longer perpendicular. In spite of the architect's efforts to place the succeeding three stories nearer the center of gravity, the subsidence continued. Bonanno ceased his work at this point, and no one would undertake the completion of the tower until 1234. In the interval the tower had inclined still further, and all the next architect, Benenato, accomplished was the addition of one more story—the fourth. A third architect had but little more success, and again the work was abandoned and remained unfinished until well into the fourteenth century.

Well beloved of the Pisans were these sacred buildings, especially in the early evening when the fretwork of the ethereal white marble leaning tower was a mass of lace-like tracery, of light and shade in arch and columns, and the shadow of its great length made it like the gnomon of a giant sundial. And near it the alabaster and porphyry and rich bronze gates of the Duomo and the Baptistery glowed as rich gold in the radiance of the setting sun. Then all would pale to soft, subdued, delicate grays and rose, enshrined in the hazy curved background of bluish hills. As the sun sank slowly into the sea by Porto Pisano to the west, the sound of many full-throated bells would ring out the call to vespers, the faint odor of smoking incense would come on the softest of breezes, and imperceptibly the twilight shadows would change from gray to deepest black, and with the coming of night a heavenly peace seemed to cast its benison over the beautiful city.

Perhaps Monsignore Paolo Tronci, who wrote his famous *Memorie Historiche della Città di Pisa* in 1682, was right when he remarked of the Leaning Tower that some people believed that “as sank the fortunes of the city to a lower ebb, so the fabric [of the Campanile] was caused to incline—and as great buildings fall or decline thus do also Republics.” For all the wealth of Pisa, all her pride in handsome men, in beautiful women, in noble buildings and crowded warehouses could not save her from her fate as another victim of the suicidal internecine quarrels of the medieval Italian city-states. Nor could they rescue her once she came into grim, bitter, and deadly conflict with her powerful and greedy rival for trade, Genoa la Superba. From the first she was doomed, and Genoa finally stripped from her all her ancient glories and reduced her to ignominious servitude.

The final struggle between the two cities began in 1282. The fortunes of war alternated with no decisive action for two years. At one point the Pisan fleet, taking advantage of the absence of the enemy’s war galleys, sailed into the port of Genoa and in derision fired silver-headed arrows into the town. In 1283 the Genoese won two naval battles. These defeats aroused the Pisans to greater efforts. Hearing that they had assembled a fleet of galleys under the command of Ugolino della Gherardesca, the Genoese armed one hundred and thirty vessels, and, led by Uberto Doria, a scion of one of Genoa’s greatest families, sailed into Pisan waters. On August 6, 1284, Ruggiero, Archbishop of Pisa, boarded a galley to ask God’s blessing on the fleet. At that moment the heavy iron ball surmounted by a silver cross which was the standard of the Commune fell into the Arno. This evil omen “struck great terror into the souls of all, as though it were a demonstration that His Divine Majesty had shown by this sign that He did not wish to be favorable [to the expedition].” However, it was fished out of the water and set up on its staff again, and after the prelate had bestowed his blessing the people took heart once more. With loud cheers the vessels, eighty-three in all, sailed out of the Arno and attacked the Genoese off the islet of Meloria. The Genoese were victorious, capturing forty galleys and slaying thousands of brave men, and between ten and fifteen thousand Pisans were carried off as prisoners to Genoa.

The seventeenth-century *Annals of Pisa* by Paoli Tronci closes the tale in a few bitter lines: “it is certain that the city lost almost all its nobility and the bravest soldiers that it had, and from this circumstance

is derived the proverb: 'Che vuol veder Pisa, vada à Genova!' ['Who wishes to see Pisa, let him go to Genoa.']. . . . and there remained not a house in the city which did not have reason to grieve."

Buried in one of the vellum-bound, musty tomes of another chronicler, Ludovico Antonio Muratori, is a piteous account of the sequel. It is set forth in crabbed, medieval Latin how the women of Pisa came in great numbers as suppliants to the prisons of Genoa:

for one had there a husband, another a son or a brother or a relative. And when these women asked the prison guards about their captives, the guards answered them: "Yesterday the dead were thirty and today forty, the which we have thrown into the sea, and thus do we each day with the Pisans." When the women heard such things about their dear ones, and could not locate them, they fell into consternation from too great anguish, and scarcely could they breathe for the pain in their hearts. When after a bit they had recovered their breath they lacerated their faces with their fingernails and tore their hair and wept with loud voices. For the Pisans in the dungeons were dying from improper food and starvation, want and misery, distress and sadness.

The story is inscribed on the worn striped marble façade of the Church of San Matteo in Genoa, where many of the Doria family were buried. There, chiseled in queer, debased, and much-abbreviated Latin, may still be read the old tale of the naval victory at Meloria and the humbling of the Pisans.

There, too, may be read on the old stones the story of the destruction of Porto Pisano by the united power of Genoa and Lucca: "In the year 1290, on the tenth day of September, Conradus Auria [Corrado Doria], Captain and Admiral of the Republic of Genoa, took and destroyed Porto Pisano." This battle marked the end of Pisa as a maritime power. The victors carried off the harbor chain of Porto Pisano as a trophy, and portions of it were hung in different prominent buildings of La Superba to celebrate the victory in perpetuity.

Ramusio knew of no aid received by Messer Marco in the making of his book except that "d'un gentil'huomo Genovese molto suo amico, che si diletta grandemente di saper le cose del mondo, e ogni giorno andava à star seco in prigione per molte hore."* This simple statement, coupled with the fact that Ramusio's text contains no reference to any

* ". . . . a Genoese gentleman, his close friend, who took great delight in learning of the various things of the world, and [who] went every day to remain many hours in prison with him."

other collaborator, seems to indicate that the learned editor was ignorant of the name of the man who really assisted in the preparation of the manuscript. It may be he was correct in stating that some unnamed Genoese gentleman had been of material assistance to Messer Marco in the preparation of his magnum opus, but the important collaborator whose name has been revealed in other texts of the book was not from Genoa.

Living as a prisoner in Genoa at the same time as Marco Polo was one Rustichello, a Pisan. He had probably been taken captive at the battle of Meloria and had already been confined for many years when Marco joined him as an unwilling guest of the Genoese Republic.

Though but little is known of the life of Rustichello of Pisa, a few facts have been preserved. The catalogue of manuscripts preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris lists several manuscripts of Arthurian romances written by one Rusticien de Pise, some as early as 1271. That this Rusticien de Pise and the Rustichello of Pisa of Marco Polo's book are one and the same person has been established beyond doubt by careful comparisons of his works with the texts of Messer Marco's book. This comparison reveals incontestable proof that not only is the style in general the same but that phrases, sentences, and in some cases entire paragraphs of the *Description of the World* set down in Genoa are almost identical with those in various extant French romances written by Rustichello. Even the opening paragraph of Marco's book—those famous lines beginning: "Lords, Emperors and Kings, Dukes and Marquesses, counts, knights and burgesses"—corresponds almost word for word with the opening lines of Rustichello's compilation of the stories of the Round Table. From these opening lines to the very end of the *Description* are to be found so many close correspondences and similarities of expression—largely clichés—that there is no longer any good reason to question the identity of Rusticien of the romances and Rustichello, Marco's fellow prisoner in Genoa.

No doubt the Pisan accepted with alacrity the suggestion that he collaborate in writing the *Description of the World*. He had been a prisoner for many years. Time hung heavily on his hands, and here was once again a wonderful opportunity for him to practice his beloved métier, that of a writer of noble tales. His heroes had heretofore been men of a dream world, impossible "preux chevaliers" who spent their lives in deeds of derring-do, killing giants, rescuing and making love to

fair ladies, and sometimes seducing the fair ladies of other less-favored knights. And now, here to his hand was a hero, a real flesh and blood hero, who had spent the best years of his life traveling in wondrous lands and sailing unknown seas. Here was a man who had himself been the companion of real emperors and princes and who could in a trice unroll his pack and display before the astonished gaze of his auditors the whole glittering, dazzling pageant of the mysterious East. And above all, here was a man with a keen eye, discernment of what was interesting, exciting, or stimulating, an unerring sense of the unusual and the essential, and blessed with a prodigious memory, so that the tale would not fail to be full and rich and well spiced. It would be a most savory dish to serve to his readers. And he, Rustichello, would gain great honor and renown therefrom. For it was his good fortune that this wondrous find, this Venetian wanderer, could speak no French. Here was his golden opportunity, his chance again to bring his name before the eyes of men.

Many a conversation did Marco and Rustichello have concerning the preparation of the book, sketching its form, its headings and sub-headings, and deciding on what should be included and what omitted. For this serious task was not to be undertaken without much preliminary planning. Marco realized that it would be impossible to prepare such a book, covering, as he intended it should, the geography, history, manners, and customs of a multitude of Asiatic peoples, tribes, and countries, without recourse to some aide-mémoires. No man, no matter how brilliant an observer or possessed of how prodigious a memory, could hope to be able to recall all the strange facts and names of persons and places that were to be discussed in the proposed narratives. So he bethought himself of those notes which he had taken during his long sojourn in far Cathay and which he had brought home with him to Venice. It may well have been, also, that in his leisure time on ship-board or after his return, he had jotted down in his methodical manner additional observations, names, weights and measures, notations as to products, prices and the like, intending them for future use in business. That many of these notes were made during his residence in China may be inferred from the first "Prohemio" or "Preface" found by Ramusio and included in his version. After stating that the matters set forth in the narrative "are few compared with the many, and almost infinite [number of] things which he might have been able to write if

he had believed that he would ever have been able to return to these our parts [of the world],” he continues: “But believing that it would most likely be impossible for him ever to depart from the service of the Great Khan, King of the Tartars, he wrote in his notebooks only a few things, about which he believed that it would be a great pity if they should pass into oblivion, being so remarkable, and that they had never been set forth in writing by any other person.” In his own introduction Ramusio gives the additional information that Marco found a way to write to his father in Venice requesting that he should send him his writings and notebooks which he had brought with him (from the East?). There are, moreover, many references in the body of Marco’s book to his making notes in writing of matters which he considered of importance. In fact he attributes the favor in which he found himself with the Great Khan Kublai to his noting and reporting things which he had seen and found interesting to the monarch. He must have laid by a vast number of these notes, and from the accuracy of his descriptions of little-known and seldom-visited places and peoples, we infer that they must have been extraordinarily full and complete.

Sir Aurel Stein, the great modern explorer of Central Asia, one who has followed the footsteps of Marco Polo on many an arduous journey, writes in discussing Agror (a district of Kashmir):

One concluding remark bearing on the value of Marco Polo’s own record will suffice. We have seen how accurately it reproduces information about territories difficult of access at all times, and far away from his own route. It appears to me quite impossible to believe that such exact data, learned at the very beginning of the great traveller’s long wanderings, could have been reproduced by him from memory alone close on thirty years later, when dictating his wonderful story to Rusticiano during his captivity at Genoa. Here, anyhow, we have definite proof of the use of those “notes and memoranda which he had brought with him,” and which, as Ramusio’s Preface of 1553 tells us, Messer Marco while prisoner of war was believed to have had sent to him by his father from Venice. How grateful must geographers and historical students alike feel that these precious materials reached the illustrious prisoner safely!

When the notes finally arrived from Venice—and that they were delivered to the prisoner and that he was given the liberty to make use of them as well as the comparative freedom and leisure necessary to prepare the book indicates that his imprisonment was not too oppressive—the two men set diligently to work.

Marco states in the beginning of his book that he "caused Rustichello of Pisa to recount all these things." We can perceive that certain material was drawn up in writing or dictated to Rustichello (and others?) to be placed in the book in its proper order. Rustichello's contribution was that of an editor whose duty it was to arrange the various portions of the tale properly, to insert such passages as were necessary for smooth transitions from section to section, to knit the different chapters and divisions into a harmonious whole, and, finally, to translate the entire book into French. His task was indeed to be a thankless one, for but few could read and most of those interested in Marco's work would receive it from the lips of those learned few. They would be intent on the adventure itself and the descriptions of strange places and peoples. They would give but little attention to finely turned phrases and polished sentences. And even the barbarous French of which Rustichello was so proud was to be largely lost on readers of the tale, for the book was destined to be translated speedily into learned Latin, into the vulgar Italian dialects, and into all the tongues of Europe, even into the Gaelic of far-off Ireland. Hence its writer was to be deprived of the vicarious immortality that might have been his reward by the very interest which his written version of the *Description* aroused. Marco's name appeared often in the book; Rustichello's appeared but once, and that in the beginning.

Rustichello performed his task well in view of his definite and unmistakable limitations as a writer. His clichés, his irrepressible tendency to introduce words and phrases of the romances of chivalry into a serious account of the countries of Asia, his descriptions of Asiatic battles in terms of Arthurian legends—all these are obvious to the attentive reader. Toward the end of the book his interest in parts of Marco's narrative seems to have flagged, for the geographical descriptions grow briefer and dull accounts of obscure battles, with but little of the freshness and detail that mark the earlier part of the work, take their place. Perhaps this was not his fault. Perhaps much of it was due to the inaccuracies of nodding, weary scribes, whose quill pens faltered and stumbled and abbreviated or omitted passages in their eagerness to reach the end of a long narrative. We shall most likely never know, unless by some chance the original manuscript is discovered.

However, Rustichello succeeded, in spite of great prolixity, much repetition of detail, discursive paragraphs of little value or interest, and

a stiffness of form which were the inevitable results of his earlier training and writing, in producing a piece of prose which is not altogether to be condemned from a literary viewpoint. As Benedetto has well said, the book is presented in a clear and simple form, the historical and the story-telling elements alternate in a pleasing manner with the dry geographical descriptions, and certain pages, such as the legend of the Buddha, have the primitive power of the most beautiful Romance prose of the period: "The book of Marco appears from one end to the other to be [in] the tranquil style of a man of letters who has before him suitable material and who seeks to make of it a piece of work in the best manner."

So we must take our leave of Rustichello of Pisa, Messer Marco's most worthy collaborator. The little we can learn leaves him but a shadowy personality behind the more glamorous, insistent figure of Marco the traveler. After he had written the words, "*Deo Gratias. Amen,*" at the end of his long task, and had laid down his weary pen, we hear of him no more. History has not recorded when or if ever he was released from his imprisonment or what became of him thereafter or when or where or how he died. We shall never know how much more he contributed to the book of Messer Marco Polo than appears in the actual words thereof. We shall never be able to count the weary hours he must have spent deciphering the crabbed ill-spelt notes of the Venetian, and in sorting the scattered references into their proper places. We shall never know how much of what Marco has told us was elicited by Rustichello's questioning, how much was added, how much was omitted, how much was changed or modified on his advice. But without him and the magic touch of his hand on Marco's notes, the world would have been immeasurably poorer, and Messer Marco himself would be for us but another empty name inscribed in the "Golden Book" of Venice.

There is no longer any serious doubt that the original manuscript was written in French. Ramusio believed that the book written in the prison at Genoa was in Latin. Others believed it to have been originally written in the Venetian or Tuscan dialect. A Latin version was made from the original very early, perhaps even before the traveler's death; but convincing internal as well as external evidence all points to French as the language in which the original text was prepared by Marco and Rustichello in Genoa. The French is none too good in grammar, vo-

cabulary, or style, and abounds in Italian or Italianate words, making the confusion worse confounded; but French it undoubtedly was.*

One day—it was October 16, 1298—as the two men were busy with their notes and their sheets of vellum, confused shouts and cheers were heard in the street outside. The hubbub grew ever louder as the crowd neared the building where Messer Marco sat with Rustichello. The door was flung open, and several men were thrust into the room by their jailers. All were unshaven, bedraggled, battle-stained, and weary. A number were swathed in blood-stained bandages, and all bore evidences of having just come from a deadly hand-to-hand struggle such as was usual in the sea fights of the time. To his horror and amazement Marco saw that they were Venetians. Quills were dropped and the book was forgotten while the two men heard in consternation the tale of the terrible disaster which had just befallen the Venetian war fleet.

When the news of Pisa's defeat at Meloria had reached Venice, her citizens had vowed to treat Genoa as she had treated Pisa. Two years passed in desultory warfare; then, in the summer of 1298, a great fleet (the recorded number of galleys varies from 90 to 120) was assembled by the Venetians under the command of Andrea Dandolo. The Genoese had not awaited their enemies in home waters but had boldly sailed sixty or more strong under Lamba Doria, brother of Uberto, victor of Meloria, into the Adriatic. Doria did not waste his time but thoroughly sacked and looted the various towns of Venetia on the Dalmatian coast. He had just finished plundering a settlement on the island of Curzola when, early on Sunday morning, September 7, 1298, he sighted the Venetian fleet.

Doria at once arranged his plan of battle. Fifteen galleys were ordered to withdraw and hide in reserve, and the other vessels were maneuvered into a triangle with the flagship at the apex. As the ships closed in, the Venetians poured flights of arrows on the Genoese, rolled open kegs of boiling oil upon the decks, and then followed with a rain of sand and lime and soap. But the wily Doria had swung his fleet about so that the sun was in the eyes of the Venetians. At first this advantage was offset by the enemy having the wind behind them, and the Venetians captured ten Genoese galleys. Excited beyond caution by their initial success, they pressed on too rapidly and several of their

* See below, pp. 254 ff., as to the later history of the text.

ships ran aground. One was captured and turned against them with an enemy crew. The Genoese, however, were hard pressed and at one time were at the point of flight.

At the most critical moment in the battle, Doria, who was standing on the high poop deck of his galley, where he could best see what was happening, glanced forward to the forecastle, where his young son Ottavio was bravely fighting in the forefront of the melee. At that moment a Venetian arrow struck the lad full in the breast, and he fell dying before his distracted father's eyes. At the sight the whole ship's company for the moment ceased their defense. But the hapless father, hesitating not a moment between his love for his beloved son and his duty to his country, leaped down among his men and rebuked and rallied them again to fight even more fiercely than before. Then, turning to some of the sailors, he commanded in a hoarse, grief-stricken voice:

My men, throw my son overboard into the deep sea. What better resting place can we give him than this spot where, fighting gallantly for his country, his death will be atoned for by the victory which will soon be ours? Now back to your work. Let each of you do his duty and avenge his untimely death with deeds rather than with lamentations.

And with set face and dry eyes he ascended again to his post and directed the struggle with more vigor than before. As his own ship was urged forward by its rowers toward that of the Venetian Admiral Dandolo, he gave the signal for the hidden galleys to attack. As they broke from cover and bore down on the Venetians, masts lowered for action, oars flashing in the sun, and men lining their bulwarks with arrows fitted to bowstrings and the crews shouting and singing, terror struck the hearts of the Venetians. Seized with panic, for they knew not how many fresh galleys were attacking them, some of the war vessels turned to flee. The Genoese followed in close pursuit, pressing every advantage. The battle had lasted all the day, and as the sun lit up the west with its glory of red and orange and gold the weary, battered Venetian fleet, now thoroughly demoralized and scattered, thought only of escaping. The proud galleys (far more numerous and powerful than those of the Genoese) which had sailed out only a few short hours before, confident that a swift victory would be theirs, were fugitives, and Venice had suffered her first great defeat at sea.

The Genoese, flushed with their victory over tremendous odds, resolved to crush the enemy, and orders were given to pursue the escaping galleys. Many of them had been so badly shattered that they were but leaking, crippled hulks. Sixty-six were burned and eighteen were carried off to Genoa, to be towed into the harbor stern foremost and with the defeated battle flags trailing in the sea. Among these was the flagship of Dandolo, on which he himself had been captured while fighting desperately. Seven thousand four hundred prisoners were carried to Genoa, among them the men who had been thrust into the room of Messer Marco and Rustichello.

All this the wounded men recounted, and more. And when the story had been told and retold, and the edge of grief was dulled and the maddening monotony of prison life had seized upon newcomers and old captives alike, Messer Marco and Rustichello sharpened their quills, stirred the ink in their inkhorns, smoothed out their sheets of vellum, checked up their notes, and again fell to work on the tale which had been interrupted on that sad October day.

Diligently they worked, for disease was abroad in the prison. Men were dying like flies, of starvation and disease and neglect, and none knew when his turn might come. And none could know what worse fate might befall them if the war was waged further and more fiercely between Genoa and Venice.

At last the task was completed, and the book finished, in the year of grace 1298.

The day of liberation of Messer Marco and his fellow Venetians was approaching. In 1299 Venice, undaunted by the crushing defeat of Curzola, fitted out a new fleet of one hundred galleys, and hired a large body of crossbowmen to man them from Catalonia. Meanwhile, however, Matteo Visconti, Captain-General of Milan, offered his services as mediator, in an effort to negotiate a peace on honorable terms between the two rival republics. The Venetians, though convinced that the defeat of Curzola was entirely accidental and that they could easily win the war eventually, decided nonetheless, since things were going none too well in their other foreign relationships, to accept the offer of Visconti. Venice selected the cities of Padua and Verona to represent it, and Genoa chose Asti and Tortona. The parties met and concluded a "perpetual peace" at Milan on May 25, 1299. The provisions of the treaty were surprising in their equality of treatment of both repub-

Cluy

Comme a ce leune
 de uide edusera toutes
 mines q'ist des mai
 plus que nos nez d'ioz f.
 neq' auun ois de tant p'ot
 uenars de c'ine copos auos
 donc nos laeron de tout celle ma
 nere com'etron aentier inyriet
 po' otre toutes les meures cou
 tes que bi sunt enq' om'etron tar
 p'imec'mat de les nes co' que les
 me'c'mat qe uont q' uient en en
 die. o: la chies que celes nes s'it
 fautes entel maniere q' uenos de
 uise. u. ieuos di queles s'it dou
 leingne qe e' apelle abbe' q' de capu
 elle ont une coue'it' elus ceste co
 ueite' l'aten en toutes les plusor
 lx. clambre qe en casome par de
 moier un me'c'mat a'aug'mant
 elle uir. i. amon. q' uij. aubes et
 maintes foies bi guingent eno
 re. ii. aubes qe se leuent em'et
 toutes les foies qui uind'it' elle
 sunt el'auce entel maniere car
 toutes sunt doubles. ce e' deus ta
 bles leune soure l'autre et tout en
 uiron e'oble de une table soure
 l'autre q' sunt calque e' de l'ore e' de
 tens q' sunt el'auce dign' de f'it
 elles ne sunt pas en p'ce de p'ce
 p'ce qe il ne ont mes les ingit
 entel maniere ou neq' d'iu' p'ce
 qui ont autre coust' que lo' sen
 ble que sou' maus que p'ces

car le uoq' di que il p'ent' l'cala
 ne clancue qu'ne menue'mant
 et le p'otent' meslor' co' un des
 d'ib'ies e' de plus qe il le ont p'ote
 bien ceste' trois coust' en sen
 ble ieuos di que' senent' come
 uotes. E de ceste coust' on g'it
 le lo' nes e' cest' uair bien i'it
 come p'ces. es' uos di que ceste
 nes uuelent' co' man'ces mes
 elle sunt sign'it' de l'ep'ce' de' b'ie
 v. es' p'otes de p'ure e' de tel. vi. q'
 si uos di qe elle allent' d'au'on
 ce e' cu' uenies q' uingent' a'as
 cun uenies. iij. man'ces. q' ont
 ceste' nes sign'it' b'iches qe b'ie
 p'otent' o: es' p'otes de p'ure mes
 si uos di quelle moine' .xl. ma
 n'ces ceste' uoie' a' uos. q' m
 core plusor' foies .ij. de'nt' a'ra
 ire l'ag'ant' nes. moine' de'nt'
 ceste' g'ant' b'iches mes leu
 ne e' g'aigne: qe l'q' uire. q' en
 core moine' de'bit' uos p'art
 bien. x. p'ot' a'ug' e' p'ot' p'edie
 des p'oson' et p'ot' f'it' les s'it' de
 l'ag'ant' nes. et uir' c'est' l'au
 us p'ote l'auce l'ice de l'ore a'la
 coust' e' en'ore uos di qe les
 deus g'ant' b'iches p'otent' en
 l'au'us. Et si uos di en'ore que
 quant' leg'ant' nes se uuelent'
 a' d'ober' ce e' coust' e' que' men
 tes un a'ug' illa' con'ce'it' entel
 maniere car il el'auent' en'ore

Page of the so-called "Paris text" (MS 1116, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris), used as the basis of the best modern editions of Marco Polo's text. Early fourteenth century, Old French, small folio. (Courtesy of the Library of the University of California)

lic. No indemnities or compensations were exacted by the Genoese, and the various clauses of the treaty indicate that the Venetians were by no means considered to have lost the war.

On July 1, 1299, a Genoese delegate was present in Venice at the solemn ratification of the treaty; and on August 28 the Venetian captives held in the prisons of Genoa were released. At almost the same time, on July 31, a twenty-five years' truce was concluded between Genoa and Pisa. And it is to be hoped that Marco's collaborator, Rustichello, was restored to liberty after nearly sixteen years of confinement in Genoa.

Chapter Nine

Venice Again

WE DO NOT KNOW how Messer Marco returned home from Genoa to Venice. He may have made the journey overland, or he may have traveled by sea. But there had been many changes in the affairs of his family since he had sailed on his last ill-fated voyage. The imprisonment of Marco had been a source of great worry to Messer Nicolo his father and Messer Maffeo his uncle. According to Ramusio they tried several times to ransom him, but without success, and they were in no way reassured by the frequent tales they heard of the Genoese retaining Venetians in their dungeons "for tens of years." Ramusio further states that they had planned to arrange for him to marry immediately on their return to Venice, because Maffeo was childless and the two brothers desired to keep their wealth in the family. This statement can hardly be correct, for Marco had a number of cousins; moreover, his half-brother, Maffeo, who had greeted him on his return from China, was still alive.

The branches and twigs of the family tree of the Polos are extremely difficult to disentangle, for the facts known do not fit exactly into any rational scheme which can be devised. Every bit of evidence that we have indicates that Marco was the only child born of Messer Nicolo's first marriage. Maffeo was evidently younger than Marco, for he is named second in the will of their uncle Marco, dated August 27, 1280. We may speculate that Nicolo perhaps returned home once or more during his six years' residence in Constantinople and that Maffeo was begotten before Nicolo and his brother left Constantinople for the East. If this was so, it is difficult to understand the failure of Marco to mention his brother in describing his father's return in 1269

with his uncle. Moreover, at least one manuscript states that on his return Nicolo took a second wife and had a child by her. No satisfactory solution of this mystery has ever been presented, and no documents have been found to elucidate it. Some scribe may have copied the story of Marco's birth twice, and the error may have been repeated inadvertently by others.

We cannot therefore take at its face value Ramusio's naïve explanation as to how and why Messer Nicolo was supposed to have remarried during Marco's imprisonment in Genoa: "And seeing that they could not ransom him [Marco] under any condition . . . and having consulted together, they decided that Messer Nicolo, who though he was very old, was none the less of robust constitution, should take a wife unto himself." Here we have the two elder Polos, their beards whitened with the frosts of the years, consulting together just as they had throughout all the years of their travels. In all the annals of men there is no record of two brothers more closely associated for a whole lifetime and seemingly never making a move without solemnly putting their heads together. We met them thus in Constantinople when they took counsel before leaving for the East; and now, in the late evening of their years, good Ramusio presents them together again in a fashion that seems most natural to us who have come to know them. Ramusio fully believed in the "compleSSIONE gagliarda" of the aged Messer Nicolo; for he continues "and so he married, and at the end of four years had three sons, one Stefano, the other Maffeo, and the other Giovannino."

We have seen that Maffeo was born before August 27, 1280. As for Stefano and Giovannino, alas, unless the documents still in existence are untruthful, they were like Gloucester's son, not "got 'tween the lawful sheets"; for their older brother, Maffeo, in his will dated August 31, 1300, leaves money "to my natural brothers Stefano and Giovannino." And the brilliant translator and commentator Yule states: "it is not unlikely that these were born from some connection entered into during the long residence in Cathay, though naturally their presence in the traveling company is not commemorated in Marco's prologue." Orlandini goes further and states that "they must have certainly been born in the Orient." In Maffeo the elder's will their mother's name is given as Maria; and other documents prove that even the younger, Giovannino (or Giovanni), was born before 1291.

Thus, in spite of Ramusio's valiant effort to ascribe great prowess to Nicolo's old age, the veteran traveler must be absolved from a marriage after his last return from the Far East in 1295 or any offspring of that supposed marriage. One may surmise that Giambattista Ramusio met with the names of Marco's three brothers and, not being able to find any documents at hand to explain their presence, accepted or invented a plausible tale to fit them into the frame of the Polo family.

To his father and this oddly assorted trio of half-brothers came Messer Marco Polo on his release from prison in Genoa. Either during his captivity or shortly thereafter the Polos had purchased a mansion in the parish of San Giovanni Chrisostomo, and there Marco dwelt for some time, living quietly and endeavoring to take up the threads of his life where they had been broken off on his capture by the Genoese galleys.

After the five years of captivity Venice must have seemed to Marco a haven of rest, a refuge from all that he had seen and undergone on shipboard and in dungeon. Hand-to-hand fighting at sea, chains, filth, vermin, bad food and water, pestilence, the sight of death in its most horrible forms—all these had been his lot, relieved only by those cherished hours of loving labor during which he had watched the pile of stiff vellum sheets grow under the swiftly moving quill of Rustichello. And now here was his written narrative with him in Venice. So doubtless he paced the bridges and the quays, watching the sea and the ships that were ever present, no matter where one turned or looked in Venice.

Now Messer Marco had had much time—indeed, too much time—in which to think, during his long years of confinement in Genoa la Superba. Perhaps, too—though this we know not—he dreamed of some fair woman of far Cathay who had won his heart completely with her clouds of shining black hair, her soft eyes, her dainty hands, and her exquisite body that swayed like the willow in the wind as she walked and glanced shyly up at the tall, pale-faced man from the unknown West who walked by her side. Favorite of the Great Khan as he was, his must have been the choice of the daughters of the great noblemen and merchants at the court. Perhaps he had even wooed and won her and married her after the custom of the country. Perhaps he had lifted her over the threshold of his home on her arrival on their wedding day, that no evil influence might enter and mar their happiness. And

perhaps, when they had drunk from the jade cups of wine joined by a frail thread of bright red silk, he had made her his own and loved her and poured out all his pent-up affection on her—he, who had been but a boy of seventeen when he left Venice with Messer Nicolo, too young to have known deep love or to have learned much of the ways of women.

Perhaps, too, the woman of an alien race had borne him children—for the daughters of Han were ever prolific. And it may be that when his father and uncle “took counsel together” and devised the plan by which they at last returned to Venice Marco had been forced by circumstances beyond his control or will to bid farewell to his tearful wife and children, with the promise—alas, never to be fulfilled—to return to them when he had accompanied his old father and uncle home and seen them safe in Venice once more. We shall never know any of this, for no record has remained. But we read clearly between the lines of his book that more than half his heart was left behind him in far Cathay; and, surely, intertwined with such a life, with such a nature as was Marco’s, may well have been the love of a woman—even more likely the love of many women.

But now that was all part of a dead life, a life that was his no more except in dreams and idle speculation. Never more would he cross the seas, following the red-gold path of the rising sun to that faraway land which was his own possession more than it has ever been any European’s before or since his day. And the memories made him lonely. He must fight it off. The past was done with, buried deep in his heart with its enshrined memories. But he was five and forty, well past middle age in thirteenth-century Venice. He would marry and seek refuge from himself at a fireside that would be his own. He would beget children, as so often urged by his father and uncle, that he might have sons and daughters to comfort his old age and to inherit the fortune for which he had toiled so hard and which he had brought back with such care and caution and stratagem over sea and land, through countless adventures and dangers, to his countinghouse in Venice. And so, recites the chronicle, Messer Marco Polo, noble gentleman of Venice, took unto himself a wife.

The story is set forth here on the authority of Ramusio. However, no record of the date of the marriage has been discovered, and it may well be that he had married Donata, daughter of Vitale Badoèr, before he was made captive by the Genoese.

The couple plighted their troth in true Venetian style. It may have been a love match or, as was often the case, it may have been arranged by matrimonial agents. As in all things Venetian, business entered even into arrangements for marriage. There had to be pledges from the future groom to his bride—usually a ring, as well as sureties that the contract would be fulfilled. On the day known as the *dies desponsationis* the formal promise to fulfill the contract of marriage was exchanged between the relatives of both parties, and the marriage was fixed for the next feast day.

In due time the marriage vows were exchanged—on the *dies traditionis* or *dies nuptiarum*—in the presence of the relatives and friends of Marco and his bride. The neighbors as well were invited to the ceremony. The day before the wedding the bridegroom paid a solemn visit to his bride and, after the custom inherited from the Romans, washed her head. Venetian tradition prescribed three solemn wedding rites, called by their old Latin names. The first was *transductio ad domum*, the conducting of the bride to her husband's home. This was accompanied by much feasting and merrymaking, and the bridal pair were followed by the relatives. Next followed the *visitatio* to the church and the *benedictio* or presentation and blessing of the ring. The bride brought to her husband caskets and coffers containing her jewelry and trousseau of silks and linens. Donata Badoèr also brought with her to Marco a substantial *repromissa* or dowry of personal as well as real property. In fact the first documentary information we have of Donata Polo is in a legal paper of March 17, 1312, by which her uncle liquidated her dowry in favor of Marco.

Eight days after the wedding came the *reventalia* or ceremonial visit of the young matron to her father's house, where a great banquet was served and rich presents were given to all the guests. Thereafter the newly married couple settled down to routine existence.

Of this marriage contracted by Messer Marco in his forties there were born three children. What would his friends in far-off Cathay have said of a man who could beget but daughters, but no son to worship before his tablets after he had gone on his last long journey to the Yellow Springs? For Marco was ever living in the past, and all that was said and done and heard in Venice was compared with the life which he had lived and seen so long on the other side of the world: Three daughters, no sons!

The daughters were christened Fantina, Bellela, and Moreta. Fantina was named after San Fantino, one of the saints of Venice; one of her grandsons bore the name Fantino. Another daughter was named Moreta, probably another form of Marotha, the name borne by one of Marco's first cousins. Bellela and Bellello, with variant spellings, are common enough names in medieval Venetian documents. Of the three daughters Moreta was possibly the youngest, as the two others were married when Marco made his will and he left a special provision therein for her to receive the same amount for her dowry as her sisters had been given.

When Marco's father, Messer Nicolo Polo, his guide, counselor, and companion from youth to middle age, died we know not. But in the testament of Marco's half-brother, Maffeo, made in 1300, Maffeo describes himself as "Matheus paulo filius condam [quondam] Nicolai Paulo." In the Latin of the period *quondam* often meant *defunctus* or "deceased." So the old man passed away full of years and adventures. He had crossed the desert wastes and mountains of Asia three times and had in addition traveled from East to West by sea. He had been one of Europe's pioneers in the Far East; and, although Messer Marco did not hesitate to push him and Uncle Maffeo into the background in his tale, we must salute him as the venturesome one who, "taking counsel" with his brother, dared the unknown with intrepid courage year after year in Russia, in Asia Minor, and along the Tartar caravan routes. He it was who had set Marco's feet upon the path of fortune and honor, who had guided him and taught him the ways of Asia and its peoples. And he it was who in those far-off days had presented the "young bachelor" to the great Kublai as "my son and your man."

Ramusio in his quaint text tells us that

his father then being dead, he [Marco], as befits a good and pious son, caused to be made for him a tomb which was very much honored for the conditions of those times, which was a great sarcophagus of living stone that may be seen to this day, placed under the portico which is before the Church of San Lorenzo of this city, on the right-hand side as one enters, with such an inscription as indicates that it is the tomb of Messer Nicolo Polo of the *contrata* of San Gio. Chrisostomo.

Messer Marco and his uncle Maffeo, judging by every indication and record which has survived, carried on their business—buying and selling, importing, exporting, seemingly playing a considerable part in

the commercial life of Venice. And they—Maffeo and his wife, Marco and his family—shared their house in San Giovanni Chrisostomo with Marco's brother Maffeo and his family and with the young unmarried Giovannino and with Stefano and his wife and their five children.

The business was still a family affair, and, as suggested by Orlandini, it was most likely for his family that Maffeo the younger made a voyage to Crete. The contemplation of this voyage and its uncertain outcome caused this Maffeo to write his last will and testament on August 31, 1300. Therein, in addition to the information about the decease of his father Nicolo, we learn that his wife was one Caterina Sagredo, and that he had one legitimate child—a daughter named Fiordalisa, probably after Maffeo's mother—and an illegitimate daughter, Pasqua. It is interesting to note that Maffeo provided that his wife should receive certain moneys and "all her clothes just as they stand up to the present." This would seem to imply that a Venetian husband retained ownership even of his wife's clothes. To Pasqua, his natural daughter—perhaps either because life was really more difficult by reason of her birth out of wedlock or perhaps because of some expressed wish—Maffeo left 400 lire "for her marriage, and if she herself should wish to become a nun, I desire that she shall have 200 lire to give to the convent, and as for the other 200 lire, I desire that securities shall be bought and that she should have the income from her securities during her life." But the most interesting clauses of the will are those which make Messer Marco his brother's residuary heir failing the birth of a son after his departure for Crete.

Meanwhile Marco plunged into business life, employing all his talents together with the wisdom born of the many experiences which had been his during his residence in Asia. He traded in furs from Russia and tin from Cornwall. He shipped bales of red caps to Asia Minor and sold glass lamps made in the factories of Murano to the mosques of the infidel. He brought in the world-famed Florentine cloths and reshipped them to Barbary, Egypt, Syria, the Aegean Islands, and the Balkans. At times he even contracted to send shiploads of pilgrims to the Holy Land—a profitable business. They were crowded into the holds like slaves—for they were simple folk, paid little, and were given miserable quarters and worse food—while the master of the ship sat dining at his ease on deck, using a silver service and entertained by musicians.

SECONDO VOLUME
DELLE NAVIGATIONI ET VIAGGI

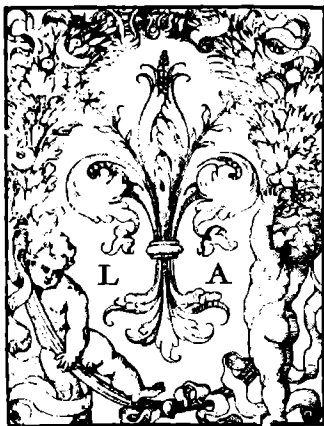
NEL QUALE SI CONTENGONO

L'Historia delle cose de Tartari, & diuersi fatti de loro Imperatori, descritta da M. Marco Polo Gentilhuomo Venetiano, & da Hayton Armeno.

Varie descrittioni di diuersi autori, dell'Indie Orientali, della Tattaria, della Persia, Armenia, Mengrecha, Zorzania, & altre Prouincie, nelle quali si raccontano molte imprese d'Uisumcaflan, d'Imael Soffi, del Soldano di Babilonia, di diuersi Imperatori Ottomani, & particolarmente di Selim, contro Tomombey, ultimo Soldano de Mamalucchi, & d'altri Principi.

Et il viaggio della Tana. Con la descrittione de nomi de Popoli, Città, Fiumi, & Porti d'intorno al Mar Maggiore, come si nominauano al tempo dell'Imperator Adriano, & molte altre narrationi, così dello stato de Melchitti, Sarbi, & Circassi, come d'altre genti barbare a gli antichi incognite. Et il naufragio di M. Pietro Quirino gentilhuomo Venetiano, portato per fortuna settanta gradi sotto la Tramontana.

Con l'Indice diligentemente ordinato, delle cose piu notabili.



Con Privilegio dell' Illustrissimo Senao di Venetia.

IN VENETIA NELLA STAMPERIA DE GIUNTI.

L'ANNO M D. LIX.

Frontispiece of the first Italian edition (Venice, 1559) of the second volume of Ramusio's *Delle Navigazioni et Viaggi*, containing the text of Marco Polo. From the author's collection



Frontispiece of the first printed edition of Marco Polo's book, Nuremberg, 1477. (Courtesy of the British Museum)

The medieval period has often been described as the "Dark Ages." True, in it a different set of values obtained and superstitions and strange beliefs held sway; but, though the forms of human activity were not the same as those of later centuries, men's lives, and women's as well, were rich and varied. In Venice more than elsewhere the days were full and interesting, for the current of commerce and industry that flowed through her canals and lagoons ever brought new ideas, new stimuli, new discoveries and processes.

Each year two galleys went to England heavily laden with spices, and brought back great sacks of English wool to sell to Lucca, Florence, and Genoa. Germans from beyond the Alps sent their sons to Venice "to learn grammar, arithmetic, and the ways of trade." Basle in Switzerland bought much Venetian glass. So much brocade was brought in from Bagdad that it was called *baldacchini*, "goods of Bagdad." Much of this was resold to France and England; there it was fashioned into canopies and drapes called by the same name, baldachin.

Other cities' misfortunes became Venice's opportunities. Shortly after Messer Marco came home from Tartary, civil strife arose in Lucca, whose weavers were reputed most cunning in working silk and velvet. Many of the weavers fled to Venice with the tools of their trade. They were welcomed by the shrewd Council of La Serenissima, as Venice was often called, and were allowed to set up their looms hard by the Rialto Bridge. There they taught their art, and because of their industry the trade in Venetian silks and velvets waxed greater than ever throughout the world. Wisely the merchants encouraged the guilds of weavers to maintain high standards of texture and color, and many a high plume and puff of smoke arose from the ancient Rialto Bridge where defective cloth was burned in public to serve as a warning and to prevent loss of trade through delivery of inferior goods. But Venetian silks did not of themselves suffice to supply the growing trade in textiles. Greek silks were imported, and Arabian weavers, and their goods found their way into the coffers and raiment-chests of prelate, of monarch, and of merchant prince.

Marco dealt, too, in wrought metal and jewels, for which Venice was famed far and wide, and glass of every kind; for was it not known that every Eastern girl of good and wealthy family had to have at least one Venetian-wrought mirror in her dowry?

All this barter and trade and the use of many foreign moneys were

bringing strange innovations into Venice business practices, such things, for instance, as "bills of exchange," by which one could transfer money by an order on another who dwelt in some distant city. And such were the strange ways in which religion was mixed with business that in the bill were inserted the words: "*e che Christo vi guarde*" ["and may Christ watch over you"].

Marco did much of his business with foreigners, and indeed he found the method complicated. For by Venetian law he could not deal direct with them but was compelled to call in a *sensal* or broker. And the trade with these foreigners was a form of barter. They were not allowed to receive cash for their merchandise but had to take Venetian goods in exchange. Cash profits were reserved for the merchants of Venice, who waxed ever richer.

Meanwhile great deeds were afoot in the city, and the government of the republic was undergoing many changes. But there is no evidence that Messer Marco concerned himself with politics. Business absorbed him—business and those inescapable dreams of the past and of the golden East. Though his book had been written and had been passed from hand to hand, already re-copied and mutilated and translated into many tongues, Messer Marco still talked of the places where he had been and the wonders that he had seen. His family must have wearied of his tales, and his friends and acquaintances must have shunned him. He spoke always in extravagant figures, and a nickname was given him which clung—"Messer Marco Milione." He was ever desirous of interesting his fellow Venetians in the Far Eastern trade, and approached them times without number with schemes for investing in trading ventures to the land of the Great Khan, where "millions" could be made, particularly if under his guidance, the expert guidance of Messer Marco Polo, who knew those lands as did no other man alive.

But the Venetians turned a deaf ear to his accounts of the great wealth awaiting them. They had enough trouble on their hands at home and abroad and were in no mood to listen to fantastic schemes for getting rich quickly in the Far Eastern trade. For though Venice la Serenissima was growing ever more wealthy and powerful, quarrels with the Pope, hostilities with other cities and states, as well as changes of doges and councils and civil disturbances to boot, all made the merchants on the Rialto look sharply to their accounts and invest only where their moneys were secure and the returns thereon quick and cer-

tain. Rapid turnovers and small profits near home were more attractive than great gains at great risks far from their native land. Moreover, to these hard-headed men of business who had made Venice the mistress of the sea, Messer Marco Milione seemed, with all his weird and fantastic tales of the lands of East Asia, to be more than a little "touched" in the head.

The traveler had not forgotten the book written in his Genoese prison, and seems to have kept a copy or copies by his side during his later life in Venice. According to an inscription in copies of a Polo manuscript preserved in Paris and in Bern, Messer Marco presented a copy of the book to "Monseigneur Thiebault, chevalier, seigneur de Cepoy, whom God absolve." This inscription states that the chevalier, who visited Venice as the representative of Charles of Valois, requested a copy of Marco's book from the author. Whereupon Marco gave him the very first copy made of his book, in August 1307. Though Thiebault was in Venice at that time, and no doubt obtained a copy of the book, there is no way of proving that Marco presented it to him. In fact the inscription states that the book in which we find it is no more than a copy of the original volume which Thiebault obtained; and this fact, together with the fulsome flattery of Charles of Valois contained in the inscription, leaves the matter of the gift by Marco of his first copy—or of any copy—open to grave question.

The city of Venice was passing through troubled times at home as well as abroad, and Marco saw much history made before his very eyes. But like most witnesses of historic scenes, he was too close to it all, too much affected by it in his business and social life, to see it in its proper perspective and in its true relation to the past and future history of his fatherland. Not all Venetians were satisfied with the rule of Doge Pietro Gradenigo. The year 1300 saw the abortive conspiracy of Marco Bocconio, and when all was over his body and those of ten of his henchmen were swinging on great gibbets between the high red columns of the Piazzetta—strange landfalls to mariners coming home from the sea.

The crushing of Bocconio's rebellion was but the beginning of more dissatisfaction and internal trouble in Venice. The streets seemed never free from rioters or from the militia guarding palaces, churches, factories, and warehouses. A quarrel with the Church over Ferrara led to the excommunication of Venice and its people by a Papal Bull, issued March 27, 1309. All Venetian treaties were declared null and void,

Venetian properties abroad were subject to confiscation, commercial relations with La Serenissima were forbidden all sons of the Church, and the clergy were summoned to leave the doomed city. News came pouring into the Rialto of the burning, sacking, and looting of Venetian banks, factories, and vessels abroad, even as far away as England. The city's trade began to suffer as though from creeping paralysis and religious, civil, and social life on the lagoons began slowly to disintegrate. At first the Venetians faced the issue bravely; but when their garrison at Ferrara surrendered to disease and attacks of besiegers, and when the news came of the destruction of one of the Venetian fleets, growing hunger and unrest in the city finally forced Doge Gradenigo to send a mission to the Holy Father at Avignon with a humble petition for peace. It was granted and the excommunication was revoked, but a large indemnity was exacted; and as a result Gradenigo became more unpopular than before.

All of this disturbed the peaceful tenor of Marco's life. But he was to see more direful things on the streets of the city very soon after. The discontent of the people with their ruler was seized upon as the rallying point of many of the noble families who hated the Doge and his power. The two leaders were Marco Querini and Bajamonte Tiepolo. The conspirators plotted to seize the Rialto and assassinate the Doge and the leaders of his party. The time set for the insurrection was the morning of St. Vito's Day, June 15, 1310. Rain was then falling in torrents and a howling hurricane was blowing in from the sea. Thunder crashed, and the lurid flash of lightning lit the narrow Merceria—then as now the main business street of the city. The shouts of "*Libertà!*" and "*Morte al Doge Gradenigo!*" were smothered by the screeching of the wind and the roar of the rain. The various bands of conspirators failed to meet as arranged. One group was attacked and routed on the Piazza by the Doge, who had learned of the plot the previous night.

As Tiepolo with his contingent marched shouting and brandishing their weapons down the Merceria, the householders, loving a brawl, began to attack them from all sides, pelting them with stones and any missiles that came to hand.

As with Abimelech in the ancient days of Israel, so was panic started by the death of Tiepolo's standard-bearer. For a certain woman, by name Giustina Rosso, hearing the blood-curdling cry, "*Morte ai ti-*

ranni!” under her window, threw open the casement and looked down upon the crowd, an action strictly forbidden by Venetian law. Taking in the situation at a glance she thought not at all of the law but seized a great stone mortar filled with growing red carnations and flung it with all her force at the head of Bajamonte Tiepolo. The heavy missile missed the leader, but struck the head of his standard-bearer. He fell, and Tiepolo was spattered with his blood and brains. This unforeseen disaster struck terror into Tiepolo’s men, for they were jammed tightly in the narrow street between high walls and missiles were now raining down on them mercilessly from window and rooftop. Terror grew to panic, and the conspirators turned and fled to the wooden bridge of the Rialto, where Tiepolo was finally persuaded to lay down his arms. As a punishment he and some of his ringleaders were banished for four years to Dalmatia, and their houses were demolished; others, less influential, were beheaded and their property confiscated.

In due time Donna Rosso was summoned before the Doge to receive the thanks of the grateful Republic. Being asked to name her own reward for her brave deed, she modestly refused recompense but finally admitted that she would like permission to hang out of her window a banner of San Marco each St. Vito’s Day, and moreover asked that her rent be never raised above fifteen golden ducats a year. The story went the round of the canals and squares, and the house was pointed out to all and sundry as the Casa Giustina, whose tenant would take no recompense from the Doge for her brave act. To this day she and her house are not forgotten in old Venice.

Another, a gentler, sweeter tale, one which long lingered in the hearts of all who heard it, was told in Venice, and passed from lip to ear wherever pious men and women forgathered. It was the story of *La Beattina*, “the little blessed one.” One day in June of 1288 a little child was born to Countess Elena, wife of Count Pier Tagliapetra, a soldier of fortune, who dwelt hard by the Campo San Vito. The child was a girl, beautiful as a flower, gentle as the soft spring winds of Venice. She was called Maria Beata, and grew up a sweet and saintly child. Every day at Mass and Vespers the little girl would go to San Maurizio’s Church, across the Grand Canal. All the ferrymen knew and loved her and were her willing slaves.

As she approached the age of marriage her father decided to betroth her to a wealthy suitor. The maiden refused; and when he forbade

her visits to her church, she disobeyed. Her father bribed and threatened and cajoled the boatmen, so that finally one day she found no one who would row her across the canal, for fear of him. Whereupon the beautiful Maria Beata knelt upon the paving stones and prayed to the Holy Virgin and San Maurizio to come to her assistance. Having received assurances of their aid, she untied her little apron and, throwing it on the water, set her feet lightly and gently upon it. Lo and behold! The flimsy fabric bore her weight, and wafted by a gentle breeze and guided by divine hands, Beata reached the other side in safety. Whereon all the boatmen cried "*Uno miracolo! Uno miracolo!*" and swiftly the news coursed down the narrow streets and sped across the bridges to the market places and the quays, and no other thing was told but of the prayer of *La Beattina* and of her apron. Though many of Venice's noble sons thereupon flocked to offer their hands and hearts, Maria Beata would have none of them but became a "Bride of Christ," with a convent cell for her nuptial chamber. It soon was whispered about that life held no longer any attraction for her, and that she continually prayed for death. And Heaven heard her prayers and supplications; for beautifully and with no pain she passed into the arms of the Father on the Eve of All Saints' Day of 1308, when she was in her twenty-first year of life. All Venice followed her bier to the Church of San Vito, and never did so many candles blaze or sweet incense smoke as on that day when *La Beattina* was laid to her rest. Her tomb became at once a shrine for prayer and pilgrimage, and each year the Doge and Dogressa left gifts upon her altar. In time a strange custom sprang up, and each All Saints' Day her coffin was uncovered. Then from far and near mothers would come to let their tiny babies touch the sacred bones, that they might never drown. This became such a scandal that finally, many a long day thereafter, the Church sealed up the coffin. But to this day every All Saints' Day *La Beattina* is remembered by Venetian mothers and their children, who throng the Church of San Vito to overflowing to receive the blessing of the saint.

We do not know when Messer Maffeo Polo died. It must have been later than February 1310, for his will, still in existence, is dated the sixth of that month. His death must, on the other hand, have occurred before the middle of May 1318, as is attested by legal documents of 1328. Moreover, Pipino's introduction to his Latin version of *The Description of the World*, bearing the date 1320, speaks of Messer

Maffeo as having made certain declarations to his confessor on his deathbed.

Maffeo and his wife had not been blessed with children, and he left the greater part of his estate to his nephews. So much was left to Marco that he had by now come into the control of more than half of the Polo property. At about the same time his half-brother Matteo died without male issue, and much of his property, too, came into Marco's hands.

Indeed, through these and other legacies the shrewd Messer Marco was rapidly gathering unto himself all of the results of the commercial investments and travels of the older generation of Polos. But the rapid manner in which all this wealth became concentrated in his hands does not seem to have sufficed him. We have seen Marco throughout his book as a keen, shrewd business man who never missed an opportunity to add to his wealth. And somehow in his declining years he seems to have become greedy and rapacious. Perhaps it was the bitterness and frustration of the latter half of his life that developed in him this unhappy, unpleasant trait. Successive inheritances and good investments were not enough. He lent money to his uncle Maffeo and his other relatives, and always seems to have profited thereby. When they did not pay, he pressed them hard; and when that did not produce the desired results, he brought suit in the Venetian courts. Thus we have a judgment of July 2, 1319, whereby Marco recovered from his cousin Marcolino Polo a debt owed him by his father, the traveler's uncle Marco, since March 16, 1306. The decree granted Marco the right to seize his goods to satisfy the judgment plus double the amount due as a fine and interest at twenty per cent for the thirteen years during which the debt had remained unpaid. This was a "merchant of Venice," and the defendant was his own cousin! A later decree of September 10, 1319, transferred the title of two properties in San Giovanni Christostomo, belonging to Marcolino, to Marco to satisfy the July judgment.

Several records are in existence which, if they do not refer to a member of another Polo family, throw light on other appearances of Messer Marco Polo before courts and other tribunals. On April 13, 1302, an entry was made in the "Great Book" of the Maggior Consiglio exempting Marco Polo from the penalty incurred for failing to have a water conduit examined as provided by law "since he was ignorant of the ordinance on the subject."

Another amusing appearance of Messer Marco is recorded in a resolution of the Maggior Consiglio, dated April 10, 1305. Therein it appears that one Bonocio of Mestre was tried and found guilty of smuggling wine (*vini per eum portati contra bampnum*). He was fined 152 lire, and this entry grants him a pardon on condition that he pay his fine in four annual instalments and that any deficiencies in the payments be made good by himself or his sureties. "And his sureties are the *Nobiles Viri* Petrus Maureceno [Pietro Morosini] and Marcus Paulo Milion and several others . . ." On the stained and yellow entry some hand turned to dust these many centuries has written under Marco's name the single word "*mortuus*, dead."

That Marco did not cease his business activities after his return from Genoa is evidenced by a very interesting legal document which has survived the ravages and vicissitudes of the years. It is a written judgment—in Latin, as was customary in the Venetian records of the time—of the "Court of Petitions" in a suit brought by the "noble man" Marco Polo of the district of San Giovanni Chrisostomo against one Paulo Girardo of the district of San Apollinare. Marco had turned over to Girardo a pound and a half of musk for sale on commission. The musk was valued at about \$110. Girardo sold one-half pound at the stipulated price and returned the remainder to Marco. When the latter weighed it he found it short one-sixth of an ounce. Moreover, Girardo failed to pay Marco the money for the half-pound sold. Suit was filed for the price of the amount sold and for the one-sixth missing ounce. The judges found in favor of Marco, together with the costs of the suit, and ordered the defendant "to be seized and confined in the common prison of Venice" if the money was not paid within a reasonable time. So Marco not only brought a sample of the musk deer with him back to Venice but dealt in the commodity after his return as well.

The onerous burdens placed upon the dyers of Florence by their fellow citizens had caused many of them to leave the city on the Arno so famous for its weaves and the beauty of its colored cloth. The weavers' and clothworkers' guilds kept the Florentine dyers in complete subservience by fixing prices for dyeing, and in many ways treated them like the poorest laborers. A goodly number of these skilled craftsmen left in disgust and found their way to Venice. There they were welcomed, and their influence was soon felt in the betterment of Venetian

dyeing. The dyers were divided into three groups. The dyers of black and other simple colors were organized into a guild, whose members were recruited from its apprentices. These had to work eleven years before becoming eligible as master workmen. Their hours were long, from 4:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M., and severe practical examinations were given in dyeing before the candidate was finally admitted as a master. The other dyers were divided into two groups, that of the dyers in fine materials and colors and that of dyers in silk. These two latter groups were not organized as guilds but performed their labor as independent craftsmen. Many weavers came with them to Venice and many of their designs, largely from Chinese motifs, found their way into the markets of the world.

The dyes heaped high in jars and barrels, bales and bundles in Messer Marco's warehouses were of every sort, and were brought together from many lands, for the folk of his time loved color and used it lavishly in their daily life. It was found everywhere, in the stained-glass windows of the cathedrals, in the painting of the statues and the interiors of church and castle and home, in bright-colored hangings and tapestries, in the robes of the women, in the parti-colored or striped doublet and hose of the craftsmen, and in the luxurious and sumptuous robes of the nobles. For Venetian workmen were not clad in drab or solemn garb, but went cheerfully to their work in gray and brown, yellow and green; and merchants dressed in green and orange, purple and red. Even the shirts and coats of mail and shoes of the soldiers and the garments of the visitors to the city from every land were brilliantly dyed or stained. To see a crowded street or market place in the days of the Polos was to witness a brilliant, colorful pageant.

Marco had brought home indigo with him and worked hard to introduce it into the dye markets of Venice and other European towns. But it competed with the long-established trade in woad, the blue dye-stuff which had held its own for many centuries, and Marco found it unprofitable. So he imported dried woad-leaves in great quantities. At first he could not bear to go near the vats where it was prepared on account of the foul odor which it gave off, mixed as it was with urine and allowed to ferment and putrefy in the sun. But he quickly became accustomed to it and paid it no more attention. And, indeed, many of the dyes were prepared for use in the same way. Brazilwood from Sumatra and Ceylon and India was heaped high in the twilight of the

warehouses, and bags of orseille lichen and gallnuts, sumach and madder, saffron and lacmus lichen.

In a secluded, well-protected corner were jars and boxes containing the dried bodies of the kermes insects, the precious source of the finest scarlet dye. There was a steady demand for this expensive article, and Marco imported it from Spain and Greece and France. He also had great stores of dried Polish shield-lice, called also "Polish cochineal," which he brought in from Germany and Eastern Europe. Both types of insects were obtained with great effort, women picking the former off the leaves of the kermes oak at night when the dew was on them, and also by digging up the shrubs or the plants to which the lice clung, picking them off, and replanting the shrubs. Lucky the poor woman who, with her fingernails kept long for the purpose, could pick two pounds of the rare insects in a day. Messer Marco made a nice profit in selling especially selected kermes bodies to the leeches, who used it as an astringent for wounds, for the treatment of blood-shot eyes, and, most important of all, for weakness of the heart, for which it was held a sovereign remedy.

Marco's travels and his book had made him well known even beyond the frontiers of Venice. One day he was visited by a famous man, and the two had friendly and profitable converse. The visitor was no less a person than Pietro d'Abano (*ca.* 1250-1316), Professor of Medicine at the University of Padua, and renowned as both physician and philosopher.* He was a most liberal thinker and writer for his time, and was consequently in trouble with the authorities more than once. He was very proud of his acquaintance with the much-traveled Messer Marco, and was profoundly impressed with the breadth of knowledge and the keen powers of observation of the Venetian. On his return to Padua the famous doctor wrote a Latin treatise entitled: "Conciliator Differentiarum Philosophorum Praecipue Medicorum." Therein he discusses among other things the problem "as to whether or not it be possible to live under the equator." In this section of his work he describes a certain great star to be seen in Zanzibar, and adduces as testimony part of a conversation he had had with Messer Marco in the following words:

* This is the same Pietro who is the subject of Browning's poem, "Pietro of Abano."

About this, together with other matters, Marco the Venetian told me, [and he is] the man who has encompassed more of the world in his travels than any I have ever known, and a most diligent investigator. He saw this same star under the Antarctic Pole, and it has a great tail, of which he drew the figure, thus [here follows a drawing]. He told me also that he saw the Antarctic Pole at an altitude above the earth apparently equal to the length of a soldier's lance, and the Arctic [Pole] was hidden. He informed me furthermore that thence camphor, lignum aloes, and brazil-wood are exported to us. He informs me that the heat there is intense, and the habitations few in number. These things indeed he saw on a certain island at which he arrived by sea. He says, moreover, that the men there are very large, and that there are also very great rams which have wool coarse and stiff as are the bristles of our pigs.

Furthermore, d'Abano refers to Marco in his discussion of a problem of Aristotle: "Because of what are those who are in hot places timid, and those who are, on the other hand, in cold places virile?" On this subject he says:

I heard from Marco the Venetian, who traveled across the equator that he had found there men larger in body than [those] here, and he had found this because in such places one does not meet with the cold of the body which is exhausting and consequently tends to make them smaller.

The admiring manner in which Pietro d'Abano refers to Marco in his work, and the way in which he cites him as the highest authority, and the evident pride with which he says "he told me" and "I heard from Marco" indicate that Messer Marco's knowledge and experience were recognized and estimated highly during his lifetime by some of the learned men of his day at least—and this apart from his book. Most likely the Professor of Medicine had also read the Venetian's manuscript, and it was his appreciation of its contribution to the world's knowledge that made him accept the authority of the traveler without question.

Time passed, and the aging merchant continued in business, going hither and thither on his lawful occasions. Meanwhile his two elder daughters had grown to womanhood. Fantina, the eldest born, married Marco Bragadin, probably before 1318; and her father, as was the custom, provided her with a handsome dowry. His second daughter, Bellela, also married one Bertuccio Querini, and likewise was well provided for by her father.

A feud had evidently developed during Marco's later years between the various members of the Polo family, which had hitherto appeared so closely knit and united in all its enterprises. We have seen

that Marco practically drove his cousin Marcolino from the palace which the family seemed to have shared amicably for many years. Now, in his last years, we find Marco turning his back on his own kin and working in conjunction with his sons-in-law, especially with Marco Bragadin, who lived in the Ca' Polo. Strangers were usurping the house of the Polos, backed by Marco; and bitter lawsuits followed one on another when he was no longer there to guide and control, browbeat and pacify.

In 1318 Marco was sixty-four, which was indeed an advanced age for a man of the thirteenth century, and ever more grasping, querulous, and quarrelsome. In that year he lost his natural brother Giovannino. The young man had evidently been engaged in business with or for Marco or his brother Stefano and, like his half-brother Matteo, had traveled to and from Crete.

The reference to the death of Giovannino has been preserved where one would never expect to find such information. On September 18, 1318, Stefano Polo applied for and obtained a license to export one thousand measures of grain "from Puglia to friendly countries." The license granted by the Maggior Consiglio of Venice recites that "Stefano Polo has set forth in his petition that Giovannino his late brother who was on a ship . . . coming from Tana, and had with him all his goods, beyond the value of four thousand lire, perished by an unhappy fate with the said ship, and as is clearly known he [Stefano] lost all his goods, and . . . he has been reduced to poverty, saying that he cannot sustain his own life and that of five very small children, of which the eldest has not yet passed beyond the age of six years." And Stefano asks therefore for the export permit to aid "in indemnifying him for such a grave loss." He evidently could not put through the deal speedily, for the Maggior Consiglio on May 22, 1319, extended the time in which to complete the transaction.*

Perhaps we can excuse the exaggeration, which, as the great scholar Orlandini suggests, may have been made to soften the hard hearts of the fiscal agents of the Venetian government. But how could a man so poor deal thus in grain? And, of course, there was the share of Gio-

* It may be noted incidentally that available documents list the children of Stefano, whose wife's name is unknown, as three—Iacobello and Andrea, sons, and a daughter, Isabella. That he had two other children is established only by the export license set out herein. We do not know their names or anything about them.

vannino in the Venetian real estate of the Polos, which now came, as a result of his untimely death, into the hands of Marco and Stefano.

As a result of Fantina's marriage to Marco Bragadin, Messer Marco Polo had six grandchildren, four boys and two girls. Perhaps he dandled one or more of them on his old knees and played with them and spoiled them as grandfathers have done since the beginning of time. We do not know. Bellela bore her husband no children, and Moreta was not married during her father's lifetime.

One day there was much buzzing of conversation and wagging of tongues and nodding of heads. For a great man was in Venice, he who had dared to write poetry in the vulgar tongue, who had been Prior in his home city until, driven into exile for no crime but that of being a patriot, he had wandered for many years throughout Italy—even Dante Alighieri, the great Florentine.

Now this famous man had come to Venice as an envoy from the Lord of Ravenna, Guido da Polenta. For a quarrel had arisen between some sailors of Ravenna and those of La Serenissima, and several Venetian seamen had been killed or injured. Guido da Polenta, having bethought himself of how Dante had been a skilled diplomat in the old days, had begged him to plead with the Doge of Venice on his behalf and that of the city. Dante was glad of such an opportunity to repay his patron's kindness. Moreover, he had been in Venice before and knew the city well.

Dante of Florence was a witty man, and brooked no offenses withal. And the story was bruited about of his speech at a state dinner to which he had been invited by the Doge, Giovanni Soranzo. There were other ambassadors from various princes of greater account than da Polenta, Lord of Ravenna; and these were served with fine large fish while Dante's plate received but a tiny one. Then Dante reached for the little fish, picked it up from his plate, and held it to his ear. The Doge, observing this strange conduct, inquired what it might mean. "I knew that this little fish's father lived and died in these waters," replied the poet, "and I was asking him news of his father." "And what answer did he make?" asked the Doge. "He told me that he was too little to remember much about his father, but that I might get the information I desired from the older fish." "Whereupon," quoth the teller of the tale, "the Doge ordered Dante to be served with a fine large fish."

In due time the business of the embassy was finished and Dante left the city of the lagoons to return to Ravenna. A few weeks later the sad news of the poet's death came to the crowds on the Rialto. Instead of returning by sea to Ravenna, he had chosen the land route, one that led along the marshy coasts, ill-famed at all times, and above all in September, the most dangerous season of the year. After the close and sultry heat of summer, the air was filled with the deadly miasmas of malaria. Dante's health was already impaired, and he fell an easy victim to the disease. His companions conveyed him as best they could past the mouths of the Po and through the ancient Pineta, that great forest of pines which extended for miles north and south of Ravenna. On they went, giving the dying poet every aid and comfort possible, past the mighty tomb of Theodoric the Goth, and so entered Ravenna by the Porta Serrata. Dante was barely conscious when he was finally carried into the city, and passed away a few days later.

All this Marco Polo is likely to have learned.

So the months followed, one slowly on the heels of the other, until two years had passed. There is a tradition that the little children used to run after him calling, "Messer Marco, tell us another lie." But there would seem to be no foundation for this, nor for the still more cruel legend that even before his death a character always appeared at the Venetian masques dressed as Messer Marco and told monstrous, unbelievable fables as though they were real happenings. True it is, however, that most of the contemporary readers of Marco's book and those who heard his tale from his own lips believed little or nothing of his story. Its horizons were too broad, its facts about a world entirely unknown to them were too novel, too far removed from their own experience and from what they had read of the outside world in other books, for them to accept. Moreover, the Republic was absorbed in profound readjustments in her government and distracted by contests and animosities with her neighbors and her rivals. Marco's tales and schemes for trading with East Asia fell on deaf ears, and his oft-told, long-winded tales were no longer welcomed or relished by his fellow citizens.

The winter of the year 1323 set in. Marco was now in his seventieth year, and was growing feebler. Finally the worried wife, Donata, after a long talk with the family, decided to call in a physician. Perhaps, if Marco had been consulted, he might have preferred the services

of a Chinese doctor, if one had been obtainable. In fact there was but little choice between their ministrations and those of the Venetian doctors. However, the physicians of Venice were better than those of the other Italian cities, as they were under strict government regulation. They occupied a high social position and conducted themselves like lords. Dressed in velvets and with morocco leather shoes, their fingers heavy with rings, they received handsome fees for their services. Their tables were set with the best foods and wines, and they were of the few who ate with two-pronged forks. However, their failures appear to have been many; for an early law of the Republic provided that when an illness was deemed serious, the patient must be warned, in order that he might make or revise his will and seek spiritual consolation and absolution.

Once the physician was called in, he examined a patient such as Marco with solemn mien and grave face and discoursed learnedly of the four humors and their condition. Perhaps blood-letting would do some good. He finally departed, to make a uroscopy in his home at his leisure, in consultation with a fellow physician. Then followed prescriptions to be taken by the patient. At first the medicines were simple—spices such as pepper and ginger, and sugar mixed with rose water and essence of violet. But these prescriptions, which could do no harm even if they had no curative value, having proved of no avail, more radical remedies were employed. An apothecary might be summoned and a *theriacum* ordered. It was an electuary of sixty-five ingredients mixed with honey, as compounded by the apothecaries' guild of Venice, and was famous throughout Italy as "Venice treacle." There followed noxious mixtures and decoctions of human and other animal organs, as well as of plants gathered during correct phases of the moon, and even such things as vipers' fat, powdered mummy, and ants' eggs.

Finally the physician would advise the family both as a friend and as one instructed thereto by the law, that they should see to it that a notary be summoned and a will drawn up while the patient's mind was still clear and well balanced. He would urge haste, as he had often seen men taken off so suddenly that they had had no time to make a testamentary deposition of their property or receive the last comforting sacraments of Holy Church.

We may reconstruct what followed in Marco's case in some detail. It was sunset in Venice, January 8, 1324.

There was the notary, Giustiniani. His gondola scraped along the stone wall as the oarsman checked its movement at the steps below; the great doors were flung open; and the notary ascended the stairs in flowing, black, clerical habit, his inkhorn and quill pens in a case hanging from his belt, and a scroll of vellum in his hands.

Giustiniani seated himself by the bed, so that the sick man would not have to raise his voice unduly, sharpened and split a fresh quill, and asked Marco to make known his wishes.*

At length the quill of Giustiniani flew over the vellum, its tip sputtering and blotting wherever it struck a rough or wrinkled spot: "I desire my beloved wife, Donata, and my three daughters to be my executrixes and to carry out the provisions of my will. Provide for the proper tithe to be paid to the Bishop of Castello, and twenty *soldi* of Venetian *grossi* to the Monastery of San Lorenzo, where I wish to be buried. See to it that the debt of three hundred *lire* which my sister-in-law Ysabetta Quirino owes me is canceled." . . . The voice continued, weakly and with an evident effort, directing that certain alms and bequests be given several congregations, monasteries, and hospitals in the lagoons and to some of his friends among the priests. The debt owing to him by the Convent of San Giovanni and San Paolo was to be canceled, and also that of Friar Benvenuto, and the Friar was to be given five *lire* in addition. Giustiniani was also to provide twenty *soldi* of Venetian *grossi* for himself.

He further dictated the release of Pietro, his servant, of the race of Tartars, from all bonds of servitude: "as may God absolve my soul from all guilt and sin. I likewise remit to him all that he may have earned by his labors in his own house, and over and above this I bequeath him one hundred *lire* of Venetian *denari*."

Stopping for breath again, he resumed anon, directing that certain moneys be distributed "for the good of his soul."

* The reader may wonder why Marco's will is dated January 9, 1324, while the date of his death is given as January 8, 1324, apparently a day earlier. The explanation is simple. In the Venice of the fourteenth century the legal day began at sunset, whereas the people's day ended at midnight. Thus the notary who was summoned by Marco's family drew up the will—a public document as soon as filed, and hence one to be framed in strictly legal form—after sundown on January 8, and therefore dated it January 9. The engrossing of the will must have taken some time, and since Marco's death took place on January 8, as is stated in the paragraph referring to his death in the record of Fantina Polo's suit, he must have passed away at some time between sunset on the evening of January 8, 1324, and midnight of the same day.

DEL SESTIERO

scere il Vescouo con qualche censo. Di qui è che quelle donne mandano ogni anno al Patriarca, il dì della vigilia di San Pietro & di Santo Andrea, bozzolati & danari, i quali gli sono portati da i Cappellani di San Scuero, a quali all'incontro sono donati alcuni pani della mensa Patriarcale. E adunque San Lorenzo luogo importante per l'origine sua & per la ricchezza ch'esso possiede ab antiquo. & ancora che la Chiesa non sia molto grande di corpo; il monistero è però larghissimo per ogni uerso, & habitato da buon numero di donne, & tutte nobili della città. Per fiancui è l'Oratorio ò Cappella di San Sebastiano, ch'altre uolte fu parrocchiale. & è sottoposto alle monache, le quali danno una certa ricognitione al Patriarca, quando ua il giorno della festiuità sua a predicarui ò a celebrar la messa. & in questo è riposto il corpo del beato Giovanni, che fu Piouano di San Giovanni decollato. & si lascia uedere al popolo per la licenza che fu di ciò concessa da Papa Bonifatio Ottauo. Nella Chiesa di San Lorenzo sono i corpi de Santi Barbaro, Ligorio, Gregorio Vescouo nella Cappadocia, Paolo Vescouo & martire, Platone, & Leo che fu Vinitiano, & della famiglia Bèba. Questo Sacratio è uisitato ogni anno dal popolo con gran frequenza, tutte le domeniche di Maggio: & ui uanno anco molti forestieri per l'indulgentia, col cui mezzo si dice che si caua un'anima del Purgatorio. Sotto l'angiporto è sepolto quel Marco Polo cognominato Milione, il quale scrisse i viaggi del mondo nuouo, & che fu il primo auanti Christoforo Colombo, che ritrouasse nuoui paesi, al quale non si dando fede per le cose strauaganti che egli racconta, il Colombo aggiunse credulità ne tempi de nostri padri, con lo hauer ritrouata quella parte, per inanzi giudicata da huomini singolari nō puoto habitata.

S. Giorgio de Greci..

NEl rio medesimo di San Lorenzo, apparisce la bella & honorata Chiesa fatta dalla nation Greca, la quale ridotta

He next proceeded to take care of his family. He directed that his wife Donata should receive certain moneys annually for life, in addition to a settlement previously made upon her, together with all the linens and household furnishings, "including three beds and all that went with them." His three daughters were to divide all his remaining property among them, share and share alike. Further: "But before such division was made his daughter Moreta was to have set aside for her dowry, in case she married, a sum equal to that given each of the other two daughters on her wedding day."

Having doubtless withdrawn to phrase all this into legal Latin, Giustiniani probably returned with two witnesses and read and translated the document for the patient and the relatives, ending with: "And whosoever shall presume to break or violate this will, may he incur the curse of God Almighty and may he remain bound under the anathema of the three hundred and eighteen fathers."

There was the harsh crackle of parchment, the dry scratch of the quill, as three witnesses signed, and a further comical squeak of the feather as Giustiniani scribbled the *tabellionato* or flourish before his name. The document crackled again harshly as it was folded and thrust inside the notary's belt. Again the stairs creaked as the three men descended to their waiting boat.

A priest entered and approached the bed. With gentle touch and low murmuring voice he administered the last rites of Holy Mother Church to the dying man, then silently, with a gesture of benediction, passed out through the door by which he had entered. Before midnight Messer Marco Polo the Venetian had fared forth on his last great journey, the longest and the most adventurous of them all, and he was not coming home again to Venice. . . .

They laid him away as he had desired, by the side of his father Nicolo, in the portico of the old Church of San Lorenzo, in a plain sepulchre, there to rest and to sleep after as full and as rich a life as it has ever been given to mortal man to live.

Chapter Ten

Epilogue

WHAT SORT OF MAN was this Messer Marco, who lived so adventurous a life, traveled so far, fought in the Genoese wars, was a prisoner, wrote his book, returned to Venice, married, begot children, and died at the age of three score years and ten? As Orlandini said: “la figura di quest’ uomo rimasto assai enigmatico.”

Nothing is known of his stature or appearance. No description of him appears in any contemporary book or document. We may surmise from his successful endurance of the arduous caravan journey to China during which he was ill for an entire year, the long sojourn in East Asia with its strange foods, many diseases, and varying climate, the strenuous return voyage via Persia during which so many of his fellow travelers died, his survival of the confinement in the Genoese prison, and his active life in Venice for a quarter of a century thereafter, together with his death at an age very advanced for his time, that Marco Polo possessed an extraordinarily robust and rugged constitution. Remarks here and there in his *Description* indicate a sobriety and temperance which differed much from the loose living so prevalent among his fellow Italians. The scanty references to him in his own book—perhaps added by another hand than his—would seem to imply that he was well built and attractive of form and face, if not, indeed, handsome; at least, as may be inferred from phrases and sentences scattered throughout that same book, he had been found attractive by women of various races. Other than this, we know nothing of the matter, and must reject all existing portraits of him as pure works of the imagination.

I. MARCO POLO, THE MAN

Aided only by the rare passages from contemporary writers which deal with Marco Polo, and which we have considered in preceding chapters, we must glean what we can of the character and the qualities of the man from his own book—sometimes reading between its lines for more enlightenment when such inferences appear to be warranted—and from other surviving documents in the archives of Venice and elsewhere.

The Venetian character has been described as a combination of “cleverness, dissimulation, patience, perseverance, greed for gain, and tenacious energy.” It may be said that Marco possessed all of these to a high degree with the exception of dissimulation, which appears nowhere in his work.

That he was clever appears throughout his book, but as this characteristic is one which embraces many others within its definition we may pass it by for a closer analysis. Patience is one of the most evident virtues of Marco’s character. Even a close reading of his book will reveal none of those impatiences with which the Westerner meets the Oriental and which are usually displayed in his dealings with them. Marco may have been impulsive, headstrong, and impatient in his youth. His long journey of three years, however, was made in the company of two men much older and wiser than himself, and in caravans of Orientals, to whom, as to their descendants of today, time means but little. Then his sojourn of seventeen years among the Chinese, most patient of peoples, and the trials of the long journey home were all an additional schooling in this virtue. By the time he had reached his forties and was preparing his book, Marco’s nature had been tried and tempered in many fires, and nowhere does he appear annoyed or disturbed to the point of rebellion or even irritation. Of course his book was written as a series of reminiscences of peoples and places, and its impersonal, objective qualities largely prevent the revelation of deep personal emotions.

Hand in hand with patience goes perseverance, and Marco was nothing if not persevering in all his endeavors, even to the day of his death. His tenacious energy was rewarded by the friendship of the Great Khan, and every line that has been written by or about him pictures a man of bulldog firmness of purpose and boundless energy of both mind and body.

In his greed for gain Messer Marco is, alas, typical of the Venetian of his time. Though the trait is not so apparent in the paragraphs of his book, his quick eye is ever roving about, wherever he finds himself, to seek markets for buying and selling and making a profit. Inheritances from his father, his uncle, and his brother do not appear to have satisfied his hunger for this world's goods, and the manner in which he pressed his relatives and others for money due him is a blot on a character which otherwise appears for the most part to be singularly upright, manly, and dignified. It may be that resentful disappointment at being forced to remain in Venice after so many years of free wandering throughout the Eastern world, or chagrin at the rebuffs and disbelief which he and his book met embittered him, drove him to seek escape in business, and aroused in him a pettiness and a grasping disposition which had lain dormant throughout his earlier years of activity.

His bravery is unquestioned. Though he was sick for a whole year on the way out to China, we learn of it only by an oblique phrase of reference. He underwent countless hardships throughout the years in the East and on the arduous voyage home, but tells nothing of it all except that of six hundred travelers on the return voyage all died except eighteen. What a saga—a whole volume of personal adventure, self-sacrifice, and endurance—most travelers would have made of that voyage alone! He has great difficulties in Trebizond on the way home, but we must turn to a family will to learn of it. He is captured in a fight with the Genoese. What a marvelous preface a vivid description of his capture would have made! Yet we are told only that he wrote his book, while a prisoner in Genoa, to avoid idleness and to give joy to readers.

Marco was a most tactful man. This appears throughout his book in his relations with Khan and slave, merchant and noble. He seems always to have known just what to say and when to say it, and when to remain silent.

Some commentators, demanding all things from an author, complain that Messer Marco has no sense of humor. He may appear to have a very serious face at times when recounting the most unbelievable tales which he had heard from others. But surely one can see his tongue in his cheek when he tells the story of the virtuous cobbler, or recounts the preposterous love-life of the elephant and numerous other tales. In fact, his humor becomes Rabelaisian in his description of Rus-

sia and its drinking parties. No, Messer Marco Polo is far from being devoid of humor.

For a man of his century Marco was most broadminded in his religious views. A typical European of his age, no miracle was too great for him to believe, and he tells many a tale of the marvels wrought by saint and holy man as matters of sober fact, and without comment. He was not bigoted, however, and was most lenient in his attitude toward those whose beliefs were different from his own. If we try to approach him from the point of view of a European of the thirteenth century, we shall find him far ahead of his age in his calm, sober judgments of other men's faiths. His story, garbled though it is, of the life and works of the Buddha is most generous; not many travelers of today would be tolerant to the point of saying with Marco that "most certainly if he had been a Christian he [the Buddha] would have been a great saint with the Lord Jesus Christ."

The long descriptions of the feasts of East Asia, the accounts of food and wine and raiment and the life of the peoples he encountered there would all seem to indicate that he found great joy in the good things of life, though he gives the impression of having partaken thereof in moderation. At times he seems prudish, but his numerous, keen, intimate, and often amusing observations on women indicate that they interested him mightily. He was young, and his observation of Venetian life as a boy was not calculated to inspire him with a desire for the life of an anchorite or an ascetic. He lived for a quarter of a century far from his home and his people, with no opportunity of marrying a woman of his own race. But nowhere does he appear other than a gentleman of the world who knows much and has experienced much but is extremely reticent as to his private affairs.

Marco presents a strange paradox in that he is modest and diffident about his personal adventures and makes but little of his hardships and dangers, yet is egotistic in his narrative to such a point that he forces both his father and his uncle entirely into the background. After the introductory chapters they appear but seldom, and then only as dim shadowy figures, mere foils for the glittering exploits of Marco himself. Nowhere does the Venetian show himself fair-minded or generous toward them. Yet they are the real heroes of the tale. They had made the first journey and had laid the foundations for the second. The way had been prepared and smoothed for Marco, and all had been

made easy for him. Kublai received him with open arms because he was his father's son, and even the few references to Nicolo and Maffeo indicate that they were far from lay figures in that long drama enacted at Kublai's court during their sojourn with him. It was most likely Nicolo, together with his brother, who planned and executed the stratagem by which they were finally able to leave Cathay for Persia. Even after their return to Venice they and Marco worked together. Yet Marco's book gives them but scant credit for all they did for him throughout their lives.

This is inexplicable except as a strange form of egotism, divorced, however, from personal vanity. He desired the tale to be his, the whole Cathayan adventure to be his; and so the book sets him forth at the front of the stage, with the spotlight ever on him, to the exclusion of even more important characters, who are forced to hover in the dark shadowy background.

Here and there the book reveals some petty traits of Marco's. Such is the anecdote of the recovery of his ring through the offices of a priestess of a Cathayan temple recounted in his book; Marco recovered his ring, but proudly boasted that he made no offering or homage in return. It may be that he was trying to impress his readers with the sincerity of his Christian faith. But inasmuch as he sought the Cathayan priestess' assistance and had his property restored, it is more likely an unwitting revelation of the pettiness and stinginess in money affairs, however unimportant they might be, which most certainly characterized his conduct in his later life in Venice.

This same trait probably led to those quarrels and lawsuits whose records have been preserved for us in legal documents. He was certainly of a litigious nature, sparing not even his own family when he felt that his rights had been violated or that sums, no matter how small, were due him. He appears to have been a man quick to seize profits or legacies or benefits moving toward him but extremely difficult to deal with when others sought what they were convinced were their rights. Despite the fact that the meager details at our disposal present him as a just, fair, and kind husband and father, we detect in him an indefinable hardness in his dealings with others. Perhaps further documents may be found revealing more pleasant aspects of his character; but all that have been produced up to the present reveal him in the later Venetian period of his life as an exacting, grasping man. His business dealings

were characterized by coldness and insistence on the letter of the law, combined with an inability to understand the rights or difficulties or miseries of those who crossed his path, even though they were of his own flesh and blood. That they had been stricken by adversity was not his fault. So much the worse for them. Truly, Shylock was never so exacting and harsh as was this most excellent merchant of Venice.*

It is difficult to reconcile the sternness and stubbornness of the later Marco with the younger man as he appears in his book. Either Rustichello "dressed up" Messer Marco in preparing his text and the older Marco is the real one, or else, as suggested above, the profound changes in his life and his manner of living after his return to Venice so warped and frustrated him that the milk of human kindness had been soured within him.

Such an alteration is not incredible. Messer Marco had been thoroughly Orientalized by his twenty-six years of travel and residence in the land of the Great Khan. It was too late for him at forty to readjust himself to new conditions and ways without violent mental, emotional, and physical conflicts. Modern psychology recognizes such maladjustments as affecting profoundly both the individual and the group. An understanding of these considerations should temper our judgment on Marco Polo and his shortcomings as we find them recorded in the cold, impersonal documents which have lain in the dusty archives of Venice these six hundred years and more.

The great traveler's intellectual qualities have been highly respected and praised by every serious student of the man and his book. It must be remembered that he was not a man of science and must not be judged adversely because of this fact. How could he be? Even if he had had

* An instance of Marco's kindness and thoughtfulness toward those less fortunate than himself has been preserved. It is his manumission on his deathbed of Pietro the Tartar. Marco not only remembered to release his faithful slave, even at an hour when the agony of death was upon him, but also bequeathed him the fruits of his labor and one hundred lire of Venetian *denari*. It is not known whether or not Pietro was a slave who accompanied him home from the East, or one acquired later. Since he alone of Marco's slaves was manumitted in the will, and received in addition a handsome bequest, it may be presumed at least that he had labored long and faithfully for his master and may well have returned with him on his long voyage from far Cathay. It is pleasing to learn from a document still in existence, dated April 7, 1328, that the Maggior Consiglio granted to Pietro, "once the slave of Ser Marco Polo of San Giovanni Grisostomo, who was a long time in Venice, for his good deportment, that for the rest he should be a Venetian [citizen] and should be held and treated as a Venetian."

the best of educational advantages—and we know not what his schooling was—he would have been able to receive no really scientific training. An age which looked to Ptolemy for its geography and to Aristotle as the final arbiter in things intellectual, an age which accepted Dante's location and geological arrangement of the various parts of the universe as correct and Brunetto Latini's "Trésor" as one of its best encyclopedias, an age that drew its knowledge of nature and the physical world from such works as the anonymous "L'Image du Monde" and the "De Naturis Rerum" of Vincent de Beauvais could hardly prepare a man for scientific exploration or scientific observations and notations of such explorations. Despite the unwarranted carping of various editors, the marvel is that Marco left us an account as clear and scientific as it is.

He was a rapid, acute, and accurate observer of facts, particularly those having a practical application to life. Fundamentally he possessed both the temper and the spirit of a great explorer. Without undue emphasis on the nonimportant, without intruding himself into his subject, he extracts what is of value from whatever he has observed, and sets it forth clearly and succinctly for all to read. Neither a learned nor a well-educated man, but one who evidently received most of his schooling from travel and experience, he demonstrates time and again a surprisingly systematic grasp of his subject and an ability to separate the true from the false. When presenting material which he had acquired by hearsay, he is often in error—even gullible—but, as to the knowledge which he acquired through personal contact and observation, modern exploration and investigation have proved him a true and careful recorder of facts. He learned rapidly, assimilated thoroughly, and forgot little.

Marco has been censured by several editors for his verbosity and "hammering iteration." Again such critics view the work wrongly and through modern eyes. The accepted prose style of Marco's time abounds in verbosity, bombast, and iteration. His work, in fact, contains comparatively little of such redundancy. To explain such as we find, it must be observed first that the book was probably written not by Messer Marco but by a professional writer of romance. Naturally this scribe wrote in the turgid prose style of the thirteenth century. Moreover, the book, as is specifically stated in its prologue, was designed as much to be read aloud as for private reading in one's study.

For such readings iterations were a help rather than a hindrance to both reader and audience.

In like manner Marco has been accused of being inordinately fond of pomp and ceremony. As a matter of fact pomp and ceremony, parade and pageant were among the chief joys of medieval life, and Da Canale and Froissart and the other chroniclers of the period provide numerous long and detailed descriptions of them. Mayhap Marco loved them, as well he might; and surely here, too, we find the professional hand of Rustichello. Moreover, these descriptions of battle and feasting afford welcome periods of rest and sojourn in the long book of travel and description, and often preserve for us precious information of the life of the times.

Messer Marco has been accused also of a lack of appreciation of the arts and of letters. One cannot ask more from him than he has to give. Surely he brought home for us riches in full measure, pressed down and overflowing, and we are most ungrateful if we find fault with him because he is not, forsooth, a genuine connoisseur of the arts and a student of the letters of those countries where he traveled and lived. Indeed, only those who have studied through a lifetime the literature and the arts of the Far East can realize the unfairness of such commentators.

We must grant that Marco is not always discriminating in his estimate of the true value or importance of his topics. He tells us almost in one breath of the prostitutes of Cambaluc and the making of paper money, and later in a single paragraph on Zanzibar he describes in order the giraffe, the elephant, the lion, the Negroes and their dress (or lack thereof), the products of the island, and the ugliness of the Negresses. None the less this very lack of scientific discrimination, disturbing though it may be to our modern methods of writing and sense of proportion, has caused him to include in his book much invaluable information which might otherwise have been lost to the world.

It is true that, Orientalized as Marco seems to have been, he never appears to have grasped the fundamental philosophies of the Eastern peoples among whom he had lived so many years. Neither Confucianism nor Taoism is mentioned by him. Yet, of an infinite number of foreign travelers who have visited and have lived long periods in China since Marco's time, few have been able to understand or appreciate these philosophies without much preliminary or subsequent study and

reading. Even today most of the many intelligent men and women who spend the best years of their life in China return to the West possessing the scantiest knowledge of the ethical and religious systems and practices of the Chinese people. Marco was a combination of busy merchant, administrator, traveler, explorer, and writer living at a time when no authentic material on the East was available in any European language even if he had been able to read it. So here again Marco must be judged in the light of the age in which he lived and of his own particular activities.

He charmed the people of the East among whom he lived so long by his personality, his tact, his ability, and his pleasing manner. On his return to Europe he likewise fascinated the people of Venice and his fellow prisoners in Genoa. His book has charmed, amused, and educated millions in every generation since it was written. In its simplicity, its frankness, its richness in material—anthropological, geographical, historical, and commercial—it stands alone as a treasure-house of fact and story. And as the book seems likely to hold its place in the libraries of all mankind as the greatest work of travel ever written, so will its author, with all his faults, continue to be loved both for himself and for the priceless gift which his imprisonment and boredom in Genoa caused him to indite.

II. THE TOMB OF MARCO POLO

It is surprising that Marco Polo's death appears to have passed entirely unnoticed by his fellow Venetians. It might be supposed that the demise of such a prominent citizen, the author of a book widely read even during his lifetime, would have caused at least a ripple of interest or written comment or some notation by a chronicler of the time. But no such information has as yet come to light.

The earliest indication that we have of Marco's place of sepulture is the request in his will that he be buried in the Church of San Lorenzo, where his father lay. There is no reason to question his interment there. There is in existence the will of his daughter Moreta, dated May 1, 1348. Therein she left the following directions: "I bequeath to the convent of the nuns of San Lorenzo, in whose place I wish to be buried in the tomb of my parents, twenty *soldi*." This seems to prove beyond a doubt that not only Messer Marco but also his wife Donata were actually buried in the Church where he had wished his bones to rest.

Ramusio tells us that in his day the great sarcophagus of Messer Nicolo, Marco's father, was still to be seen in San Lorenzo, but does not mention Marco's tomb. It may be inferred, however, that the son was then reposing there also. The next reference to the Polo tomb is found in the delightful *Venetia Città Nobilissima et Singolare* of Francesco Sansovino, published in Venice in 1581. Therein, in his description of the Church of San Lorenzo, the author notes: "Under the portico [*angiporto*] is buried that Marco Polo, surnamed Milione, who wrote the travels of the new world, and who was the first before Christopher Columbus to discover new countries . . ." Though Sansovino has slightly confused East Asia with America, his information as to the location of Marco Polo's tomb need not be questioned.

In the Museo Correr in Venice is a manuscript work entitled "Compendio dell'Origine e Progresso del Monasterio Illmo. di San Lorenzo" by Tomaso Fugazzoni, written in 1685, with additions by later authors. This work states that in 1580 repairs were commenced on the Church of San Lorenzo, then "old and falling to pieces," and that the work "was finished most religiously in the year 1592." Continuing, Fugazzoni states that "in the center of the portico was the burial-place of the most famous Marco Polo, noble Venetian." The Church "was renewed from its foundations, and was remodeled in a noble and spacious form." This remodeling, which gave a new form to the Church, perhaps involved a change also in the floor level of the Church or the portico, which was two steps higher than the floor of the ancient Church, first built in 809 by the Doge Angelo Participazio. Fugazzoni states that in the center *was* [*era*] the burial place of Marco. This would seem to imply that when he wrote Marco's resting place had already disappeared. During the succeeding centuries much remodeling and repairing was carried on in various parts of the Church.

A record of the burials in San Lorenzo and San Sebastiano (a later chapel added to the original church), written in 1718, lists: "in the Church [chapel] of San Sebastiano . . . at the foot of the said altar, the burial-place of the most famous and noble Venetian, Marco Polo Colombo Milione" (whence the Colombo?). This would appear to indicate that in 1718 the tomb or grave of the great traveler was known and perhaps even marked.

In 1765 there appeared in Venice a very interesting volume, illustrated with many engravings, and entitled *The Foreigner Enlightened*

about the Rarest and Curious Things Ancient and Modern of the City of Venice and the Surrounding Islands, by Giambattista Albrizzi. The author of this quaint guidebook describes the Church of San Lorenzo as it was in his day. He also refers to the chapel of San Sebastiano, and states that there stood therein "three altars of not ordinary workmanship . . . Here is buried Marco Polo, called il Millione, so well known, and famous for the discovery of new countries before Christopher Columbus." Albrizzi is evidently following Sansovino's note in referring to Marco's exploits, but he uses the expression *è sepolto*. The question arises: Was Marco Polo's tomb or grave still known and marked in 1765? We do not know.

Cigogna, in his monumental and invaluable *Venetian Inscriptions* (1827), discusses the Church of San Lorenzo, the many vicissitudes through which it has passed, the extensive damages it has suffered, and its numerous rebuildings. The disappearance of very important tombstones and other inscriptions concerned him greatly. He states:

As for inscriptions, the above rebuildings and decorations have caused many of them to be missing, and certainly some of them precious . . . Among other memorials which have been lost was that of the Polos, the celebrated Venetian voyagers of the thirteenth century, whose tomb stood with many others in the portico of the ancient Church, that is [in the portico] of that which was built after the fire of 1105.

In a footnote Cigogna refers to some inscriptions which had been found, but adds that "those of the families of the Polo, Schiaveti, Giustiniani, Basadonna, Foscarini, and Biondi are still awaited." Thus in 1828 the tombs had disappeared and no inscription remained to indicate where Marco, his father, his wife, and his daughter Moreta lay buried.

Another account has been published of more recent researches and exploratory excavations in the Church of San Lorenzo. As a result of these studies, the last made in 1924, the director of the excavations has come to the definite conclusion that there is no further hope of recovering the remains of Marco Polo for reburial. He believes that when the Church was rebuilt the bones were removed and thrown into a common grave with those of pest victims and others, or else that when the Church was partially razed before remodeling they became a part of the accumulated material (as have many other bones) used to raise the level of the pavement of the new Church.*

* See article by Rodolfo Gallo, "Le Ricerche della Tomba di Marco Polo," in *Rivista Mensile della Città di Venezia*, Settembre 1924.

The author had occasion to visit again the places in Venice associated with the Polo family as late as the summer of 1938. The Church of San Lorenzo was then but a dilapidated shell—the roof partly gone, the walls stripped and damaged, the pavements everywhere broken and torn up—with hardly a tombstone in place. Practically no undamaged evidences remained in the main edifice to indicate its former use for religious purposes. No priest was to be found; and when the ancient sacristan appeared with his keys, after a much-rusted bell handle had been pulled again and again, he professed to know nothing of the tomb. The only information he could communicate was a hoary tradition that “the tomb stood over there, at the right of the door, and there were doves on it.” By “doves” were perhaps meant the three jackdaws on the coat of arms of the Polos, referred to by Giambattista Ramusio in his introduction to Messer Marco’s book.

Thus the exact burial place of Marco Polo is unknown at present. The very church where he asked to be laid at rest near his father has been altered beyond recognition and is in ruins. Perhaps somewhere under the wrecked pavement of San Lorenzo still lies the coffin with the bones of the great traveler. It may be that proud Venice, which thus far has paid but scant attention to the deeds of her greatest son, will some day erect to his memory that monument which is his due.

III. MESSER MARCO’S FAMILY

After hundreds of years of undisturbed repose in the dusty archives of Venice, several documents have recently been discovered which throw new light on the immediate family of Marco Polo. The tale is short but interesting.

Donna Donata Badoèr Polo, Marco’s widow, first appears in the legal records of Venice on June 24, 1325, in a document whereby she and her three daughters delivered to Marco Bragadin, the husband of Fantina, a receipt for property which formerly belonged to Messer Marco.

Quarrels in the Polo family evidently continued after Marco’s death, for his widow next appeared in the Venetian courts in a very unfavorable light. In some way not revealed to us two bags of Venetian *grossi*, valued at \$1,500, were left in her charge, tied up and sealed [*legati et bullati*] and placed in a sealed chest. When her son-in-law, Bertuccio Querini, Bellela’s husband, took over the money and counted

it, only \$850 was found. Relations between the two were evidently very unfriendly, for Querini haled his mother-in-law before the Council of Forty and accused her of abstracting the money *non bono modo*, "not in a goodly fashion." The Council found her guilty, ordered the restitution of the money, and fined her \$187.50. One can imagine the pleasant relationship between Querini and his mother-in-law!

Donata figures further in a document dated July 12, 1333, whereby she and her daughters were placed in possession of the property of Messer Marco, her defunct husband. The good lady died at some as yet undiscovered date between July 12, 1333, and March 4, 1336, for on this latter date she is mentioned as "the deceased widow of Marco Polo of the *sestiere* of San Giovanni Chrisostomo."

The dates of birth and death of the three daughters of the Venetian traveler are not known, but a few facts about their lives have been preserved in Venetian documents, for the Polos had a way of appearing very often in open court and before other legal tribunals.

Fantina, the first-born daughter of Marco and Donata, was also the longest-lived of the three. She was married some time before 1318 to Marco Bragadin, who seems to have enjoyed the confidence of his father-in-law. Fantina's name appears several times in legal documents connected with family matters. The most interesting of these is an assignment, dated January 11, 1337, to Moreta, her surviving sister, of the household effects of their deceased mother. This document mentions specifically those three beds, with their complete furnishings, which Messer Marco had also considered sufficiently important to mention in his bequest to his wife. These three beds were evidently prized family heirlooms.

On May 1, 1348, Fantina Bragadin again appears, this time as the residuary legatee of her sister Moreta. By May 28, 1361, Fantina had become a widow, for on that day she appeared before the Court of the Procurators as the "*relicta nobilis viri Marci Bragadin*," who seems to have died in Crete.

A long decision of the Procurators of San Marco, dated August 4, 1362, would indicate more family trouble among the Polos. It deals with certain properties which Fantina claimed were hers by inheritance from her father Messer Marco and which she asserted her deceased husband had taken from her "*frandulenter malo modo et violenter*" and against her will and consent.

Fantina again appears in a court decision of September 5, 1362, in a case involving an inheritance claimed by her of property willed by Maffeo, Marco's uncle, to him. The decision of the Procurator in this case is one of the most valuable of recently discovered documents of the Polo family. Following several pages of an itemized list of the bequeathed property which was the subject of the lawsuit appears the line which after over six hundred years of uncertainty has fixed the date of the death of Messer Marco: "In nome de Dio 1323 die 8 zener mori miser Marco Polo."*

Under the date of August 28, 1375, is found the last will and testament of the widow Fantina Polo Bragadin. And finally among the papers of the "Ospitali e luoghi pii" there was found a bill of sale, dated December 18, 1385, by which "Cateruccia Bragadin [daughter] of the late Fantina Polo" sells a share of her maternal inheritance. So Fantina lived at least fifty years after her father's death, and passed away at some unknown date between August 28, 1375, and December 18, 1385.

Bellela Polo, like her sister Fantina, was married before Marco's death. Her husband was one Bertuccio Querini. She survived her father but a short time. In a document dated June 24, 1325, she appears as living. But she had passed away, childless, before October 16, 1326; on that date the Maggior Consiglio annulled her will on the ground that she was not of sound mind [*non erat sane mentis*] when she made it. It may be noted here that it was her husband who, two years after her death, brought action against his mother-in-law for the money extracted from the two bags entrusted to her.

Moreta, for whose dowry Marco provided in his will, was still single at the beginning of 1326. This is attested by a contemporary legal document which has fortunately been preserved and which reflects the social conditions of the Venice of the period. One Zanino Grioni attacked Moreta Polo in the Campo San Vitale and, not satisfied with the use of abusive words [*verbis injuriosis et factis*], laid violent hands on her. The cause of the attack is not known. It must have been serious, for on February 26, 1326, Grioni was found guilty by the Council of Forty and sentenced to two months in jail. Justice was evi-

* "In the name of God on the eighth day of January died Messer Marco Polo."
(See note on page 233.)

dently speedy, for the document concludes with the note that "on that same day, before dinner, the said Zanino Grioni was arrested and placed in custody."

At some unknown date thereafter Moreta married Ranuccio Dolfin. In a document dated March 4, 1336, he appears as living, but in a later document, September 1337, Moreta is referred to as his "relicta" or widow. Evidently another family difference arose, for she and one Baldovino Dolfin submitted their claims on September 12, 1337, for judicial arbitration "for the sake of peace and the avoiding of all scandal." On June 29, a decree was issued assigning property of her husband to Moreta. The case evidently dragged on for some years, however, as the final document in the file of the case is dated December 19, 1341. Nothing daunted by death or lawsuits, Moreta subsequently married Tomaso Gradenigo. We learn of this marriage from Moreta's will, dated May 1, 1348, where she is mentioned as his wife and wherein he and her sister Fantina are named as her executors. The date of Moreta's death is unknown. It must have been before August 28, 1375, as Fantina's will of that date provides for money to be expended for prayers for Moreta's soul, among others. Moreta Polo, in spite of her two marriages, died childless.

Fantina, unlike her two sisters, had a numerous progeny—four sons and two daughters. Of these Zanini and Nicoletto died unmarried before 1375. Steffano married Magdaluza Contareni and had by her two daughters, Cateruccia and Magdalucia, both of whom died unmarried. Steffano himself died before 1375, as his mother in her will of that year left money to be spent for prayers for his soul as well as for those of his two brothers. Another son, Pietro, married Ruzinella (surname not known) and was alive in 1403. The pair had a son Marco, who appears to have died unmarried at an unknown date. Of Fantina's daughters, Maria married Marcello (surname unknown) some time before May 1, 1348. She was still alive in 1375, and left two sons, Francesco and Fantino, who apparently died unmarried. The second daughter, Cateruccia, married a person whose name has not come down to us. By him she appears to have had a son Andriolo, though the reading is not clear, who was left forty *soldi* of *grossi* to outfit him if and when he should become a priest. There is no further record of this Andriolo. Cateruccia appears in the latest document which has been discovered relating to Marco's descendants. On De-

cember 18, 1385, she sold her portion of the properties inherited from her mother to one Fantino Marcello di Sant'Angelo.

Thus the direct line of descendants of Messer Marco Polo and Donna Donata Badoèr Polo had no offspring after the third generation, and in the quaint phrase of Ramusio, "as the condition and the vicissitudes of human affairs brought it to pass, it became utterly extinct." In this way did the properties and wealth which the Venetian adventurer had labored so much of his life to accumulate become scattered and dissipated, and all finally passed into the hands of strangers.

IV. "IL MILIONE" AND HIS PROPERTY

The origin of the nickname "Il Milione" is uncertain as applied to both Marco Polo and his book. In the contemporary work of Jacopo d'Acqui, Marco is referred to as "Master Marco the Venetian, who is called Millonus [or Milionus], which is the same as the wealth of a thousand thousands of *lire*, and so he is called in Venice." Ramusio, speaking of Marco's book in his Preface (1557), wrote:

And because in the continual repetitions of the story which he gave more and more often when speaking of the magnificence of the Great Khan, he stated that his revenues were from ten to fifteen millions in gold, and in the same way in speaking of many other riches of those countries he spoke always in terms of millions, they gave him as a nickname, Messer Marco Millioni, and thus I have seen it noted in the public books of the Republic where mention is made of him, and the court of his house from that time to the present is still commonly called the Court of the Millioni.

When Messer Marco appeared as surety for the pardon of the smuggler Bonocio of Mestre he was set down as "Marco Polo Million." This was in 1305, nearly twenty years before his death. In certain Latin papers concerning a lawsuit involving his daughter Fantina, dated September 5, 1362, he is referred to as "Marcus Polo Million." Sansovino, writing in 1581, states that, "returning rich to his native country, he gained the cognomen of Milione through the riches brought back with him on his return." Cigogna, in a note written in 1827, expresses doubt and uncertainty as to the origin of the name. While Yule and Orlandini incline to accept Ramusio's explanation, Benedetto has presented the novel theory that "Milione" is a form of Emilio and was part of Marco's real name. Thus we have no agreement of author-

ity through the intervening centuries, and the matter must rest undecided unless some hitherto undiscovered document reveals the true explanation.

The same strange uncertainty surrounds the title "Il Milione" often given the book. Marco entitled his work *The Description of the World*. In describing the work, Jacopo d'Acqui, Marco's contemporary, informs us that "that book is called the 'Book of Milione [Milionis or Milonis] about the Wonders of the World.'" Villani, another contemporary, refers to it as "Milione." It is the title by which the book is commonly known in Italy today. This title may have been transferred from the book to the man as a nickname or vice versa. No final decision is possible, at present, and one surmise is as valid as another.

V. MARCO POLO'S WEALTH

The name "Il Milione" as given to Marco Polo, and the statement by some early writers that the appellation was based on his supposed great wealth, have given rise to much speculation and surmise as to the real amount of that wealth. Fortunately the researches of Orlandini have lately brought to light an inventory of at least part of the property possessed by the traveler at the time of his death. This consists of an excerpt from the record of a lawsuit of the litigious Polo family. It is the same document which has revealed the date of Marco's death, that is, the petition filed by Fantina Polo concerning her father's property, which she claimed her late husband had appropriated.

The list of goods covers several pages. The property as catalogued consisted largely of various fabrics contained in boxes and coffers—one bound with iron, one of walnut, etc. Following Yule's valuation of the Venetian *lira dei grossi*, and adding the value of the described property to the total of the bequests in the traveler's will, the estate of Messer Marco appears to be as follows:

Gifts to charity in the will	\$ 1,400.00
Investment value of the annuity left to Donata	
Polo (according to an estimate of Moule) . .	3,000.00
Goods as per inventory	6,865.00
Partial value of house (estimate of Moule) . . .	3,500.00
	<hr/>
Total	\$14,765.00

Even assuming—though there is no basis for such an assumption—that Marco had made gifts of portions of his property to various members of his family before his death, there appears nothing, in extant records at any rate, to warrant any belief that Marco's wealth attained more than very modest proportions. Though the sum total of the estate probably represented much more in actual value in the fourteenth century than in the twentieth,* there is not a shred of reliable evidence that Messer Marco accumulated that fabulous wealth so often attributed to him by writers of his day and later. The evidence which we have must lead us, in fact, to reject Ramusio's fanciful story of the home-coming banquet of the Polos and their lavish display of jewels—unless indeed Messer Marco had been very extravagant in his living or had later sustained extraordinary losses in business or in the Genoese wars. There is no evidence of either of these happenings, and as the records stand today the Venetian traveler seems to have lived modestly and to have died in comfortable but comparatively moderate circumstances.

VI. THE MANUSCRIPTS AND PRINTED EDITIONS OF MARCO POLO'S BOOK

It has been seen that the original manuscript of Marco Polo's book was written in Old French. Copies of this French text must have passed through many hands outside of Italy as well as within its borders. The story of the gift of a copy to Thiebault de Cepoy has been related. John of Ypres, Abbot of St. Bertin, also known as John the Long, who compiled many valuable works of medieval travel and geography during the latter part of the fourteenth century, recounts the story of the Polos and their visit to the East, and, speaking of Messer Marco, he adds: "And he afterwards composed a book about these things in the French vernacular, which book of marvelous matters, together with many similar [books] we have by us."

The French manuscript evidently did not satisfy the demand for the book, and even during Marco's lifetime translations and abridgments were prepared. As early as 1320 an abridged translation appears to have been made into Latin, perhaps from a Lombard manu-

* An attempt has been made by Sig. Giuseppe Castellani to evaluate the various moneys mentioned in the will of Marco Polo. See the article by him in *Rivista Mensile della Città di Venezia*, Settembre 1924.

script and not from the French original, "at the urgent request of many Brothers Fathers and Masters" by Friar Francesco Pipino of Bologna. An Italian translation—in Tuscan, now in the Magliabecchian Library at Florence—can also be traced back to the lifetime of Marco Polo. Other manuscripts gradually made their appearance in Venetian, Spanish, Bohemian, German, Catalan, Aragonese, etc. In all there are one hundred and nineteen manuscripts that have been found to date, aside from doubtful copies, compendia, and the like.

The book was early used as a historical reference by the Florentine historian, Giovanni Villani (*ca.* 1275–1348); in discussing the Tartars, Villani remarks:

And whoever desires to learn fully about their deeds, let him seek out the book of Frate Aiton [Hayton], Lord of Colcos of Armenia, who prepared it at the instance of Pope Clement V, and again the book called "Milione," which Messer Marco Polo of Venice made, he who recounts much of their power and their rule, inasmuch as he was for a long time among them. We shall leave the Tartars, and we shall return to our subject of the deeds of Florence.

That the tale recounted by Messer Marco found interested readers all over Europe, even before the advent of printing, is attested by a fragment of the book found in Ireland, the westernmost civilized country of the known world in the middle of the fifteenth century. Its discovery is a romantic tale in itself.

In 1814 the Duke of Devonshire ordered repairs to be made on his ancient castle of Lismore, in Waterford County, Ireland. In the interior of the building the workmen found a doorway sealed with masonry. On opening it a wooden box was found, containing a fine old crozier and a manuscript. This famous manuscript, called from the circumstances of its discovery the "Book of Lismore," remained virtually unstudied until 1839, when Eugene O'Curry, an eminent Irish scholar, investigated it thoroughly. It contained among lives of the saints, legends, stories of Charlemagne, and the like, some incomplete extracts from the book of Marco Polo (about ten folios in all) written in Gaelic. This book had apparently been translated probably about the year 1460 "for Finghin McCarthy Reagh, Lord of Carbery, and his wife Catherine, the daughter of Thomas, Eighth Earl of Desmond." The fragment, abridged and translated freely from the Latin version of Pipino, has been translated into English by Whitley Stokes.*

* In *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, I Band, 2–3 Heft, Halle, 1896–1897.

The interest in Marco Polo's work became ever greater, and it was one of the earliest books printed in Europe. It is strange that the text should have been compiled through the collaboration of a Venetian and a Pisan in French, and stranger that the first printed edition should have been in the form of a German translation. This edition, bearing a fanciful portrait of Messer Marco on its title page, appeared in Nuremberg in 1477 and is one of the rarest of incunabula. The second edition was published, also in German, in Augsburg, in 1481. The first printed edition in modern French was issued in Paris in 1556. It was not the original work of Marco Polo but a French version from Pipino's Latin translation. The famous Italian edition of Ramusio appeared in 1559. An abridged edition was printed in Italian in Venice by Marco Claseri in 1597. And thereafter numerous editions have appeared in English (the first being a translation from the Spanish of Santaella by John Frampton, in London, in the early part of 1579), Spanish, Portuguese, Bohemian, Swedish, and other European languages and even in Chinese. Hardly any two of these editions are alike, as many of them have been derived from different manuscript versions. In fact there is no assurance that we have as yet the complete work as prepared in the Genoese prison. The most authoritative version to date is that published by the Société de Géographie in Paris in 1824. A magnificent work on Marco Polo's text was published in 1928 by Luigi Foscolo Benedetto in Florence; it is a compilation and editing of all known texts (with copious notes) in an effort to produce what Sig. Benedetto calls an "edizione integrale." But, recent as this monumental work of scholarship is, it is incomplete, because of later discoveries of manuscripts and other material.

An extremely valuable Latin text was located after much search in the Zelada Library in the Cathedral Chapter Library of Toledo, Spain, in 1933, by Sir Percival David. This manuscript dates from the end of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth century. The transcription of the Latin text, though printed in 1935, was first published in London in 1938. This newly discovered manuscript contains much new material, especially a mass of information which Marco obtained at second hand about Russia, which country, as far as is known, he did not visit.

On the basis of Benedetto's work and the newly found Zelada text, Professor A. C. Moule, of Cambridge University, has prepared and

published what he calls a "composite translation." It is a prodigious and highly successful "attempt to weave together all, or nearly all, the extant words which have ever claimed to be Marco Polo, and to indicate the source from which each word comes." This work, consisting of the Zelada Latin text (Vol. I) and Professor Moule's introduction and translation (Vol. II), to be followed by a volume of special articles and a volume of plates and maps, is the most scholarly and most sumptuous translation of the text of the great Venetian's book ever prepared.

For the general reader, who is interested in Messer Marco's travels and his description of Asia, rather than in the exact wording of the original text, the very fully annotated edition of Sir Henry Yule* (1921) will still be found the most satisfactory. No other edition contains more than a small portion of the philological, ethnological, historical, and geographical notes and material with which this work is replete. It must ever be the starting point for any serious student of Messer Marco Polo, his life, his travels, and his book.

The serious student of Marco Polo's life must always be deeply indebted to the late G. Orlandini for his short, compact, but invaluable pamphlet† containing the text of practically all the known documents relating to the Venetian traveler's family.

VII. HOW MARCO'S BOOK WAS FIRST RECEIVED, AND ITS LATER INFLUENCE ON GEOGRAPHY, CARTOGRAPHY, AND OTHER SCIENCES

Messer Marco Polo's reputation as an author suffered much during his lifetime. His contemporaries did not accept his book seriously. Their ignorance, their dependence on and belief in the ecclesiastical pseudo-geography of the day, their preconceived ideas of the unvisited portions of the world, as well as the legends to which the medieval mind clung with a blind persistence incomprehensible to modern men, made it impossible for them to perceive and accept the truths contained in Marco's writings. Jacopo d'Acqui, a contemporary of the traveler, recites an anecdote which may or may not be true: Marco's friends were

* Third edition, 2 vols., with additional volume of addenda, entitled *Ser Marco Polo* (London and New York, 1921).

† G. Orlandini, *Marco Polo e la Sua Famiglia* (Venezia, 1926).

much concerned over the bad reputation which he had gained by telling so many "tall stories" and what they considered downright lies. "And," to quote Jacopo, "because [in Marco's book] there were to be found great things, things of mighty import, and indeed unbelievable things, he was entreated by his friends when he was at the point of death to correct his book and to take back those things which he had written over and above [the truth]. And he replied: 'I have not written down the half of those things which I saw'."

This attitude toward Marco's book persisted for many years. The *Description of the World* was considered a creation of the imagination by most of its readers, and, indeed, it was often bound up with manuscripts of romances and was usually classified as one. The preposterous book of *Travels* of Sir John Maundeville, a spurious work,* was evidently more popular than Polo's truths, for five times as many editions of Maundeville were printed during the fifteenth century as of Marco Polo.

Even as late as the end of the fourteenth century the veracity of the *Description* was often doubted or denied. A Florentine manuscript of the work transcribed in 1392 is still preserved in the National Library of that city. Appended to it is the following curious note:

Here ends the book of Messer Marco Polo of Venice, which I, Amelio Bonaguisi wrote with my own hand while Podestà of Cierreto Guidi to pass the time and [drive away] melancholy. The contents appear to me to be incredible things and his statements appear to me not lies but more likely miracles. And it may well be true that about which he tells; but I do not believe it, though none the less there are found throughout the world many very different things in one country and another. But this [book] seems to me, as I copied it for my pleasure to be [composed of] matters not to be believed or credited. At least, so I aver for myself. And I finished copying [it] in the aforementioned Cierreto Guidi on the 12th day of November in the year of the Lord 1392. And, the book being finished, we give thanks to Christ our Lord, Amen.

Bonaguisi's aspersions on Marco's veracity are not half as valuable or significant as is the revelation of the attitude of mind and lack of belief in his book by those living in his own century.

Marco Polo's ill fortune pursued him even after men had begun

* It has been fairly well established that many of the kernels of truth in his book were paraphrased or lifted bodily from the work of the Friar Odoric de Pordenone (1286-1331).

to accept his book as a real contribution to geography and the other sciences. All knowledge of the man himself was lost, neglected, or ignored to such an extent that one historical writer of sixteenth-century Spain (Mariana) referred to him as "one Marco Polo, a Florentine physician," and an English author of the early nineteenth century spoke of him as "a Venetian priest."

The demand of navigators for better maps finally resulted in the production of more accurate charts for the use of seafaring men. The first of these were the justly famous *portolani* made for practical navigation rather than for the general student. The *portolani* reached their highest point of excellence in the products of a family of Catalonian Jews who did their work on the island of Majorca at the end of the fourteenth century. The greatest of their atlases was that of 1375. It "differs from the ordinary Portolans in that it has been expanded into a sort of world map. Following the text of Marco Polo, it depicts eastern Asia, the Deccan Peninsula and the Indian Ocean far better than any of the earlier maps."* These charts were first made in the thirteenth century, and were used through the sixteenth century by seamen. Before the compass came into general use the names of the winds were used to designate directions. "Legends were often inserted referring to the products of the region bearing the legend, or to the character of the inhabitants of the same. Much of this information appears to have been derived from Pliny, Solinus, Isador, or from travelers such as Marco Polo."†

There is a tradition that the world map of Marino Sanudo, made about 1320, was a copy of one brought from China by Marco Polo; but there is nothing to substantiate the claim.

Gradually the map makers of Europe recognized the validity of the geographical findings of Messer Marco, and a hundred years after his death the results of his book began to appear on their maps. The influence of the Venetian's contribution became ever greater, in spite of many manifest errors in his location of various regions. Errera, the Italian historian, speaks of the writings of Polo as "a reliable fountain of truth" accepted by the end of the fourteenth century. The leaders

* Quoted from Erwin Raisz, *General Cartography* (New York and London, 1938), p. 27. See illustration, p. 32.

† Quoted from Edward Luther Stevenson, *Portolan Charts* (Hispanic Society of America, New York, 1911), p. 24.

of the European advances in science and discovery in that century and during what has been called "the age of the great discoveries" were often close students of Marco Polo's book. Fra Mauro's wall map of 1459, now in the library of San Michele di Murano, at Venice, though it employs the fallacious theory of the disk-like shape of the earth, seems to have taken place names and features from the book of Marco Polo.

In 1426 (or 1428) Prince Pedro, the elder brother of Prince Henry the Navigator, visited Venice. While he was there he was presented by the Signoria with a copy of Marco's book and, according to tradition, with a map copied from one made by Polo of his travels in the East. Thus Marco Polo made a substantial contribution of valuable knowledge to the group of Portuguese geographers and navigators on the very eve of the discovery and exploration of a New World.

Contarini's map, published probably in Venice in 1506—the earliest map known showing any part of America—contains names of places first mentioned by Marco Polo. Likewise the 1508 map of Johann Ruysch, published in Rome, contains for the first time the delineation of internal parts of East Asia, "no longer based on . . . Marinus of Tyre and Ptolemy, . . . but on more modern reports, especially those of Marco Polo."*

Our investigation of the influences on cartography of Messer Marco's book need be pursued no further, as later material is easily found in all histories of geography or map making. Only two facts need be added: The Venetian's error in locating Japan (which he had never personally visited) too far to the east of its true position perhaps largely accounted for the voyage of Columbus and his discovery of America.

The second fact is that best presented in the following quotation:

The first step in this direction [i.e., in rearranging the map of the world] was made by Toscanelli, a learned cosmographer of Florence. He constructed a map, now lost, the object of which appears to have been to represent the eastern portion of Asia, and the islands to the east and south of it, a part of the world unknown to Ptolemy, but with which Toscanelli had become acquainted through the travels of Marco Polo and others, and also to show that Asia could be reached by sailing westward from Portugal, directly across the then unknown Atlantic; and in 1474 Toscanelli sent this map, accompanied by a letter, to Columbus, to confirm the great discoverer in the design he then entertained of

* A. E. Nordenskiöld, *Facsimile Atlas to the Early History of Cartography*, Stockholm, 1889, p. 64.

attempting to sail westward across the Atlantic to the Indies. In this map Toscanelli divided the space between the western shores of Portugal and the eastern part of Asia into twenty-six divisions or spaces of 250 miles each, and probably laid down the eastern part of Asia with Marco Polo's outlying islands of Cipanga [Japan], Java, etc., as they are found on the globe of Martin Behaim, supposed to have been constructed in the year that Columbus discovered America and which geographical information it has been inferred, Behaim acquired from the map of Toscanelli. . . . This map is supposed to have been projected after the manner of Ptolemy, incorporating the information obtained by Marco Polo.*

Marco Polo's contribution to the world is not limited to his influence on the writings of geographers and the redrawing of maps. His prodigious memory, aided by those famous notes sent to him in the Genoese prison from his home in Venice, preserved aspects of the history, ethnology, sociology, physical geography, zoölogy, botany, economics, products, and politics of Asia such as has never been gathered into a single book by one man before or since. Even a short dissertation on each of the subjects discussed or mentioned by him would fill a small library. A list of the plants and animals named by him—excluding those which can no longer be identified from his descriptions—would fill pages. Yet carping critics complain that he has omitted much, instead of marveling that he has included so much precious information about the Asia of the thirteenth century which would otherwise have been irretrievably lost to the world.

VIII. AFTERMATH

In the middle of the fourteenth century darkness again settled down over Asia. The trade routes became the prey of marauders. The "Everlasting Dynasty" of the Mongols fell after less than a century of ever diminishing glory, and the Ming Dynasty which overthrew it was naturally anti-foreign. Merchants and monks no longer traveled to and fro in safety from Europe to the Yellow Sea, and trade with the Far East faltered and died out. The ordinary man forgot Marco Polo and the strange new world which he had revealed to him, for internecine wars and the overwhelming victorious wave of Turkish conquest brought Europe new and serious problems. But Messer Marco's book lived on, passing from hand to hand, from country to country, from

* Charles P. Daly, in his annual address as President before the American Geographical Society, 1879, reported in Vol. XI of the *Journal* of the Society.

language to language, and was never entirely neglected. To some readers he brought the glow of romance, to others an escape from the everyday world about them to the unknown fabulous lands and peoples of Asia. To yet others his tale brought dreams—dreams of high adventure and deeds of derring-do. To a few the book written to while away long prison hours brought stimulus to action, an urge to go forth and seek the unknown in their own day.

And when on that fateful third of August, 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed out from Palos to seek another world, he carried with him a copy of the Pipino edition of Marco Polo's book in Latin. That very copy, containing over seventy marginal notes in the handwriting of the great discoverer, is still preserved in the Columbian Library at Seville, Spain. It bears evidence of much reading and study, and must have been constantly at the navigator's elbow during the difficult days and nights of the long voyage. Thus in his book did the spirit of Messer Marco Polo, gentleman of Venice, first to write a full description of unknown Asia, fare forth with Christopher Columbus. It was fitting that they should make this, the greatest of all voyages, in one another's company—he who had revealed Asia to an incredulous Europe, and he who was about to give a new world, a land of promise and of high destiny, to mankind.

The greatness of Venice has vanished. The spacious warehouses, the milling crowds on the Rialto, the wharves crowded with richly laden caravels, the proud pageants of the Doges, the wedding of the sea—all these have passed away. Venice is fast decaying. Her sunrises still clothe her in all their splendor of red and gold, and the kindly twilight gently drapes her in blue and gray and shimmering silver. The great moon still looks down on her palaces, now deserted and dilapidated or become the homes of poor laboring folk. The narrow waterways and the Grand Canal still echo to the cries of gondoliers and the music of mandolins and guitars. But to him who knows her history, Venice is sad—profoundly sad and melancholy. For her glory has departed. She dreams of the days that were, when she was mistress of the seas, and when conquest and glory and the wealth of nations were hers. The waters softly lap the steps and bridges as before, the stars shine down as they have through the centuries; but the days that were will return to proud Venice no more. The spoils of war and peace have passed from her. Indeed, it sometimes seems as though the sea is eager to take

back to himself what is really his—the lagoons and the islands of Venice La Serenissima, his bride, whose greatest son was Messer Marco Polo, son of Nicolo, who many years ago fared forth to unknown lands and wrote a deathless book about it all, and who was neglected and forgotten by his own people and his own city.

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