



## CONTI, NICOLO` DE'

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**CONTI, NICOLO` DE'** (1395-ca. 1469), Venetian merchant who traveled in the east from 1414 until 1438. He first learned Arabic at Damascus, then visited Baghdad and Basra, traveling by sea from there to Bandar-e 'Abbās, Hormoz, and Qalhāt on the 'Omān coast, where he learned Persian. Conti then traveled to many places in India, Southeast Asia, and the Sunda Islands. He returned via the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and Egypt.

During his stay in Cairo Conti renounced his Roman Catholic faith, but in Florence in 1439 he appealed to Pope Eugene IV (1431-47) for forgiveness. At the pope's suggestion, he dictated the story of his voyages to the humanist Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), the pope's secretary. Poggio inserted this narrative in the fourth book of his Latin dialogue *De Varietate Fortunae*. Although this work was completed in 1447, it was not fully published until 1723 in Paris. Book IV, however, was published separately in Milan in 1492 under the title *India Recognita*, evidence of the early interest aroused by Conti's voyages; a unique copy of this edition is extant, in the British Library, London (IA. 26738). In the 16th century interest in Conti's voyages declined. Of thirty-one surviving Latin manuscripts of Poggio's dialogue (thirteen of them containing only book IV) and two manuscript translations of book IV into Italian, only three were copied after the end of the 15th century. When G. B. Ramusio wished to include Conti's account of his voyages in his collection *Navigazioni et Viaggi* (I, Venice, 1550), he was compelled to translate into Italian a Portuguese version (Lisbon, 1502) of the Latin text of 1492, which had already become extremely rare. There were also translations into Spanish,



Dutch, and English. Modern editions include R. H. Major's English translation (London, 1857, pp. 1-39) and that of Mario Longhena (Milan, 1929, pp. 115-96), the latter based on the Italian manuscript in the Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence (ms. Palatino 681).

The study of Conti's voyages raises several problems. For example, reconstructing his precise itinerary is difficult, and it is not always possible to distinguish Conti's actual account from Poggio's additions. Conti only touched on Persian territory; he sailed into the harbor of Colcus (Longhena: Calcon; Ramusio: Calcum), probably to be identified with Gombroon/Combru, now [Bandar-e 'Abbās](#), rather than with Kangān. He stopped at Hormoz island, then remained for some time at Qalhāt before sailing for India. According to Poggio, after he left Hormoz Conti arrived "at the city of Calacatia [Qalhāt], a very noble emporium of the Persians. Here, having remained for some time, he learned the Persian language, of which he afterwards made great use" (Major, p. 5). This oblique reference to the widespread use of Persian as a lingua franca in the Persian Gulf and around the Indian Ocean must certainly contain elements of truth; nevertheless, a detailed study within the orbit of Persian trade would be required in order to confirm it. Similar reports by other, later travelers often contain somewhat dubious details. It should also be remembered that in Renaissance Europe Persian had still not been clearly distinguished from other Oriental languages.

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