



POLO, MARCO

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

On a previous journey Marco's father Niccolò and his uncle Maffeo, both of whom were also merchants, had reached China, departing from *Soldanie* (Soldaya/Sudak) in the Crimea in 1261. En route they met Berke, the khan of the [Golden Horde](#) in 1262 and proceeded on to Bukhara (*Baccara*), where they remained for three years, finally reaching China, whence they returned in 1269 (Polo, 1928, sec. II-X; 1938, I, pp. 74-80; 1975, sec. 2-9; 1999, pp. 113-14; 2001, pp. 119-25). At the end of 1271, Niccolò, Maffeo, and Marco embarked at Acre for the East and they met Qubilai in his summer seat at K'ai-ping-fu in Northern China in 1275 (Polo, 1928, sec. XI-XIX; 1938, I, pp. 82-93; 1975, sec. 10-18; 1999, pp. 116-21; 2001, pp. 125-35). During the meeting with the khan they gave him a letter from Pope Gregory X (Tebaldo Visconti, 1271-76), and then went on to Khanbaliq (Beijing). Seventeen years later, in 1291, they left China by sea from Zaytun (Quanzhou), traveling via the Persian Gulf and Tabriz. By 1295 they were in Venice. In 1298, Marco Polo was captured by the Genoese in Curzola (Korčula) and imprisoned in Genoa where he met Rustichello da Pisa who wrote out Marco Polo's memoirs in French. The text was probably not completed, due to the sudden separation of Marco Polo and Rustichello. This early version is lost, and the actual knowledge of the evidence



furnished by Marco Polo is based on later manuscripts of the text in different languages. The *Description of the World* is preserved in French and Franco-Italian (*Devisement du Monde* or *Livre des Merveilles du monde*), in Tuscan, and Venetian Italian (*Meraviglie del Mondo* or *Milione*, this latter title being derived from a surname of the family, “*Emilione*”: Szczesniak, 1960; Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 625-26), in Latin and in other languages. (For the textual problems see Charignon, 1924-26; Iwamura, 1949; Jackson, 1998, pp. 84-86; Pelliot, 1959-73; Polo, 1865; 1928; 1938, I, pp. 41-55 and II; 1975, intr.; 1998; 1999, pp. 23-110; Ramusio, 1559, pp. 2-60; Ramusio, 1980; Roques, 1955; Watanabe, 1986, pp. 3-63; 2001, pp. 9-115; 2003, pp. IX-XL.) In 1299 Marco Polo returned to Venice, where he died in 1324.

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

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

While much of the information furnished by Marco Polo is focused on China and the Far East, much space is also devoted in the text to Persia, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The information on Persia has been studied by Franchi (1941) and Gabriel (1963, q.v.), that on the Pamirs and Afghanistan by Lentz (1933), and that on the Silk Road by Drège (1976). Other scholars have used the



work of Marco Polo to shed light on pre-Islamic sites (Invernizzi, 2005, pp. 78-79), on which Polo's information is, however, meager. During the 20th century, the *Description of the World* had considerable success in Persia, Piemontese listing more than twenty works and translations of it that appeared there between 1949 and 1996 (Piemontese, 2003, pp. 234-36).

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

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

The *Description of the World* makes frequent use of literary traditions, as in the case of the conquest of Baghdad (*Baudac/Baudas/Baudaca*) by Hulagu (*Ulau/Alau/Alchom/Altu*), and the killing of the last caliph al-Mosta'sem (1258), to which are added legendary elements such as the description of the caliph dying of starvation in front of his treasury, a fact that seems to be an adaptation of classical traditions, unsupported by contemporary Arabic sources (Polo, 1928, sec. XXV; 1975, sec. 24, and note on pp. 574-76; 1999, pp. 126-27; 2001, pp. 141-43). Marco Polo narrates another legendary event, said to have occurred in Baghdad in 1275, when a sovereign, erroneously defined as the caliph, challenged the Christians to join two mountains together. The miracle was accomplished by God in response to the prayers of a cobbler. As Monneret de Villard demonstrated (1948, pp. 84-86), this legend was probably

an adaptation of a legend attributed to the Fatimid caliph al-Mo‘ezz (953-75) or other later members of the Egyptian dynasty (Polo, 1928, sec. XXVI-XXIX; 1955, pp. 29-35; 1975, sec. 26-29; 1999, pp. 128-30; 2001, pp. 143-49). Various chapters of the *Description of the World* are dedicated to the the *Viel de la Montaigne/Veglio della Montagna*, “the Old Man of the Mountain,” the *šayk al-jabal* of the Islamic sources (Polo, 1938, I, pp. 128-32; 1975, sec. 39-42; 1999, pp. 138-40; 2001, pp. 166-69; Nowell 1947), *Alaodin* (‘Alā-al-Din Moḥammad) who was the seventh Grand Master of the Isma‘ilis of Alamut called *Assassins/Assassini/Harcassis/Hasisins*, a term probably derived by the word *ḥašīš/ḥašīšiyin*, although this etymology remains controversial (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 52-55). The country of the members of the sect is called *Milect/Mulect/Mulehet/Milice*, a corruption of the word *molḥed* “heretic,” mistakenly applied by Marco Polo to the region (Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 785-87). The description given by Marco Polo of the marvelous garden where ‘Alā-al-Din Moḥammad and the Isma‘ilis lived, and of the activities of the Grand Master, are practically identical with those of Oderico da Pordenone (Wyngaert, 1929, pp. 488-89). Polo also describes the destruction of Alamut by Hulagu.

Not all of Marco Polo’s description rests on legend, for several of the episodes he relates concerning the Mongols seem historically reliable. Even if he includes the tradition of Prester John (Polo, 1928, sec. CX; 1975, sec. 64-67, 108 and note pp. 696-701; 1999, p. 156), echoing previous descriptions (see Beckingham, Hamilton, 1996; Doresse, 1953; Nowell, 1953; Rachelwitz, 1972; Richard, 1957; 2005), he also furnishes a careful history of the line of [Čengiz Khan](#), including a discussion of the customs and the religion of the Mongols (Polo, 1975, sec. 68-69). The descriptions of the wars of the Il-khanids Abaqa (*Abaca/Abaga*) and Arḡun (*Argo/Argon*) with the Chagatay lord Qaidu (*Caidu*) and of the open conflict between Qaidu and Qubilay are useful sources for these events (for this historical evidence, see Biran, 1997, pp. 54-57). Polo also refers to the Princess *Aigiaruc/Aigiarne*, a name that is identified by Pelliot as Ay-Yaruq, probably a surname of the princess Qutulun (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, p. 15). There are extensive descriptions in Polo’s text of the conflicts between Arḡun and Aḥmad Tegüder, called *Acamat soldan* or, in the Tuscan version, simply *Soldano* (Aḥmad Solṭān). These events occupy various chapters (Polo, 1928, sec. CCVI-CCXIV; 1938, I, pp. 456-67; 1975, sec. 196-203) where Polo relates the conversion of Aḥmad and his death at the hands of Arḡun. Polo states also that Arḡun died from poison. Another figure who appears in Polo’s account is *Milichi (malek)*, who was the “vicar” of Aḥmad (about him, see



Pelliot, who identified him as Alīnāq (killed in 1284: Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 29-30). Marco Polo also describes the descendants of Jöči, including *Conci/Canci* (Qoniči) who ruled in the domains of Ordu (Polo, 1928, sec. CCXVIII; 1975, sec. 204). He names the founder of the Golden Horde *Sain/Frai* from his epithet *Sayin-Khan*, “the good Khan,” which title was in fact used for Batu, though Marco Polo believed that this name referred to the father of Batu, and not to Batu himself (*Bacui/Patu*; Polo, 1975, sec. 208; Pelliot, 1959-73, II, p. 327). Among the successors of Batu, Polo mentions *Barga/Barca* (Berke) who defeated Hulagu around 1262, a fact that is reported by Polo (1938, I, pp. 478-83; 1975, sec. 209, see also notes pp. 556-57). The Franco-Italian version of the text also includes some chapters dedicated to Toqtaï, the fifth son of Mūngke Timur, who is absent from other versions (Polo, 1928, sec. CCXXX-CCXXXIII).

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

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

The more substantial information furnished by the *Descriptions of the World* is



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

The next chapter is dedicated to Georgia (*Giorgianie/Giorgens/Jorganie/Zorzania*), whose king was called *David* (*Davidre* or *David Melic* < Ar. *malek*), probably David V (r. 1249-69), son of Queen Russudan. Polo relates that all the kings of that province were born with the mark of an eagle on their right shoulder. The Georgians were valiant warriors, and they were Christians. Polo alludes to the Iron Gate (< Pers. *Darband/Darband-e Āhanin*) made by Alexander the Great (Polo, 1975, sec. 22; 1999, pp. 124-25; 2001, pp. 138-40; for other versions see Pelliot, 1938, I, p. 98) and adds that, in the account in the *Book of Alexander* (Polo's reference here to a version of the *Alexander Romance* is generally considered an interpolation by Rustichello; see Polo, 1975, note p. 534), Alexander shut the Tatars within the mountains, but that the reference was to the *Comain* (Cumans, see above), because there were no Tatars at the time of Alexander. Polo also mentions a monastery dedicated to St. Leonard (probably a Dominican house) and gives important information about the Caspian Sea, called *Gel* or *Chelan* "*Geluchelan*" (from Gilān > *Mer de Ghel*, see Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 733-35; Polo 1928, sec. XXIII; 1975, sec. 22; 2001, p. 140), where the Genoese sailed. The



presence of the Genoese here is confirmed by other sources (Richard, 1970).

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

One chapter in the *Descriptions of the World* is devoted to various towns: *Tauris/Toris* (Tabriz), capital of the Il-khanid Empire between 1265 and 1304, is considered one of the main towns of *Yrac/Irac* which Marco Polo misinterprets as an expanded ‘Erāq-e ‘Ajam (Polo, 1928, sec. XXX; 1975, sec. 25; 1999, p. 127; 2001, pp. 149-50). The people of this town traded with India and other countries, and produced silk fabrics and brocades. Latin, Armenian, Nestorian, Jacobite, and Georgian merchants were active there. The town was surrounded by beautiful gardens, even if the population was evil and disloyal. *Iasdi/Iadis/Jasoy* (Yazd) was a beautiful town where silk and brocades were worked (Polo, 1928, sec. XXXIV; 1975, sec. 33; 2001, p. 155). Turquoise (*turchesche*) was extracted in great quantities from the mountains of Kerman (*Creman*) and was worked there. The people of Kerman also specialized in the production of iron and steel, and prepared arms and harness for the knights. The women worked silk and gold. In this country the art of falconry was particularly developed. In Yazd and Kerman, Marco observed some onagers,



which he calls “wild asses” (Polo, 1928, sec. XXXV; 1975, sec. 34; 1999, pp. 152-53; 2001, pp. 155-57). The village of *Camadi* or *Camandi* (Qamādin), a suburb near Jiroft, in the realm of *Reobales* (Rudbār?), was famous for dates and other fruits (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, p. 139), and it was here that animals such as donkeys and rams with their typical fat tails could be found. The local population built walls of earth to defend themselves. They sold slaves and were under King *Nogodar*, identified as a chief of the *Carans/Carans/Charaunas/Caraonas/Scherani*, the Qaraunas (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 183-96; II, p. 792) about whom Marco Polo gives information in various parts of his text (Polo, 1928, sec. XXXVI; 1938, I, pp. 120-22; 1975, sec. 8, 35, 114-15; 2001, pp. 158-59; see also Aubin, 1969). To escape from them Marco Polo takes refuge in the castle of *Canosalmi/Ganasalim* (probably *Qanāt-e Šāh: Pelliot, 1959-73, I, p. 158).

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

In what is now Afghanistan, Marco Polo describes *Sapurgan/Sopurgan/Supunga/Sipurgan/Espurgam*, identified by Benedetto (Polo, 1928, sec. XLIV; 1938, I, pp. 133-34; 1975, sec. 43; 1999, p. 140; 2003, p. 1) as Šebergān, north of Mazar-e Sharif, as a country full of trees and delicious melons. He observed the destruction wrought by the Mongols in *Balc/Balac/Baldach* (Balkh) and noted that the people of this town lived in fortresses in the mountains. It was in Balkh that Alexander had married the daughter of Darius (Polo, 1938, I, pp. 134-35; 1975, sec. 44; 1999, p. 141; 2003, pp. 2). The castle of *Taican/Tahican*, noted by Polo as a good market for fodder, was identified by Pelliot (1959-73, II, pp. 842-43; see also Lentz, 1932, p. 8) as



Taliqan. Here the mountains were of salt. The same chapter (Polo, 1975, sec. 45; 1999, pp. 141-42; 2003, pp. 4-6) includes a mention of *Scasem/Scassem*, which Lentz (1932, pp. 10-12) and Pelliot (1959-73, II, pp. 826-27) have identified as Iškāšm (Sikašīm in *Ḥudūd al-Ālam*, see Minorsky, 1982, p. 121, nr. 14), a town on the south-west slopes of the Pamirs (see also the comments about another Iškāšm in the notes to Polo, 1975, pp. 716-17).

The *Description of the World* mentions Badakṣhān several times (*Badasciam/Balascam/ Balassam*; Polo, 1928, sec. XLVII, I; 1938, I, pp. 136-39; 1975, sec. 46, 47, 49; 2003, pp. 4-6), where the kings were descended from Alexander the Great and the daughter of Darius. For this reason the kings of this dynasty were called *Zulcarnei* (from the Qur'ānic epithet of Alexander *Du'l-qarnayn* and the tradition concerning Rōshanag and her daughter Stateira, see Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 615-16). Very expensive rubies (*balais/balasci* < *badakṣī*, “stones from Badakhshān”; Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 63-65; Polo, 1975, note p. 551), as well as the best *azul/azzurro* (lapis lazuli, < Pers. *lājvard*) in the world, and silver were mined here. Badakhshān was a cold country where it was possible to find very good horses. The population produced oil from nuts and were good warriors. The women wore trousers because they had large buttocks and people liked them when they were fat. *Pascian/Bastian* (*Pasciai* in Polo, 1928, sec. XXXVI, 35; XLVIII, 1; 1999, p. 143; 2003, p. 6) is variously interpreted. It seems to be the Pashai, south of the Hindukush (Lentz, 1933, pp. 16-17). Here, the population, which spoke its own language (*paṣayī*, see Morgenstierne, 1967, pp. 1-4), was of dark complexion and were idolaters. In their ears they wore gold and silver earrings set with precious stones. This land was near Kashmir (*Chesciemur/Chesmir/Chesimun/Thesimur/Kesimur*), another land of idolaters (Polo, 1928, sec. XLIX; 1938, I, pp. 139-49; 1975, sec. 48; 1999, 144; 2003, p. 7). The Lord of Badakhshān also governed the *Vocan* (Wakhan) in the Pamirs, which was inhabited by Muslims who spoke their own language (for the *wakhi* language see Pakhalina, 1966, pp. 398-418). Marco Polo claimed that the mountain here was the highest in the world, alluding to one of the peaks of the Pamirs. Here there was a great and beautiful river and good pastures. As Cardona noted (in Polo, 1975, pp. 753-54) the description of this valley appears similar to that given by Edrīsī (1987, II, p. 204; also Lentz, 1933, pp. 17-20). Moving eastward, away from the Pamirs, Marco Polo described *Belor/Balor/Bolor*, a country identified by Pelliot as the *Bulur* of *Ḥudūd al-Ālam* (Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 90-91; Minorsky 1982, p. 369). It is the area of Balur or Balurestān, which includes the valleys of Chitral, Yasin, and Gilgit. Polo noted that the people of this region too were idolaters.



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

Various Persian linguistic and historical influences are evident in the section of *The Description of the World* dedicated to China. The use of words such as *Fafur/Facfur* (Pers. *fağfur*), used by Arab and Persian historians for the Sung emperor, seems clearly to reflect the adoption by Marco Polo of a Muslim tradition (Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 652-61). The name *Catai* (*Alcatay/Cata/Catai*) used by Marco Polo for Northern China stretching to the Huang Ho derives from the Arabic transcription of the word *Qitai (>Ar., Pers. *Qatā/Qatāy*), referring to the Kitan tribes who migrated to the West and were known in the



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

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

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

Marco Polo lists the provinces of the Golden Horde domains, conquered by Batu (see above): *Rossia* (Russia); *Cumania/Comanie/Comania*, the land of the Kipchaq (Cumans), known by the Byzantines as *Kymanoi* (Polo, 1975, note p. 601); *Alains/Alani/Alanai*, the lands of the Alans (Ossetes; also *As* or *Asi* in Rubrouck, Wyngaert, 1929, p. 89; Pelliot, 1959-73, I, pp. 16-25); *Lac/Lacca* (Dagestan/Daghestan; Pelliot, 1959-73, II, p. 760); *Mengiar/Megia/* (Hungary < *Magyar*, see the question in Pelliot, 1959-73, II, pp. 777-78, Polo, 1975, note pp.



663-65); *Çiç/Ziziri/Zirziri*, a name that may be related to the Eastern Circassians (*Jik*; Pelliot 1959-73, I, pp. 606-8; Deeters 1958); *Gucia/Gutia/Scozia*, Crimea, which was inhabited by Goths (See Wyngaert, 1929, p. 170; Pelliot, 1959-73, II, p. 743) and *Gazarie/Gasaria*, the “land of the Khazars,” modern Crimea (Polo, 1975, sec. 208).

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(Michele Bernardini)

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