



Hans Ulrich Vogel and Ulrich Theobald (Eds.)

# Marco Polo Research Past, Present, Future

# MARCO POLO RESEARCH



Hans Ulrich Vogel and Ulrich Theobald (Eds.)

**MARCO POLO RESEARCH:  
PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE**



## **Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie, detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.



Dieses Werk ist lizenziert unter einer Creative Commons Namensnennung - Keine Bearbeitungen 4.0 International Lizenz. Um eine Kopie dieser Lizenz einzusehen, konsultieren Sie <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/legalcode> oder wenden Sie sich brieflich an Creative Commons, Postfach 1866, Mountain View, California, 94042, USA.

Die Online-Version dieser Publikation ist auf dem Repositorium der Universität Tübingen frei verfügbar (Open Access).

<http://hdl.handle.net/10900/151266>

<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:21-dspace-1512662>

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15496/publikation-92606>

Tübingen Library Publishing 2024  
Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen  
Wilhelmstraße 32  
72074 Tübingen  
[druckdienste@ub.uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:druckdienste@ub.uni-tuebingen.de)  
<https://tlp.uni-tuebingen.de>

ISBN (Hard/Softcover): 978-3-98944-006-7

ISBN (PDF): 978-3-98944-007-4

Umschlaggestaltung: Sandra Binder, Universität Tübingen  
Coverabbildung: Tebetans offering their unmarried daughters to by-passing strangers, « ... por ce qu'il en faicent lor voluntés et qu'il gigent con ells ». Source: *Livre des merveilles*, around 1400, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Français 2810, f. 52v, [gallica.bnf.fr](http://gallica.bnf.fr) / BnF.

Satz: Ulrich Theobald

Herstellung: BoD – Books on Demand, Norderstedt

Printed in Germany

# Table of Contents

*Ulrich Theobald and Hans Ulrich Vogel*

Preface ..... ix

## *Le Devisement dou monde:* History and Digitization of the Text(s)

*Philippe Ménard*

Recherches passées, travaux récents et investigations futures  
sur le *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo ..... 3

*Alvise Andreose*

The Textual Transmission of the *Devisement dou monde*:  
Old Problems and New Insights ..... 53

*Samuela Simion, Mario Eusebi and Eugenio Burgio*

On the Way to an Integral Edition of the Book of Marco Polo:  
A First Attempt to Create a Digital Edition ..... 91

*Giuseppe Mascherpa*

The Description of the City of Quinsai  
in the Early Tradition of the *Devisement dou monde* ..... 133

*Michel Quereuil*

Le Tibet dans les principales versions du *Devisement du monde* ..... 155

## Reception and Styles of the Book, and the Literary Field

<i>Marcello Ciccuto</i> The Illuminated Manuscripts of the <i>Devisement</i> : Words and Images in Establishing a Late Medieval Pattern of Perception for the Topic of Travelling to the Far East .....	187
<i>Christine Gadrat-Ouerfelli</i> Who Read Marco Polo's Book and Why? .....	201
<i>Sharon Kinoshita</i> Translating Marco Polo's <i>Le Devisement du monde</i> .....	215
<i>Danièle James-Raoul</i> La poétique du voyage dans le <i>Devisement du monde</i> : Éléments de style .....	249
<i>Dominique Boutet</i> L'exotisme dans le <i>Devisement du monde</i> , en particulier dans le « Livre d'Inde » .....	299
<i>Michèle Guéret-Laferté</i> Persia, a Strategical Place in the <i>Devisement du monde</i> : Order and Disorder in the Progress of the Narrative .....	315

## Marco Polo's Reports and the World He Witnessed

<i>Li TANG</i> Marco Polo's Description on "Nestorians" and other Christian Groups in Yuan China .....	335
<i>DANG Baohai</i> Two Mongolian Toponyms in Marco Polo's Account: The Green Mound and Cacciar Modun .....	361
<i>LUO Wei</i> On Some Designations Used in the <i>Description of the World</i> and the Political Attitude of Marco Polo .....	385

<i>Ulrich Theobald</i>	
Marco Polo on Military Affairs of the Yuan Dynasty.....	417
<i>Stephen G. Haw</i>	
Marco Polo and the <i>kešig</i> , with a Further Note on the Toponym "Singui" .....	451
<i>Hans Ulrich Vogel</i>	
Marco Polo's Crouching Dragons and Hidden Tigers.....	477





# Preface

Ulrich Theobald and Hans Ulrich Vogel

The “adventures” of Marco Polo attracted immense attention from the beginnings, and different readerships picked out what they were interested in, or what served their particular aims. While the actually rare descriptions of ghastly deserts or of freaky semi-human creatures in the book were often quoted and given shape in illustrations, the rich commercial details of Chinese cities are rather unamusing for the common reader, and in the eyes of the modern, secularized recipient, the book’s many details on religious communities of Muslims (“Saracens”), Buddhists (“idolators”) or Nestorians, are often not more than marginalia.

In the twentieth century, film directors availed themselves of Marco Polo’s book – or rather the orbit of imagination around it – to produce pictures for the masses, each with a different interpretation of Marco Polo, from an arrogant Rory Calhoun (1962, dir. Piero Pierotti) to an awestruck Ken Marshall (1982, dir. Guiliano Montaldo) and the sex-and-crime-style Netflix series with Lorenzo Richelmy (2014, dir. John Fusco). Another popular incarnation of Marco Polo is the comic series produced by Enzo Chiomenti and Jean Ollivier between 1962 and 1984 in some issues of which Marco Polo can barely be distinguished from Sindbad the Sailor.<sup>1</sup>

Rather unnoticed by the common public, scholars from the early nineteenth century on began with serious studies on the book of Marco Polo and its many circulating versions. The history of Marco Polo research is expounded in Philippe Ménard’s contribution to this book. What becomes evident from both the popular reception and scholarly studies is that the panoply of themes that the Polian travelogue involves is indeed as vast as the deserts, landscapes and oceans he once crossed. A truthful and adequate

---

<sup>1</sup> For a complete list of this series, see <http://www.comicbd.fr/Se-Marco-Polo.html> (access 2023/11/25).

interpretation of the book, its background and reception, and of the sojourn through foreign countries therefore involves scholars from miscellaneous fields.

This volume represents another attempt in bringing together Marco Polo researchers from different cultural backgrounds and distinct disciplines<sup>2</sup> and thus enhancing more coherent and comprehensive analyses of one of the great early books on inter-civilizational encounters on the globe. One aim is to present a picture of the multi-faceted character of Marco Polo studies, certainly not of the whole range, but of pieces from exemplary areas of research and from different disciplinary points of view that in monographic studies of individual scholars are normally not approached and tackled together. On the one side, such are, for instance, the history of the book and thus studies of the textual transmission of the versions of the travelogue, or the history of literature with its questions about the position of Marco's *Devisement dou monde* among contemporary chivalric romances, or social and bibliographical history engaging in analyses of the readership and the dissemination of the book. On the other side of the spectrum is the study of the world that Marco Polo witnessed, with its aims at comparing his observations with historical facts that can be established from native sources. Such are research of Nestorian communities in China, the question of what position Marco actually held when he served the Great Khan, or social, military, economic and religious conditions prevailing in the Mongol-Yuan empire, including very mundane, but practical, issues like the custom to chase away tigers by the use of bamboo "firecrackers". Another field of research discussed in this volume is the identification of names and terms mentioned in the book by means of making use of now better available Chinese sources like stele inscriptions or local chronicles

---

<sup>2</sup> A first attempt in this direction was undertaken in the volume edited by Balazs (1957), the results of a conference commemorating the 700th birthday of Marco Polo, which was certainly interdisciplinary, but included with Enoki Kazuo only one scholar from East Asia. Conferences and collective volumes bringing together scholars from East and West has become a more regular feature in recent years. See especially Masini, Salvatori, and Schipani (eds.), (2006) [congress of 2004 in commemoration of the 750th birthday of the Venetian], Xu Zhongwen and Rong Xinjiang (eds.) (2016), Rong Xinjiang and Dang Baohai (eds.), 2019, and Andreose (ed.) (2019).

and biographies. Much has been done in this field by Paul Pelliot, but questions remain and additions and corrections are due. For instance, Luo Wei in his contribution identifies the name of the Mongol general Baiyan, which the Venetian rendered as meaning [in Chinese] “Hundred Eyes” (*baiyan* 百眼), as a homophone of *baiyan* 白雁 or *baiyan* 百雁, “white wild geese” or “hundred wild geese”, respectively. The appearance of white wild geese was used in some Chinese folksongs and poems to refer to the arrival of Baiyan’s army, and perhaps at some point of time also the homophone “hundred eyes” became current in folklore. This word pun is, by the way, in the Netflix series further emulated to the figure of a blind (!) martial arts teacher named “Hundred Eyes”.

Another aim of this volume is to inspire researchers to cooperate in similar ways also in the future. One field of research not well covered in this volume is, for instance, the Near East, Central Asia and “Ceylon”, apart from the contributions of Danièle James-Raoul and Michèle Guéret-Laferté who both investigated important literary aspects in the narration on regions (i.e., India and Persia, respectively) other than China. Future collaborations might include more research on these areas, as well as – as Philippe Ménard suggests – more textual and terminological studies of the languages in which the different editions of *Le Devisement dou monde* were written. For the latter tasks, the “Marco Polo digitale”<sup>3</sup> database of Eugenio Burgio and his collaborators with its inclusion of the most important manuscript versions offers new opportunities by facilitating comparisons of content and wording in different redactions.

Most of the contributions to this volume were presented during a conference held in October 2017 in Tübingen, while others have been added later. Two of the lectures held during the conference could not be incorporated into this book, namely those of Johannes Gießauf and Helen Wang, while the conference papers of LUO Wei and Sharon Kinoshita differed from their contributions to this book. The contents of these four conference presentations shall be described here briefly because all of them represent bricks in the grand edifice of Marco Polo studies:

---

<sup>3</sup> See <http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/main/index.html> (access 2023/11/23).

Johannes Gießauf of the University of Graz discussed the place of Marco Polo's book among mediaeval travel reports presenting *mirabilia mundi* or "wonders of the world", among which "monsters" figured very prominent. In the league of "monsters", we find the "Tartars" (Mongols) believed to originate in the *tartaros* ("underworld" or "hell") and being the harbingers of the Anti-Christ. Unlike Matthew Paris in his *Chronica Maiora* (1259), who thought that the Mongols were cannibals, the Franciscan Friar Giovanni da Pian del Carpine painted a very sober and realistic picture of the Mongols in his *Ystoria Mongalorum* (1247). Carpini's report was used by later writers, for instance, C. de Bridia in his *Hystoria Tartarorum* (1247), but de Bridia also added his own, more reliable information. This text also quotes from Isidore of Sevilla's (630) *Etymologiarum sive originum* which results in generic similarities to the well-known and widespread Alexander Romance (12th cent.). William of Rubruck, arriving in Karakorum at the Great Khan's court in 1254, mentioned Isidor and Solinus (4th cent.) in his report *Itinerarium*, but doubts that such early writers could have provided reliable information on the "Tartars".

Gießauf finished his report by a definition of Gervasius of Tilbury (d. 1235) on the genres of *historia*, *argumenta*, and *fabulae* (a classification going back to Isidore). While *historia* were "facts which actually happened", and *fabulae* were "things which neither happened nor could happen", *argumenta* were, according to Gervasius, "wonders which may not be subject of our knowledge, but may be natural occurrences". This genre is, according to Gießauf, where the "wonders" reported in the book of Marco Polo belong to.

Helen Wang, Curator in the Department of Coins and Medals in the British Museum, represents the object-related study of Marco Polo and his times. As the scion of a merchant family, the Venetian was very interested in economic matters and provided his readers with abundant information on trade and commerce, as well as on local currencies. Wang offered an introduction to monies of the Yuan period and their peculiarities. Her presentation showed specimens of coins, notes and precious metal ingots. Helen Wang highlighted key areas of research on Yuan money in recent

years, for instance, the movements of monetary silver or the Mongol edicts by which paper money was declared to be the sole currency valid in the Yuan empire. The most familiar forms of Yuan money were therefore the paper notes described by Marco Polo, a topic that undoubtedly fascinated Europeans who were only used to commodity moneys.

Luo Wei spoke about a critical topic in Marco Polo's book, namely his report of sexual hospitality – the interpretation and omission of which is also discussed in the contribution of Michel Quereuil. Luo used unique Chinese material on this very special customary service offered to guests, and thus is convinced that Marco Polo's account by no means emanated erotic fantasies (perhaps it did, but this was likely not the purpose of the text). Traces of sexual hospitality can indeed be found in the early stage of the development of many ethnic groups throughout the Eurasian continent. The formation and maintenance of the custom can be attributed to the biological demands of human groups living in remote places like the Tibetans. One can consider it as an intention to acquire different and beneficial genes and incorporate them into the ethnic stock. At the same time, the argument of “pleasing the deities” by this custom was often brought forward by relevant clerical authorities, in an attempt of rationalizing and preserving it. Marco Polo's report has thus great value as it allows us to trace back the spread and use of local customs among various ethnic groups in China's Yuan period.<sup>4</sup>

Sharon Kinoshita called into attention that the book of Marco Polo was composed or published in many different versions with various titles (*Devisement dou monde*, *Livre du Grand Caan*, *Livre des merveilles*, *Il Milione*, *Travels of Marco Polo*), each of them attempting to serve the expectations of different audiences. Even if these various redactions were more or less translations from older versions – going back to a hypothetical *ur*-version – differences are great and led to widespread misinterpretations of the account. Marco was criticized because of his “lack of emotion” or the abundance of narrative parts instead of presenting more geo- or ethnographical information. Another problem often discussed is the

---

<sup>4</sup>For an English publication of the results of his research on this topic see Luo Wei (2017).

phenomenon of double authorship, in which “me” is sometimes referring to Marco, and sometimes to Rustichello da Pisa, or to both as a “corporate author”. Topoi pervading all manuscripts and editions are the love for unusual places, the exotic, Polo’s personal involvement, and an orderly narrative characterized by “transitional moments”. Generally seen, Marco’s report demystifies common contemporary imaginations of an exotic and marvellous Asia. Yet some traces of “narrative Bermuda Triangles” remain in his book.

Kinoshita made then use of one example of an exotic character that brings together various literary traditions of the world, namely the description of the Andaman Islands, where man-eaters were told to live who had dog heads and traded in spices. These “most outlandish” features are mentioned twice in the most important versions of the book. Similar tales about the Andaman Islands are found in Chinese and Arab sources, and provide proof of the existence of a “république mondiale des lettres” (Pascale Casanova, *World Empire of Letters*, 1999) before the Europeans took control over the Indian Ocean.

Now let us come to this volume itself which is divided into three sections, namely first, contributions concerning the history of the manuscripts and editions of Marco Polo’s *Devisement dou monde*, their “genealogy”, plasticity, and their digitization as a base for further research; second, on the backdrop of literature studies presentations dealing with the genre of novels and romances of adventure and exotic narratives, readership and distribution, and issues of translation into modern languages; and third, discussions of historical nature with articles on the interrelation between Marco Polo’s account and historical facts of the then-contemporary East.

The eminent French Marco Polo scholar Philippe Ménard opens this volume by presenting an overview of the history and development of Marco Polo studies from the early nineteenth century onwards, such as those of Marsden (1818), Zurla (1818), Roux de Rochelle (1826), Baldelli Boni (1827), Pauthier (1865), and Yule (1903). He then mentions and criticizes the most important classical editions of the book, like Benedetto’s so-called “integral edition” (1928) or the “disparate patchwork” published by Moule and Pelliot (1938-1939). Both books mixed together different

editions and versions of the text and are therefore – even if presenting many valuable references and research notes – only of limited use for more in-depth research, which must consult the different redactions of the account. Fortunately for us, the most important renderings of Marco Polo's report that have come down upon us were transcribed and published individually and thus made accessible to the public in recent years. These are, in chronological order of their publication, the Tuscan version (TA2; Bertolucci-Pizzorusso, 1975), the Italian version of Giovanni Battista Ramusio (R; Milanese, 1980), the Latin version of the Z manuscript (Z; Barbieri, 1998), the Venetian version (VA3; Barbieri and Andreose, 1999), the French version (Fr; Ménard, 2001-9), the Franco-Italian version (F; Eusebi, 2010), and finally, with Ramusio's redaction as point of departure, the digitized editions of F, L, P, V, VA, VB and Z being realized under the guidance of Eugenio Burgio. Members of this project have contributed to this volume as well.

In the second section of his report, Philippe Ménard draws a picture of how the field of Marco Polo studies might look like in the future. By highlighting and identifying a substantial number of problems he identifies the following areas in which more research and efforts would be welcome: making available online more original Marco Polo redactions; increase in incisive and comparative terminological, linguistic, literary and genealogical studies of the Franco-Italian and other versions (see several contributions in this volume); in-depth investigations on the more than sixty manuscript and printed versions of Pipino's Latin rendering; more intense research on the late Venetian printed versions of the late fifteenth century and their Castilian off-springs of the early sixteenth century; corrections and complementation of Benedetto's studies and conclusions; better presentation of the digital editions and more substantial provision of relevant bibliographical information; and, finally, closer views on the illustrated editions, for instance, with regard to the interrelation of images and text (compare the contribution of Marcello Ciccuto in this volume). "Vorrei augurare a tutti Buona Fortuna" is Ménard's final statement.

In his contribution, Alvisè Andreose provides us with a competent overview on the state of the art in research about the history of the most



important Marco Polo manuscripts and their genealogical relationships. He takes as the starting point of his critical investigation Luigi Foscolo Benedetto's ground-laying works of the 1920s and 1930s, i.e., his text-critical studies of the editions that were available to him. As pointed out by Andreose, for Benedetto the Latin Z, Venetian V, and Latin L redactions eventually formed a single group B, to be distinguished from group A, i.e., the "Franco-Italian" F, early French Fr, Tuscan TA and Venetian VA versions, all of them more or less distant copies and copies of copies of the lost original version. Benedetto's composition of group B was largely based on "agreement in exact reading". However, by taking also "agreement in error" in account, more recent research by European scholars, that is mainly French and especially Italian ones, have shown now an altered picture, with two main groups  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ . The former one, represented directly by V ( $\gamma$ ), consists of three subgroups, namely, Fr in the subgroup ( $\delta$ ), F – with L – in the subgroup ( $\delta''$ ), and TA, VA and VB in subgroup ( $\delta'''$ ). The group  $\beta$  is represented, and this only indirectly, solely by the Z renderings. As Andreose writes, this first real stemma codicum was established by Eugenio Burgio and Mario Eusebi in 2008. According to this scheme, Ramusio's version of 1556 was based on testimonies of both groups, especially V, L, VB and a precursor of Z, with Pipino's Latin translation (descending from VA) serving as the principal model. It is noteworthy that the F manuscript occupies a lower genetical position in group  $\alpha$  and that, contrary to Benedetto's opinion, V and L do not belong to the Z tradition and thus to the  $\beta$  group, but are relatively early and late testimonies of the  $\alpha$  group.

Other important aspects of Andreose's article are his highlighting of studies undertaken recently on the milieu in which manuscripts written in Old French were produced in thirteenth-century Northern Italy as well as his overview of the history of research on all the important MP manuscripts as well as their modern text-critical editions. Moreover, he concludes that more research has to be done on the history of the Polo manuscripts, especially with regard to the huge number of redactions of the Latin Pipino translation, the exact status of the Z tradition, and the question of single and multiple redactions of individual manuscripts. According to Andreose,

the present state of research on the *Devisement*'s textual transmission does not permit a definitive classification of all the important manuscripts.

Samuela Simion, Mario Eusebi and Eugenio Burgio present their project of producing a critical "reconstruction" of the contents (not the wording) of a hypothetical "original version" of Marco Polo's account. This synoptic edition will be embedded in a hypertextual framework that will allow the user not only to compare different editions, but also to insert annotations based on latest research results. In the eyes of the authors, older critical integral editions, like those of Benedetto, Moule and Pelliot, or Kappler focusing on the "synchronical" presentation of variant editions, suffer from severe shortcomings, the most critical one being that the traditional book format does not allow the users to track the alteration of texts by copyist-editors. The Benedetto edition presents a homogeneous text, but the reader has to rely on the apparatus to find out which statement was based on what edition. Moule and Pelliot put sigla at the side of the F redaction, resulting in a "mishmash" in which the history of the text becomes unintelligible. Kappler eventually based himself on F while integrating variant passages only from Z and R, thus creating a rather "artificial text" in which passages from other trustworthy redactions were not taken into account. The reader thus has to depend in all cases on the editors' judgments, and has not the chance to carry out textual comparisons by him or herself.

The new digital critical and integral edition will allow users to directly compare two or more versions of the text, down to individual sentences, and thus trace back in detail where editors added, omitted or altered statements. Differences can be marked by adding bold or italics features. Moreover, the user can observe movements of textual parts to other places, shifting of segments of sentences, or differences of single expressions or crude abbreviations (like "etcetera" in the Toledan Z copy) within the text. This digital project thus combines the preservation of individual redactions with a diachronical and integral "reconstruction" of a hypothetical *ur*-version. The individual redactions themselves will allow the user to identify genetic relationships between individual versions, and therefore this database will be much more than a "digital archive" of various textual editions.

The authors then present an example of the usefulness of the database, namely by means of the toponym Achbaluch, which is only mentioned in the Ramusio version (R). In Fra Mauro's "world" map from 1459, however, the city of Hachbaluch is shown, which means that Fra Mauro must have used a manuscript close to that which Ramusio had access to. Another proof for this connection is the mentioning of the stone lions at the "Marco Polo Bridge" over the Pulisangin River. In other words, and in the vein of Mascherpa's conclusions, Ramusio, but also Fra Mauro, relied on an earlier and more complete redaction of Z than that preserved in the Toledan rendering. Such things and other details lead to the conclusion that neither the relatively rich versions Z, R, V and L, nor the simplified and "vulgate"  $\delta$  redactions (i.e., primarily Fr, F, but also K, TA, VA and VB) contain all the information we can consider authentic and original, but that a text coming near to the *ur*-version of the *Devisement dou monde* can only be reconstructed through a critical integral translation (into the global language of English) that takes all the important traditions into account.

The digital integral edition, designed in two columns, with a critical translation in English on the left and the original redaction(s) to the right, will also include an index in which each of the selected lemmas is critically commented. The operational mechanisms will allow anyone interested in the project – philologists, historians, anthropologists, geographers and so on – to cooperate, in order to produce an authoritative tool devoted to knowledge about Asia in the European Middle Ages. Of the more than 140 manuscript versions of Marco's *Devisement dou monde* with their high textual variations, additions and omissions, the team selected the vernacular redactions Fr, K, TA, TB, V, VA, and VB, the Latin versions Z and P, as well as the L rendering as the basis for their reconstruction of an integral edition.

The description of Quinsai (today's Hangzhou) as it is reflected in the early traditions of the *Devisement dou monde* is the topic of Giuseppe Mascherpa's contribution. A son of a Venetian merchant family, Marco Polo was very impressed by this city, the former capital of the Southern Song dynasty whose canals, bridges and boats resembled so much his

hometown. Other contemporary authors likened the two settlements (Margnolli, Pordenone), and also the Northern Italian versions of the *Devisement*, like VA, made either explicit or indirect comparisons of the two cities by use of expressions related to Venice. Chinese authors were impressed by its splendour as well, as seen in the books *Dongjing menghua lu* 東京夢華錄 (Dreams of Splendor of the Eastern Capital), *Ducheng jisheng* 都城紀勝 (Account of the Marvels of the Capital), *Xihu laoren fansheng lu* 西湖老人繁勝錄 (Account of the Various Splendors Written by the Old Man of Western Lake), *Wulin jiushi* 武林舊事 (Ancient Matters from Wulin [Hangzhou]) or *Mengliang lu* 夢梁錄 (Account of the Millet Dream). The description of Quinsai as an “urban monograph” therefore occupies a prominent place in the book, but it varies greatly according to what edition is consulted. Mascherpa highlights that the description of Quinsai is one of only few occasions in which Marco Polo stresses his name and person (*je Marc Pol*), as an admirer who had seen the city with his own eyes. Marco also refers to a description of the city’s wonders that was presented to the Khan as a kind of memorandum. This is the only passage in his account that mentions an East Asian written source. In addition, the enthusiastic description of the “Venice of the East” uses exceptional wordings not found elsewhere in the book, and apart from some customary exaggerations, Marco’s details on Quinsai can be substantiated from other sources.

Interesting problems arise when comparing the F redaction with the Latin Z<sup>t</sup> (Toledo) and the Italian version of Ramusio (R). As is well known, Z<sup>t</sup> and R in general not only changed some wording, but added substantial new information when compared to F, in the case of Quinsai many details on topography, buildings and city life. Moreover, it is an established fact and is well demonstrated by Mascherpa also in the case of the “City of Heaven” that R contains unique passages not available Z<sup>t</sup> (which in comparison with F omits about sixty chapters and radically reduces others) nor in any of the other redactions used by Ramusio (P, VB, V, L) or other traditions. As Ramusio is absolutely faithful to his sources, his information from the Z tradition can only come from the famous, but lost “Codice Ghisi”, which must be considered a different branch of the Z tradition and

which is thus called  $Z^1$  by the author. How this additional unique information found its way into  $Z^1$  is another interesting question, for which Mascherpa offers two possible answers. Either it came from notes and memories of Marco himself added to the  $Z$  version with or without his consent and supervision, given the fact that the  $Z$  redaction circulated (and probably was written) in the Dominican milieu of Venice, with which the Polo family had a strong relationship. Or that these unique additions to be found only in  $R$  had their origin in other first-hand information on Quinsai available in Venice in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and were inserted later into  $Z$ , i.e.,  $Z^1$ , in order to enrich Marco Polo's account.

Michel Quereuil's paper concentrates on the description of Tibet in various Marco Polo manuscript traditions. He points out that the Venetian's "Tibet" was not Tibet's central region, but referred only to its south-eastern frontier area. After providing an overview of the main contents of the two Tibet chapters, the author then focuses on four important topics, i.e., the use of bonfires fed with giant bamboo canes for deterring wild animals in these war-devastated regions, the guest-prostitution and marriage customs in its inhabited zones, the harvesting of musk, and the description of Tibetan enchanters and astrologers. For each of these topics he compares their rendering in the most important Marco Polo versions, that is,  $F$ ,  $Fr$ ,  $TA$ ,  $VA$ ,  $P$ ,  $Z$  and  $R$ . One of his findings is, for instance, that only the  $VA$  version mentions that bonfires are started with firewood before green bamboo canes are added, the exploding segments of which will drive away predators. And with regard to the practices of Tibetan girls, who were expected to have as many sexual relations with by-passing travellers before marriage as possible, Quereuil focuses on the different degrees of evaluation of this practice in the various redactions, ranging from neutral and objective in  $F$ ,  $TA$ ,  $Fr$  and  $Z$  to the pejorative and condemning judgements in  $VA$ ,  $P$ , and  $R$ . He, moreover, compares the existence or omission of particular details in these versions. In his conclusion, the author confirms the findings on the interrelationships between the different redactions that had been worked out by modern textual research. This is, first, the kinship between  $F$ ,  $TA$  and  $Fr$ , with the specifications that  $TA$  abbreviates while  $Fr$  amplifies the accounts given in  $F$ . In addition,  $Fr$  does not rely on the

BNF manuscript 1116 but on another witness of F since certain details, absent from 1116, are found in other redactions. VA is often just as concise as TA, but sometimes includes information ignored by F, TA and Fr. Most of these elements are found in P, whose model indeed seems to have been a Venetian version (i.e., VA). Moreover, as is well-known, Pipino had rewritten the text and had inserted religio-moral judgements. Z occupies a special place as it contains details not included in other versions, while Ramusio seems to have combined several sources, and in particular the two Latin redactions (L and Z), allowing himself also certain innovations. This all is proof, according to Quereuil, of the astonishing plasticity of a text in constant evolution, which repeatedly feeds on previous versions.

The article of Marcello Ciccuto analyses the various ways in which, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the French courtly patrons of illuminated manuscripts (i.e., A2, A4, B1, B2 and C3 of the Fr redactions) of Marco's account imposed an interpretive canon on his text. Illustrations are only part of the dense cultural and imaginative texture into which the Venetian's report was woven into in late mediaeval France, the other being the combination of texts with which the Venetian's report was bound together. Books were, Ciccuto says, used to highlight specific programs of ideological and cultural propaganda, even if such a narrative only served to cement the image of exotic countries whose conquest had become unfeasible after the end of the Crusades. In other words, there was the need to disguise defeat by evoking a kind of "para-historic" exoticism or anti-quarianism evoking the memory of the glorious Alexander the Great.

Illustrations of the time worked out a superimposition of the pattern of crusade and adventure tales in the Alexandrine tradition (the many variants and "offspring" of the *Roman d'Alexandre*) onto the original setting of a mediaeval travel account to the Far East. This was not necessarily an intentional instrumentalization as described above, but happened through a learned reading process in which the study of the travelogue adopted a schematization of narrative materials based on formulaic signals, captions, and extra-textual indicators. Thus, the noble readers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries frequently did not interpret the *Livres du Graunt Caam* or the *Livre des merveilles* as a geo-commercial tract, but as yet another

report in the crusader-Alexandrian manner, in which geography was not taken literally, but as a symbol of “outremer”. The illustrated French redactions were not presenting novel knowledge to the noble readership, but did quite the opposite, namely familiarizing and deepening existing images of the Orient. This can be seen in the non-relatedness of some illustrations with the text. Illustrated romances presented the Orient with preconceived settings, in which universal rulers like Alexander or the Great Khan as the “main characters of the whole narration” reigned over all aspects in their realms. To no small extent, these images of rulership were intended to reflect the rising power of the French kings and the political aspirations of the Burgundian dukes. This contingency of time and space can also be demonstrated by Marco’s references to events related to the time of Alexander the Great, like the horses of Badakhshan, the use of elephants by the Great Khan, wine fountains and other aspects of the courtly *dolce vita*, or the topic of Christians being able to move a mountain by prayers. Moreover, as is highlighted by Ciccuto, the enumeration of the many place names may be thought of as a kind of “colonial pedagogy” of its time.

Christine Gadrat-Ouerfelli also works on the recipients of the *Devisement*. She begins with the diagnosis that Marco’s book was often wrongly misunderstood as a “fantastic tale” (Zumthor 1994), which – with the exception of the Catalan Atlas (1375) – had no effect on scholarly disciplines like the science of geography (Henry Yule). Yet the many versions and translations of the book prove that there was indeed great interest in the text. Gadrat-Ouerfelli is therefore convinced that there must have been a great international readership of Marco Polo’s travelogue during the late Middle Ages. By combing through late mediaeval library catalogues she realized that the travel report of Marco Polo can be traced in royal libraries in France and Spain as well as in those of princes and princesses in France, Occitania and Italy, such as the famous collectors and patrons Gaston Fébus, count of Foix, and Jean de Berry, or of the Este in Ferrara and the Visconti in Milano. It was also available at the Papal court, in the possession of Dominican and Franciscan lectures at Oxford, in the libraries of famous physicians (most of which were not just medicos, but men of letters or “humanists”), in the collections of Catalan and Tuscan merchants, as

well as in the holdings of monasteries. Dominican monks even produced Latin translations of Marco's book, especially Francesco Pipino's P version and perhaps also the Z redaction. In Venice or Florence, the editions in the local tongue (Venetian, Tuscan) were preferred, while in Central Europe, e.g., Germany or the Netherlands, and in England as well, the "supranational" Latin P renderings were in vogue. The Latin Z version and the LB redaction, however, seemed not to have left the Venetian and the Milan area, respectively. Thus, the book was present in all the libraries of social importance.

It also cannot be doubted that Marco Polo's book was often read (though ownership is not necessarily a proof for reading), and the question about the readership should therefore not be why was it read, but how was it read. As the *mappae mundi* prove, it did inspire geographers and was certainly the main source for early maps of East Asia. Yet the book was also used by chroniclers and historians, and in clerical circles as well, as a source, for instance, on Christians in Asia, the (mythical) kingdom of Prester John, or the Nestorian communities in China and their standing at the Mongol court. Moreover, merchants found abundant information on commodities, currencies, and trades along the route the Venetian had travelled, and, eventually, the *Devisement dou monde* also inspired romances with plots in the Oriental sphere. Christine Gadrat-Ouerfelli therefore aptly concludes that Marco's book was a kind of "Swiss knife", offering a multitude of functions for all kinds of needs.

Sharon Kinoshita produced the latest English translation of the Franco-Italian version F of BNF fr. 1116 (Hackett 2016). In her rich and detailed article, she not only justifies the need for this new translation, but also discusses the complexity and numerous questions, pitfalls and problems of rendering a mediaeval text into a modern shape. Earlier translations made use of different versions of the text. Marsden (1818), for instance, relied on the Italian R redaction, while Yule (1871) used Pauthier's edition based on Old French manuscripts, with additions from the F and R versions. Latham's (1958) rendering followed Benedetto's 1928 edition and was thus based mainly on the F and Z versions, with additions from "less reliable" versions, and Cliff (2015) created a composite edition based principally on



F, but enriched with statements from Z and R as well as from other “good” texts and thus sometimes altering the meaning of the F version (e.g., Adaman Islands, Badakhshan). The problem with regard to a critical edition of the text is clearly similar to what Simion et al. have described in their contribution. Kinoshita then calls to mind that the time of the book’s earliest version was a critical moment in history, namely a period of dramatic Mongol expansion and the end of European presence in the Holy Land and the beginning of restricted access to the East, leading later to much distorted images about the Mongols. She then also highlights the reasons why Polo-Rustichello may have chosen Franco-Italian for the composition of the text: This linguistic *mélange* did neither represent the church, nor the intellectual élite, but, instead, established a link to the vernacular literature of epics, romances, and chronicles, with their sometimes formulaic, at times “pedestrian”, and sometimes repetitive (and thus, “catchy”) wordings, and so allowed a wide readership access to it.

Kinoshita gives a number of examples of narrative embellishments of the text, which she does not interpret solely as Rustichello’s additions to Marco’s “authentic” core account, but rather as an expression of their close collaboration. In contrast to markers of culture difference in other version, many of their descriptions must rather be seen as a contemporary interpretation of foreign habits and as an attempt at integrating them into the social context of mediaeval Europe. One instance is their matching of the Khan’s relationship with his ministers with that of a European sovereign to his vassals. In this way, they “collapsed” the cultural distance between the Mongols and the European readers of the book, the latter being addressed in the prologue of their treatise. Another example of this kind of lexical characteristic of the F text is the use of the word *chevaliers* (“knights”, the French counterpart of the Mongolian *quesitan* ‘imperial guard’) for qualitative, and that of *homes a chevauz* (“mounted men”) for quantitative purposes. And while the *Devisement* often mention “wonders” (*merveilles*), these are mostly not what medieval audiences would have come to expect from *mirabilia*, but are remarkably naturalistic, indeed often of human confection, and expressions of number or scale. With these and many examples more, Kinoshita shows that the F version of the *Devisement* is a

genuine “text in formation” that reflects the perception of the Eastern world by a “participant observer” who did not have Latinate learning nor was motivated by political or evangelical motives.

Danièle James-Raoul analyses the book of Marco Polo with respect to its literary style. There are three fields that characterize the originality of the *Devisement*, particularly in the French manuscript B1 she uses; namely, first, the narrative instances deployed in great number and in a complex manner; second, the lexical and syntactic instruments giving access to a phantasmatic and unfamiliar world; and third, the incessant balancing between the straight line of the narrative and detours, reiterations and loops.

The first part of her article deals, among other issues, with the “telescopic use” of pronouns. She shows how much the report stresses the important role of the narrator-traveller “*messire Marc Pol*”, who figures like an Arthurian hero around whom the whole story is constructed. Apart from the statistical evidence of his central role, his exemplary function is underlined by continuous emphasis of his virtues – among which veracity plays a dominant role. Yet Rustichello da Pisa comes to the fore, as well, because he is the narrator of the travelogue, visible in his use of the pronoun *je* or “I” that guides the readers (*vouz* “you”) along the journey. James-Raoul makes clear, by combination with certain verbs, when the grammatical first-person singular refers to Rustichello, and when (in a few instances) to Marco. Cases of the pronoun *nous* “we” or verbs in the first-person plural are ambiguous, because they sometimes are used inclusively in the sense of narrator and readers, but usually function in an exclusive manner, as a plural majesté for the narrator, i.e., the Pisan. Another aspect of “we” or “our” is the amalgamation of the individuals Marco and Rustichello.

The second aspect of James-Raoul’s contribution is lexical and narrative abundance or shortness, and repetition of certain phrases and contents in order to describe the extraordinary diversities of the world outside of Europe. Quite remarkable in the book is the high frequency of comparisons and analogies (“is much like”) by which the narrator brings exotic, unknown objects into the realm of familiarity, while at the same time often highlighting their significant differences with the phenomena as they are

known to a European reader. Yet the narrator also works in a didactic or pedagogical way by introducing plenty of foreign names and terms, usually translating them somehow. A particularly literary function is performed by long, sometimes polysyndetic, enumerations which do not serve to provide detailed information, but only to signify the putative prodigy of the Orient as it is expected by the readership. This effect might also be evoked – quite contrary – by using imprecise summary expressions like “in many ways”, “of all many things”, etc. A similar stylistic device is the notorious lexical hyperbole or gigantism that is so often used in the text that virtually each settlement is “the noblest city”.

The last part of James-Raoul’s richly documented article deals with the contradictory narrative combination of straight lines with excursions, announced (but not realized) descriptions, and anaphoric rollbacks. In this way, she says, it was possible to create an artistic amalgamation of straight, well-organized *dispositio* and entertaining *elocutio*. The form of travelogue allows to establish a macrostructure of geographical regions with microstructural, almost encyclopaedic, or even formulistic, descriptions of cities. The spatial arrangement, however, is often interrupted by accounts of details (like customs of the Mongols, Khubilai’s palace, his court, battles and hunting activities, etc.) that would not find place anywhere else in a topographically structured narrative. The author warns against interpreting the deviations from Marco’s itinerary as a product of Rustichello. In fact, digression from the straight line is indebted to the “aesthetics of the era”, just as the dialogic dramatic scenes do that appear now and then in the account, like Niccolò Polo’s audience with the Great Khan, Prester John forgiving the Golden King, or Alaü (Hülegü) of the Western Tartars reproaching the vanquished Caliph of Baghdad for hoarding his gold instead of giving it to his troops to defend him.

Dominique Boutet (1949-2021), who is regrettably no longer among us, asks in his contribution whether it is appropriate at all to speak of ‘exoticism’ when talking about the *Devisement dou monde*, a product of the late thirteenth century. Scholars have argued that there was no exoticism before the discovery of the Americas or even the nineteenth century, and that mediaeval exoticism was fictional, aimed at leading the reader to an inner

revelation, or that people of the Middle Ages with their notions of marvels, prodigy, monstrosities and animalistic aspects simply “ignored” the exotic. However, if using a definition of ‘exoticism’ as a “reverie” about remote countries with altogether different cultures and something that is embodied in a text (Moura 1992), Marco Polo’s book may at least partly fit into this concept – adding the further important argument that ‘exoticism’ is a kind of reception of a text, and not necessarily the writer’s intended message (Tanase 2008).

In Boutet’s view, the “Book of India” of the *Devisement* is an ideal source to demonstrate the Venetian’s complex relationship with the modern concept of ‘exoticism’. Basing himself on the partly illustrated manuscripts of the French tradition (Fr), the author states that the Venetian provides in this part of his account a description of the palace of Syngangum (Japan), the adornments of which resemble that of other royal residences (also in contemporary romances), and thus presents to his readers a measurable, expectable and domesticable strangeness. Another example is that Marco speaks of a lot of vessels and commerce in the Indian Ocean, and thus deconstructs the then-prevalent imagination and expectation that all islands were inhabited by monsters. The marvelousness of this part of the world is expressed in quantity, and is thus a kind of “strangeness that can be mastered (mentally)”, as it is just “more prodigious” and “more beautiful” than in Europe. But one can also often sense a kind of ambiguity in the Venetian’s report, one case being his accounts of Buddhism. While the Buddhist idols are unfavourably described as having cow, pig, dog, sheep heads or such of other animals, his rather positive attitude towards the Buddha (“he would have been a Saint if he had been a Christian”) resembles contemporary praises of the virtues of heathen persons in Christian stories. Moreover, we can even find a kind of cynical humour in the *Devisement*, such as displayed in its account of how along the coast of the kingdom of Gujarat corsairs force their victims to drink tamarind and seawater to throw up and then search through it to see if the merchants have eaten pearls and precious stones in order to hide them. On the other side of the spectrum, we can identify a very clear tendency to demystify legendary accounts, like in the Venetian’s descriptions of the unicorn (rhinoceros) or the *griffon* (a

giant eagle). A statistical analysis shows that the words “strange” (*estrange*) or “different” (*devisiez*) are rarely used (see also the contribution of James-Raoul in this volume), in contrast to the word “marvellous” as well as quantitative and qualitative superlative qualifiers that crop up more frequently.

Exoticism, as Boutet concludes, implies a blend of reality and fiction, a move away from a distant reality towards the imaginary. This is not the case with the *Devisement*, where the author usually seeks to give an intellectual and therefore intelligible account of strangeness and otherness – the opposite of the “reverie” that is characteristic of exoticism. Another of Boutet’s conclusions is that the Venetian’s description of the alterity of the Far East produces a tension between astonishment, attraction and repulsion, and so rather than creating exoticisms by intent, it was his familiarisation and domestication of the foreign that, as a side-effect, favoured the emergence of exoticisms in the *Devisement*’s wake.

Michèle Guéret-Laferté analyses the passages on Persia concerning the literary structure. The place itself was of great importance for the construction of the travelogue, as it was in Persia where the adventure of the Polo family began, and it was likewise in Persia where the narrative ends. At the same time, the description of Persia as the first part of the book (“the forge” of the text) testifies how Marco and Rustichello explored their ways and methods to liaise the method of following the narrative along the itinerary (mathematically spoken, a line) with the necessity to inform readers of the eight “kingdoms” of Persia (an area). The foremost principle is to present the reader an objective account of foreign lands which necessarily puts the figures of the travellers into the background, with the exception of instances where Marco himself testifies to the veracity of the account. However, the combination of a ‘line’ (a “horizontal, syntagmatic axis”) with an ‘area’ (a “vertical, paradigmatic axis”) turns out to be inconsistent insofar that on the one hand regions nominally announced are not dealt with, while on the other hand, the text describes territories not mentioned before, like Kerman. This makes it nearly impossible to determine the exact route of the Polos through Persia, though it is evident that details about geography and climate hint at personal experiences.

The narrative experiment from the “Book of Persia” was positively adapted to later parts of the *Devisement*, and combines the macroscopic structure of a travel route with digressive “mini-narratives” related to the current location. For this purpose, Marco and Rustichello invented a veritable “formula” informing about riding distances from one place to another. It was used in most of the versions and translations of the book. Once a place was “reached”, there was time to insert anecdotes related to the location, or such not directly related, but which might be of interest to an audience, as for instance, the legend of the Old Man of the Mountain or the miracle of the mountain that was moved. The itinerary element of the text allows Marco silently to identify with three different types of travellers, namely the merchants of Venice (including the Polos), the messengers of the Great Khan (whose role Marco adopts during his inspection tours through parts of China), and maritime voyagers (on his way back, accompanying Princess Cocacin to Persia).

Li TANG makes clear that in the granular descriptions of the settlements he passed, Marco Polo systematically mentioned the religions of their inhabitants. While “Saracens” (Muslims) and especially “idolators” (Buddhists) are commonplace in most locations in Asia, the mentioning of Christians of various churches makes the *Devisement* a particularly valuable source. Tang uses Marco’s account as a source to fill the gap of information between former dynasties’ prohibition of “foreign” religions in China (including Buddhism) – a ban that had actually economic reasons and not so much religious ones – and the revival of “religious freedom” under the Mongols. Quite interestingly, Chinese sources of the Song period (960-1279) are indeed silent with respect to Nestorianism or the Syriac Church in China proper. However, where written sources are mute, archaeology in the shape, e.g., of stele inscriptions or devotionals, has brought to light evidence of the existence of Nestorian communities along the Silk Road and in the northwest of China, i.e., a territory under the dominion of the Tangut Empire during the years from 1038 to 1227. Tang then identifies all places in the book of the Venetian where Nestorians lived and is thus able to draw a map showing the wide spread of Nestorianism in thirteenth-century China. During the Yuan period, their communities were not

just located along the Silk Road and in the northwest of China, but also in its north-eastern, eastern, south-eastern and south-western parts. Moreover, Marco's observations in Samarkand, Baghdad and Greater Armenia are evidence of a substantial Christian network (adherents of various churches) throughout Western, Central and even South Asia. The Z manuscript is the only version of the book speaking of Uighuristan (today's Xinjiang) with Turfan as a great centre of the Nestorian creed. Apart from the description of cities, anecdotes – like the wonder of the hoovering column in the Saint John's church in Samarkand – give likewise evidence of the spread of the Christian creed. The reason for the flourishing of Nestorian parishes in Mongolian China was Khubilai Khan's particular protection of this religion even if many of the horsemen supporting the Khan's opponent Nayan 乃顏 were Nestorian Christians. Tang concludes that Nestorian Christian communities from Mesopotamia to Central Asia had not been wiped out after the conquest of Islam and were still widespread along the Silk Road and that they especially flourished in Yuan China during the thirteenth century – observations that have been also corroborated by William of Rubruck's report about his mid-thirteenth century travel from Central Asia to the north of China.

DANG Baohai presents a linguistic analysis of two place names mentioned in Marco Polo's book. While Western and Japanese scholars vainly attempted to unambiguously identify the place names in the past, it has become possible to clarify the locations by use of Chinese-language sources and inscriptions on stone steles only discovered in the past decades. The first toponym is the "Green Mound" described in Marco's chapters on the palaces of the Great Khan. Some scholars of the past, like Bretschneider and Pelliot, identified this artificial hill correctly as the Qionghuadao 瓊花島 (Viburnum Island) or Wansuishan 萬歲山 (Longevity Hill) in present-day Beijing, but none of the usual names for it resembles the designation "Green Mound". A bilingual stele found in 1982 includes an imperial edict from 1268 which explicitly uses, in Chinese and Mongolian, the same expression (*Köke ayula*, *Qing shan'er* 青山兒) as the Venetian. With the help of a kind of imperial diary reflecting the Great Khan's long-term routine through the year and on the basis of other sources, Dang is

able to identify the seasons when Khubilai usually resided at the Green Mound, and thus proves Marco's presence at the location as well. The place is also mentioned by Pordenone, and by the Egyptian historian Ibn al-'Umarī, though in much shorter terms.

Somewhat more complex is the question of the hunting ground "Caccia(r) Modun", which Paul Pelliot once identified as the Mongolian word *yaqča modun* "lone tree" (Chinese transcription *hacha mudun* 哈察木敦), but without being able to identify the location. Lists of Mongolian hunting places in the *Yuanshi* 元史 (History of the Yuan [Dynasty]) help only to exclude certain options. Yet again, a Chinese stele inscription first published in 1999 and dated 1296 provides information that allows Dang via a detailed and meticulous investigation to identify Marco's place as Haheicha Mo[dun] 哈黑叉磨[敦]. This location was an imperial hunting ground south of today's Beijing, and the Venetian was thus the only author in the world who provided information on the place before the Chinese inscription was discovered.

During the conference in 2017, Dang Baohai presented yet another example for the identification of Marco's place names with the help of contemporary Chinese sources. This was a hunting place called "Ocean Sea", a journey of two days south of the capital city. This place was not the Bohai Sea, but a great lake that does not exist anymore. In Chinese sources, it was known as Liulin Haizi 柳林海子 or "Willow-Forest Lake" (*haizi* 海子 meaning "a big lake like a sea"). All these examples prove the veracity, reliability and uniqueness of the information in the Venetian's account.

The identification of names and terms used by Marco Polo is also the aim of LUO Wei, but most important is Luo's discovery that Marco had apparently contact with the Han Chinese population which can be seen from terms and knowledge that was beyond the realm of the political and economic elite. First, Marco was aware that some regions of China were in the "feudatory" possession of Mongolian princes, and thus called them "kingdoms" as if they were independent countries. Second, his use of the name Quinsai for the old capital of the Southern Song is remarkable, as it denoted the "temporary residence" (*xingzai* 行在) of the Song dynasty and



its use was consequently forbidden after the city's conquest by the Mongols. Third, the name of the rebel Liitan Sangon is analysed. This was Li Tan 李壇 (d. 1262), and Pelliot correctly identified the word Sangon as a Chinese honorific address of the time, *xianggong* 相公 "Minister-Duke". Luo Wei detected four Chinese stele inscriptions from before Li Tan's revolt that include a combination of Li's name with this address and thus finds justification in Marco's use of this combination. It can be guessed that Marco Polo had intensive conversations with representatives of the local population (who perhaps still spoke of Li Tan as *xianggong*) and so learned about this honorific title.

Another conundrum with personal names is the great Mongolian general Baiyan Cingsan, a designation which is rendered in F "Bayan Hundred Eyes", perhaps being an error of the redactor, who mixed up the two parts of the name, namely the general's name Bayan 伯顏 and the title Grand Councilor or *chengxiang* 丞相. Luo shows that various contemporary Chinese ballads and poems make allusions to Baiyan's conquest by talking of "hundred wild geese" (*baiyan* 百雁) or "white wild geese" (*baiyan* 白雁) coming from the north and thus symbolizing the Mongol invasion of the south. The less poetic expression *baiyan* 百眼 or "hundred eyes" might have originated in lower social groups, which could be a proof of Marco's contacts with the commoners' culture of the Han Chinese. The last topic of Luo's study are the expressions Chenchu and Vanchu that were not personal names, but have long been identified by various Chinese and Western authors as the military titles *qianhu* 千戶 and *wanhu* 萬戶 of Wang Zhu 王著 and Zhang Yi 張易, respectively, i.e., the two assassins of the infamous Ahmad (d. 1282). Luo is convinced that Marco's adoption of the Chinese custom of calling persons of respect by their title instead of by their personal name is yet further evidence of his expansive conversations and contact with the Han Chinese populace.

Ulrich Theobald presents an overview of several military aspects in Marco's book and juxtaposes the statements with Chinese sources. The *Devisement* narrates in great detail the many military campaigns which the Mongols carried out, be it against external foes, or among themselves, in

fratricidal conflicts. While it is without a doubt that the Polos did not participate in the siege of Saianfu, the introduction of catapults and their replacement of the traditional traction mangonels is well attested in native sources. Though the introduction is attributed to a single person (the most prominent of which is the Central Asian Ismā'īl), there are several versions of the instrument's transmission. Fighting units using "Western" catapults were widespread in the military institutions of the time. Even if Marco repeatedly speaks of the decimal organization of the Mongol army, with their "chiliarchs" and "myriarchs", he was unaware of the complex ethnic structure of military units under the Mongolian Yuan dynasty, with the exception of Alans mentioned by him. Chinese sources give evidence of the important role that Alan leaders played in the conquest of south China and prove that they were perfectly integrated into the societal landscape of the Mongolian empire. Quite interesting are Marco's references to the fighting style of the Mongolian tactics with information going beyond that transmitted by earlier observers, for instance, the numbers and types of arrows each horseman took with him to war, or the close combination of cavalry and (mounted) infantry and various types of weapons, making the Mongolian warrior a kind of "weapons system". A closer study of the Mongolian battle with the elephant army of the king of Mien shows that, even if the numbers given by Marco are disproportionately exaggerated, it was possible – as seen in sources on India and Vietnam – to drive away war elephants by showering them with arrows or bolts. Finally, the huge numbers of "falconers" mentioned in the *Devisement* reflects the great popularity of hunting among the Mongols, but is also evidence of the diverse functionality of the personnel who served the Great Khan, sometimes as civilian courtiers, at time as warriors, and also as hunting companions.

Stephen G. Haw's contribution consists of a discussion of two different topics, but with a painstaking methodological approach that is very similar. Haw makes use of Chinese, Mongolian and Western primary sources and critically comments on Western secondary sources from the vast treasure of interpretations and commentaries on the *Devisement*. The first part deals with the question whether Marco Polo was indeed a member of the *kešig*, the Great Khan's bodyguard, starting with Olschki's claim that among the

heirloom of Marco was a silver belt “of a Tartar knight”, though this is a statement that presently cannot be verified. Another early testimony is Jean de Long’s declaration that Marco was a *miles* (“knight”) in the military service of the Great Khan, which is also implied in Ramusio’s redaction. The traveller definitely showed a great interest in military matters, had detailed insight into the organization of the imperial household and court life, was entrusted with personal and important missions, and displayed the greatest loyalty to the sovereign. One redaction of Marco Polo’s account even described him as having learnt some military skills, a precondition for becoming a *kešig*. All this is probably also the reason why he could provide such detailed knowledge of the 1287 battle between the forces of Khubilai and of Nayan and its outcome. Chinese sources do not reveal many details on the Great Khan’s bodyguard, the *kešigten*, not even its size (Marco speaks of 12,000 “barons and knights”), because it was a kind of “secret organization”. It is known, however, that persons of all ages and ethnic and social backgrounds could obtain the privilege of becoming a *kešig*. An interesting aspect of their loyalty to the ruler was the collective daily change of robes whereby the Great Khan and his allegiant “knights” all wore the same colour. This Mongol custom is confirmed by the Armenian Vardan, who in 1264 had personally visited the Ilkhan Hülegü during a *quriltai*.

In the second part of his article, Haw critically refutes Atwood’s identification of the city of “Singui” with Xining 西寧 in Qinghai, a notion that can be traced back already to Marsden’s 1818 annotated edition of the Venetian’s account. In his very detailed and meticulous manner, Haw works with arguments of different disciplines, from linguistic aspects and mediaeval writing conventions and copying problems to historiographical and environmental reasoning. While Atwood is dismissive of Marco’s geographical knowledge, a detailed analysis of the administrative and demographic history and Marco’s mention of musk production in this region allows his “Singui” to be identified with Xizhou 熙州 (today’s Lintao 臨洮, Gansu).

Hans Ulrich Vogel investigates Marco’s reports on tigers, one of two important symbolic animals in China, the other being the dragon. While

Marco Polo said little about dragons, he wrote much more about tigers, i.e., *Panthera tigris*. As has been remarked already by other scholars, the Venetian's references to "lions" in Asia mostly mean tigers, which is quite obvious in statements as for instance, "each of the audience tents is most artfully covered with lions' skins, striped with black and white and red ...". By taking into account Western and East Asian primary sources and secondary literature, the author shows that no contradictions at all exists between the indications in the Venetian's account and the data obtained from Chinese sources and research literature about tigers in China. Vogel analyses Marco's information on the tiger as a zodiacal animal, tigers depicted in works of art or decoration, tigers in tattoos, the tiger skin tent of the Great Khan, tiger designs on tablets of authority, tigers used for hunting, natural occurrences of tigers in certain places in China, the killing of tigers with the help of hounds, the custom to deter tigers by means of bamboo crackers, and catching tigers by means of traps. Marco's statements are critically compared with some accounts in contemporary Chinese sources. It appears that Marco Polo was the first European who reported about the tigers of East Asia and especially of China which – though hard for many people nowadays to imagine – is considered the cradle and original habitat of the *Panthera tigris* specie. At the same time, the author points out that while in the eyes of the Venetian tigers were closely associated with the Great Khan's authority and his power even over nature, in the eyes of Chinese scholars they were linked to the cruelty of the Mongols' rule. As being closely related to the ruling elite, Marco Polo was clearly unaware of this political criticism.

The present book gives thus an overview of the broad field of Marco Polo research and shows that more than seven centuries after its genesis, an infinite number of aspects still require clarification and discovery. With its publication, we hope to encourage scholarly communities all over the world to engage with, and contribute to, this great enterprise by adopting innovative approaches, critical methods and novel tools and, if feasible, to make use of newly accessible source materials in order to improve our understanding of the Venetian's account in its many redactions for the history

of literature, society, economy, politics, culture, and intercultural exchange. Moreover, we are convinced that this collection of articles written by leading scholars in the field will be a useful contribution to the year 2024 and herald in a worthy manner the many activities and publications that we will see in the 700th year since the death of the Venetian traveller.

Last but not least, this is also an opportunity to express our gratitude to a number of persons and institutions that supported us in this publication endeavour. First, we would like to mention Katharina Viklenko, M.A., a former student research assistant, who undertook editorial work for us in the early stage of this book project, and then also Scott Stelle, who carried out for us the checking of the English contributions written by non-native speakers. Our gratitude also goes to the Tübingen University Press, especially to Sandra Binder, who accompanied the process of publishing this volume on the open-access Tübingen Library Publishing platform. In financial respects we are deeply grateful to the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) and especially the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange in Taipei, Taiwan (R.O.C.), for having supported the conference “Marco Polo Studies: Past, Present, Future” that was held in Tübingen in 2017. Eventually, we are also pleased to mention the generous financial contribution to the publication of this volume that we have kindly received from the Association of the Friends of the University of Tübingen (Vereinigung der Freunde der Universität Tübingen, Universitätsbund e. V.). To all of these persons and institutions, we would like to express our deep gratitude, in the hope that the results presented in this book meet their expectations.

## References

- Andreose, Alvise, ed. (2019). *La strada per i Catai: Contatti tra Oriente e Occidente al tempo di Marco Polo* (Milano: Edizioni Angelo Guerini e Associati).
- Balazs, Étienne, ed. (1957). *Oriente Poliano: Studi e Conferenze Tenute all' Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente in Occasione del VII Centenario della Nascita de Marco Polo (1254-1954)* (Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente).

- Luo Wei 罗玮 (2017). "On the Custom of Sexual Hospitality in Marco Polo's The Description of the World", *World History Studies*, 4.1: 36-51.
- Masini, Frederico; Salvatori, Franco; Schipani, Sandro, eds. (2006). *Marco Polo 750 Anni: Il viaggio. Il libro. Il diritto; Congresso Internazionale, Roma, 23 novembre 2004, Venezia, 25 novembre 2004 (Università degli Studi di Roma "Tor Vergata," Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza," Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia)* [congress of 2004 in commemoration of the 750th birthday of the Venetian] (Roma: Tiellemmedia Editore).
- Rong Xinjiang 荣新江; Dang Baohai 党宝海, eds. (2019). *Make Boluo yu 10-14 shiji de sichou zhi lu 马可·波罗与 10-14 世纪的丝绸之路 (Marco Polo and the Silk Road (10th-14th Century))* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe).
- Xu Zhongwen 徐忠文; Rong Xinjiang 荣新江, main eds.; Zong Suqin 宗苏琴; Dang Baohai 党宝海; Ma Xiaolin 马晓林; Bu Minpei 卜敏斐, assistant eds. (2016). *Make Boluo, Yangzhou, sichou zhi lu 马可·波罗, 扬州, 丝绸之路 (Marco Polo—Yangzhou—The Silk Road)* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe (Beijing daxue guoji Hanxuejia yanxiu jidi xueshu congkan, yibian, disan zhong 北京大学国际汉学家研修基地学术丛刊乙编第三种)).



***Le Devisement dou monde: History and  
Digitization of the Text(s)***





# Recherches passées, travaux récents et investigations futures sur le *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo

Philippe Ménard

D'abord, rappelons la Bibliographie due à Hiroshi Watanabe, *Marco Polo Bibliography, 1477-1983*, Tokyo, Toyo Bunko, 1986, tirée à 500 exemplaires, qui recense 2337 ouvrages en caractères occidentaux, classés par ordre alphabétique des auteurs, sans le moindre esprit critique, qui peut rendre quelques services. Il y aurait à prendre la suite, mais en insérant quelques brefs commentaires sur les travaux recensés. Ici le passé suggère immédiatement l'avenir.

## 1. Recherches passées sur Marco Polo

### 1.1. Les travaux du XIXe siècle

Je laisse de côté les deux volumes de *Dissertazioni* de l'abbé Placido Zurla (1769-1837), intitulés *Di Marco Polo e degli altri Viaggiatori italiani più illustri*, *Dissertazioni*, Venezia, Giacomo Fuchs, 1818, 2 volumes in-4 de 391 et 408 p., qui ne sont pas dénuées de science, mais qui offrent surtout un intérêt archéologique.

Parmi les nombreux auteurs qui ont travaillé sur Marco Polo au XIXe siècle je signale avec reconnaissance et admiration le comte Baldelli Boni pour ses deux gros et beaux volumes publiés en 1827, le tome I pour l'édition du ms. de l'Accademia della Crusca, c'est-à-dire le ms. *TAI* de la version toscane, et le second pour l'édition du texte de Ramusio. On a toujours profit à les regarder.

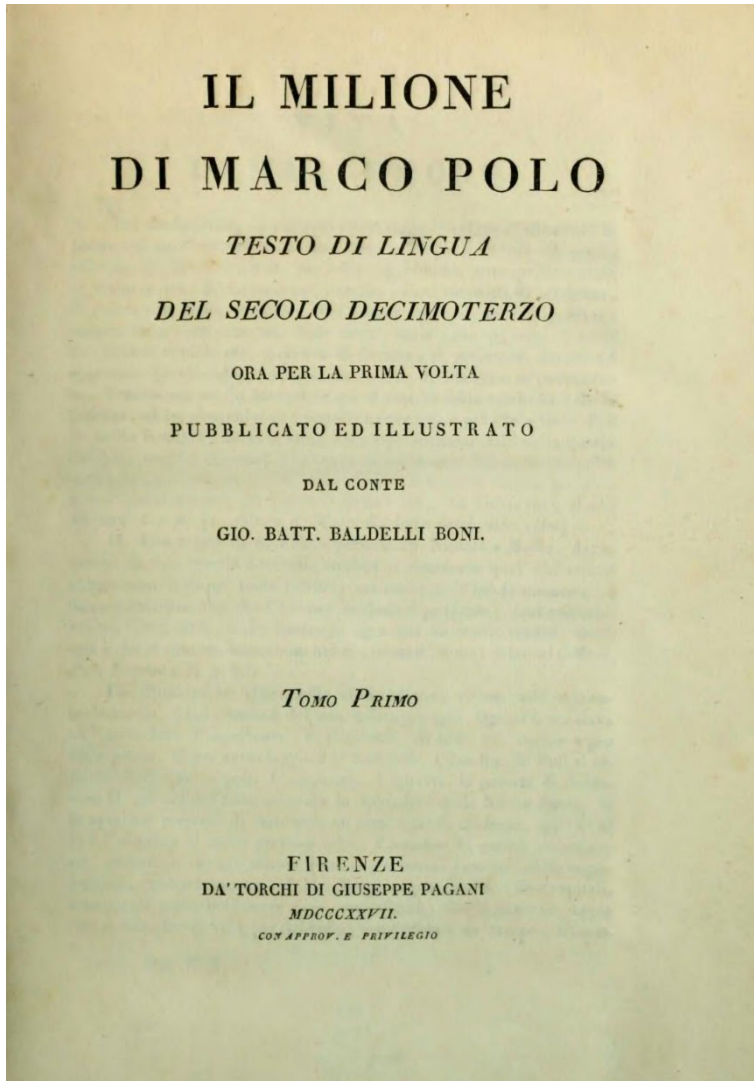
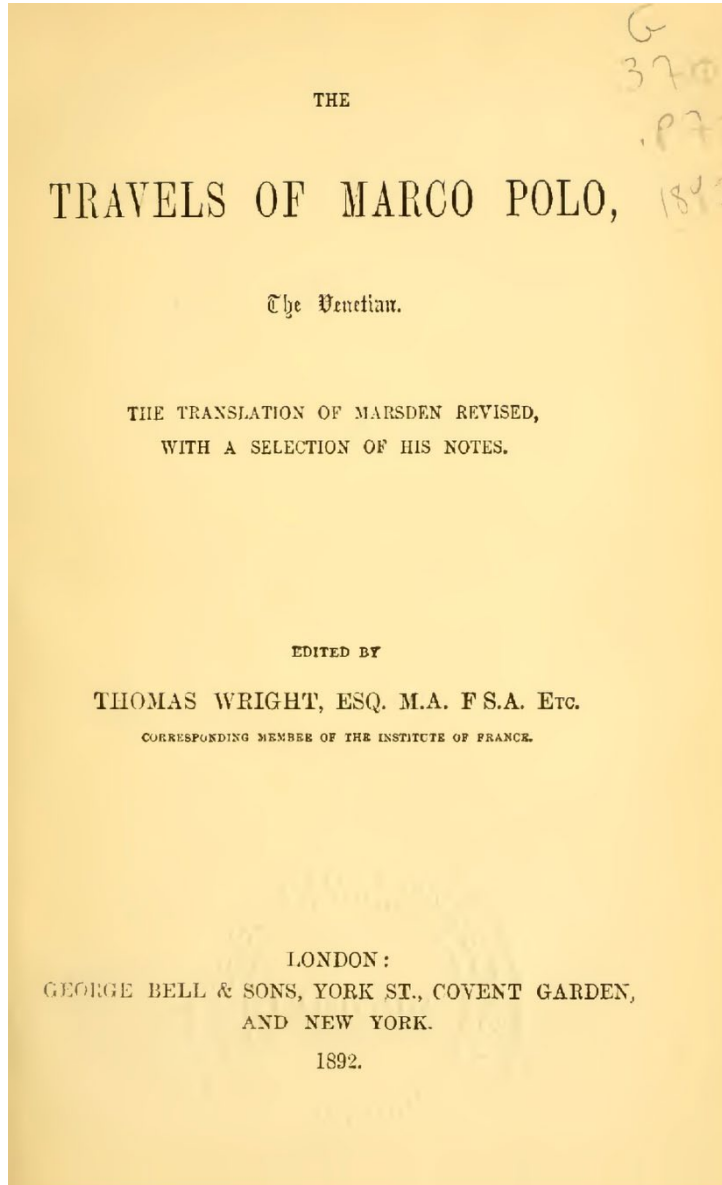


Figure 1 : Édition Baldelli Boni, 1827

Source : <https://it.wikisource.org/> (domaine public).



**Figure 2 : Édition Marsden revue par Wright, 1854**  
Source : <https://archive.org/> (domaine public).

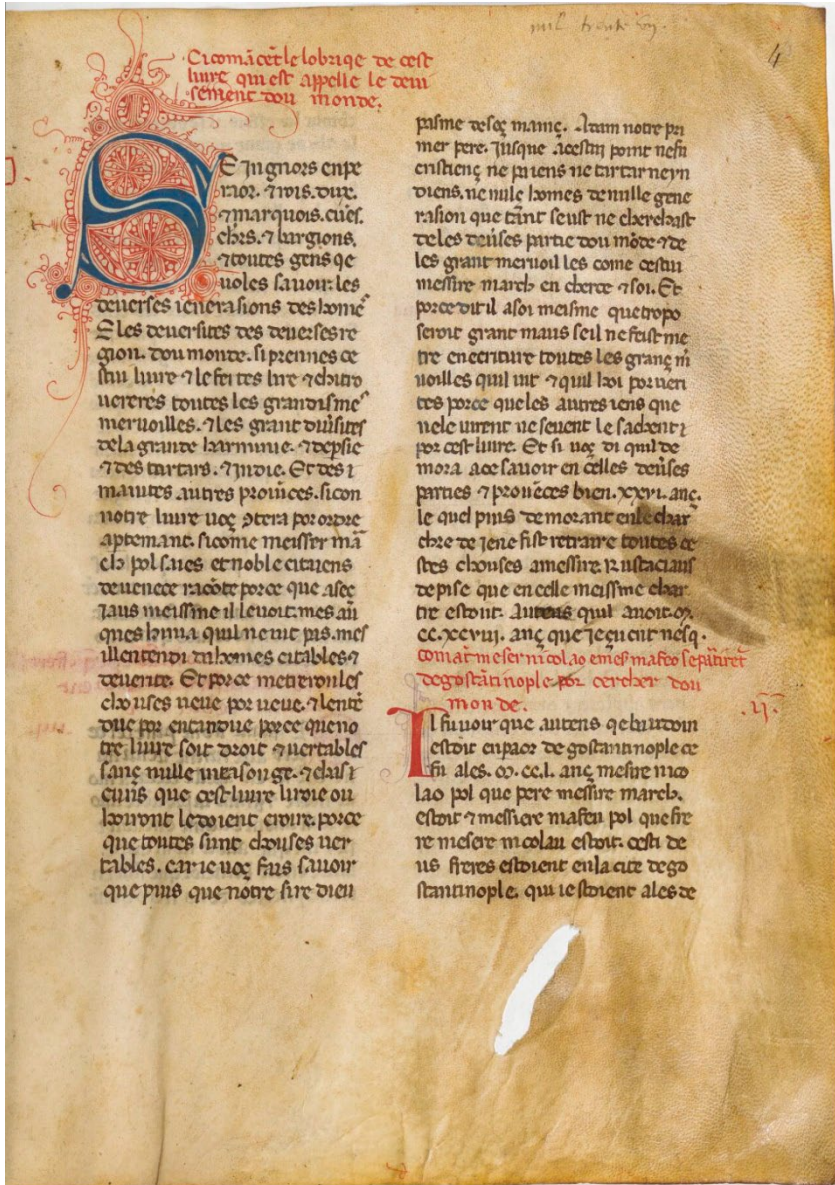
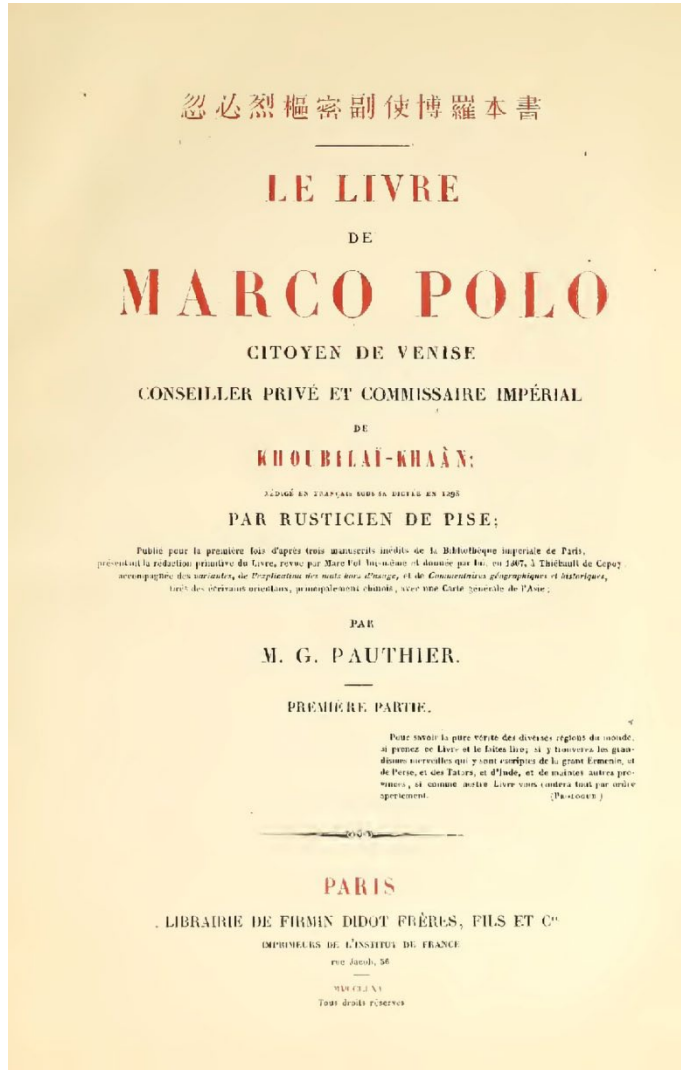


Figure 3 : Le ms. BnF fr. 1116

Source : <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52518523g/f13.item>.



**Figure 4 : Le livre de Pauthier**

Source : <https://archive.org/> (domaine public).

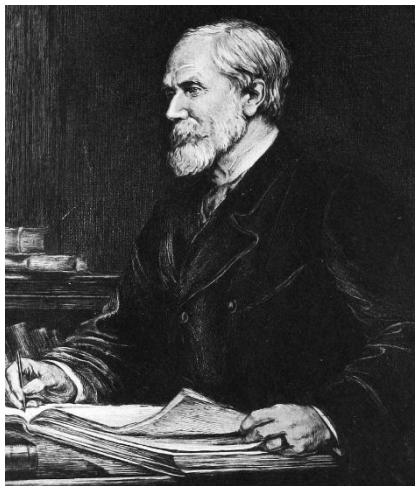
En Grande-Bretagne il faut citer William Marsden (1754-1836), qui publia en 1818 *Travels of Marco Polo*, London, George Bell & Sons, qui compte 781 p. Sa traduction est précieuse pour tout ce qui concerne l'Asie. En effet, Marsden partit à 16 ans à Sumatra au service de l'East India Company. Il apprit là le malais. Sa traduction du texte de Marco Polo est fondée sur la version de Ramusio. Ce qui caractérise son travail, c'est l'extrême abondance des Notes et leur caractère érudit. Elles sont particulièrement utiles pour tous les chapitres qui concernent Sumatra. On trouve sur le web une version digitale, mais seulement avec une sélection des Notes opérée plus tard par Thomas Wright, London, 1854. Dans l'édition originale, les Notes suivaient chaque chapitre. Dans la nouvelle version revue par Wright elles sont en bas de page immédiatement au-dessous du texte.

En France au XIXe siècle le premier éditeur de la version franco-italienne du texte de Marco Polo est en 1826 Jean-Baptiste Gaspard Roux de Rochelle. Le titre est *Recueil de voyages et de mémoires publié par la Société de Géographie*, tome premier, Paris, Imprimerie d'Everat, 1826, gros ouvrage de 523 p. Edition princeps du texte du ms. fr. 1116 du fonds français de la BnF, plus fidèle au texte du ms. que les éditions ultérieures, ensuite p. 297-494 sous le nom de *Peregrinatio Marci Pauli* une édition du texte latin que l'on appelle aujourd'hui la version *LT* conservée par un seul ms. de la BnF, le ms. latin 3195. Il s'agit pour nous d'une traduction latine de la version toscane *TA* car il y a des italianismes dans le texte, avec quelques contaminations de la version latine de Pipino. Puis suivent p. 495-502 une Table du Texte latin, p. 503-530 un Glossaire des mots hors d'usage fait par Dominique Martin Méon, employé à la Bibliothèque du Roi, travail en partie utile, malgré sa brièveté, à la compréhension d'un texte difficile, puis p. 531-532 un Errata, enfin p. 533-552 les Variantes des Noms propres et des noms de lieux. Tout cela constitue un ensemble estimable.

Ensuite et surtout doit être mentionné l'ouvrage de M. G. Pauthier, *Le livre de Marco Polo, citoyen de Venise, conseiller privé et commissaire impérial de Khoubilai Khan*, Paris, Didot, 1865, 2 vol., 828 p. au total, édition de la version française d'après trois manuscrits, notamment du bon

ms. *Al* (fr. 5631 de la BnF). Comme il connaissait la langue chinoise, l'auteur a apporté, le premier, de très précieuses informations sur le texte dans de savantes et nombreuses Notes.

Parmi toutes les publications du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle le travail qui mérite toujours d'être consulté est la traduction de Sir Henry Yule, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian*, third edition, revised by Henri Cordier, London, 1903. La première édition du livre de Yule remonte à 1870. Il se caractérise par la traduction en anglais du ms. dit de la Société de Géographie, c'est-à-dire de la version franco-italienne, mais il en enlève, nous dit-il (t. I, p. 141), les maladresses les répétitions et les lourdeurs. Il s'inspire de la version française établie par Pauthier où le processus d'abrègement du texte, judicieusement exécuté, élimine, comme il dit, les insupportables prolixités de la dictée (p. 141). Il s'en réfère à son propre jugement. En outre, il introduit entre crochets les endroits de la version de Ramusio qui lui paraissent authentiques. A ses yeux une traduction ne doit pas suivre les mêmes principes que ceux qui régissent une édition (p. 142). La traduction de Yule revue et corrigée par Cordier se signale par ses Notes et ses très remarquables illustrations. Les unes et les autres apportent au volume un intérêt et un profit renouvelé.



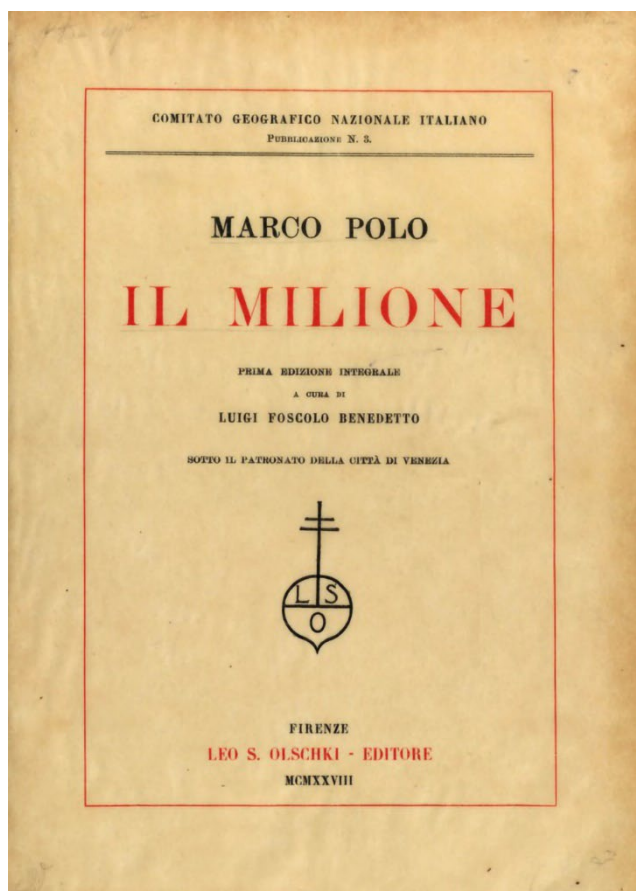
**Figure 5 : Portrait de Yule**

Source : <https://en.wikipedia.org/> (domaine public).



## 1.2. Les travaux de Benedetto au XXe siècle

Le gros volume de Luigi Foscolo Benedetto, *Marco Polo « Il Milione »*, *prima edizione integrale*, Firenze, Olschki, 1928 (in-4), présente d'abord 221 p. sur l'étude des manuscrits de toutes les versions, puis 243 p. d'édition du texte de la version franco-italienne, dite *F*, avec sous le texte des variantes et des additions. L'ouvrage constitue un bloc considérable sur



**Figure 6 : L'édition de Benedetto (1928)**

Source : <http://www.libreriamedievale.com/il-milione.html-4>  
(domaine public).

lequel on pourrait passer des heures à dissenter. Essayons d'aller à l'essentiel.

D'abord rappelons-en rapidement les grands mérites. Dans cette édition du ms. fr. 1116 de la bibliothèque nationale de France l'auteur a voulu donner des informations sur tous les mss. de toutes les autres rédactions. Tâche immense et démesurée. Il en est résulté un survol érudit, parfois contestable, des différentes versions.

En premier lieu p. XI–XXXIII sur la version franco-italienne. On appréciera les bons commentaires paléographiques faits sur le ms. fr. 1116 (malheureusement dans son édition il ne respecte pas toutes les graphies du texte), les excellentes remarques sur le nom du collaborateur de Marco Polo, chargé d'écrire le texte en français, nommé *Rista pisan*, à identifier avec Rustichello de Pise, le compilateur de romans arthuriens. En revanche, il est impossible d'admettre que le fragment de la British Library sous la cote Cotton, Othon D V. soit écrit en franco-italien. Là le critique commet une lourde erreur.

Le second chapitre s'attaque à une grosse question, celle de la version française. Il est intitulé *Il rimaneggiamento di Grégoire*. Ce sont deux erreurs qui s'affichent. Grégoire n'est pas du tout l'auteur de la version française, comme je l'ai démontré, et la version française n'est pas un remaniement. C'est un jugement inutilement désagréable sur elle. Il y a dans ce chapitre un classement des mss. utile bien qu'il soit incomplet, car Benedetto ne connaît pas le ms. de la Pierpont Morgan Library à New York auquel j'ai donné le sigle *A4*, mais sa classification des mss. n'est pas globalement inexacte. Dans notre édition nous distinguons trois familles de mss. : d'une part la famille *A*, à laquelle se joint le ms. *D* (ms. 9309 de Bruxelles, qui a appartenu à la Bibliothèque des ducs de Bourgogne), la famille *B*, enfin la famille *C*. Benedetto ne distinguait que deux familles (page LXXV). Nous avons relevé des erreurs unissant *A2* et *A4*, mais nous avons signalé aussi des additions originales de *D* : par exemple il est le seul à donner le nom du pape décédé, à savoir Clément, ce qui est juste. Le pape Clément IV est mort, en effet, le 29 novembre 1268 à Viterbe. Même si l'on peut contester certains des groupements imaginés par Benedetto, on

doit reconnaître que l'éditeur de F s'est donné beaucoup de mal pour rassembler des fautes communes. Nous verrons dans quelques instants que l'opinion malveillante de Benedetto se fonde surtout sur une grave erreur paléographique et sur un contre-sens donné à un mot mal lu.

Les chapitres suivants consacrés à la version toscane et à la version vénitienne semblent moins contestables. Nous évoquerons les critiques à présenter à l'œuvre de Benedetto dans notre troisième partie.

### **1.3. A la suite de Benedetto,**

A. Moule et P. Pelliot ont voulu donner une étude et une traduction anglaise fondées sur un très grand nombre de versions et de mss. Leur traduction anglaise, *The Description of the World, Translated and Annotated*, 2 vol., London, Routledge, 1938-1939, ajoute une foule d'additions au texte franco-italien. Elle témoigne d'une incontestable érudition. Dans l'introduction du livre la liste des mss. et premières éditions imprimées compte 143 numéros. Mais en insérant dans le texte un nombre important d'additions empruntées à des versions disparates, tantôt Ramusio, tantôt le ms. Z, elle crée un texte totalement artificiel.

Les *Notes on Marco Polo* de Pelliot publiées après la mort du grand érudit (3 vol. 1959, 1963, 1973), malgré leur caractère touffu de Notes de premier jet, constituent une œuvre capitale pour l'élucidation des toponymes. Elles n'ont pas été véritablement remplacées.

## **2. Les travaux présents**

Bien des érudits méritent d'être cités.

Editions de diverses versions du texte :

Valeria Bertolucci Pizzorusso, ed., *Il Milione, versione toscana del Trecento*, Milano, Adelphi, 1975, constamment réédité, fondée sur le ms. inédit I.II.136 de la la Bibl. nationale de Florence (sigle TA2). Edition remarquable, malgré la brièveté de ses Notes.

Marica Milanese, ed., *Giovanni Battista Ramusio, « Navigazioni e Viaggi »*, vol. III, Torino, Einaudi, 1980, p. 9-297. Edition pourvue de brèves Notes très utiles.

Alvaro Barbieri, ed., *Marco Polo, « Milione », redazione latina del manoscritto Z*, Parma, Ugo Guanda, 1998. Edition utile, malgré la brièveté de ses Notes.

Alvaro Barbieri et Alvisè Andreose, *Marco Polo, Il « Milione » veneto, ms. CM 211 della Biblioteca Civica di Padova*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1999. Edition utile, malgré la brièveté de ses Notes.

L'équipe française de seize savants, dont plusieurs sont présents ici, qui a publié sous ma direction la version française *Marco Polo, « Le Devisement du monde »* Genève, Droz, 2001-2009, avec Marie-Luce Chênerie, Michèle Guéret-Laferté et Philippe Ménard (tome I) ; Jeanne-Marie Boivin, Laurence Harf-Lancner, Laurence Mathey-Maille (tome II) ; Jean-Claude Faucon, Danielle Quérueil, Monique Santucci (t. III) ; Joël Blanchard et Michel Quéreuil (t. IV) ; Jean-Claude Delclos et Claude Roussel (t. V) ; Dominique Boutet, Thierry Delcourt et Danièle James-Raoul (t. VI),

Mario Eusebi, ed., *Il manoscritto della biblioteca nazionale de France Fr. 1116*, t. I *Testo*, Roma-Padova, Antenore, 2015. Si l'on de compare le ms. et le texte de l'éditeur, on relève des corrections habiles et instructives. Elles mériteraient d'être commentées dans des Notes. Un volume de commentaires serait souhaitable. Eugenio Burgio et Samuela Simion, ed. digitale, *Ramusio, « Dei viaggi di Messer Marco Polo »*, Venezia, Ca' Foscari, 2015 (éd. dite par les auteurs *critica et commentata*). Texte de Ramusio de 1559 et transcription de versions particulières, en partie inédites, *L* (ms. non indiqué avec précision, je crois qu'il s'agit du ms. de Ferrare, cl. 336), *P* version de Pipino (Florence, Bibl. Riccardiana, ms. 983), *V* (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, ms. Hamilton 424), *VB* (Venezia, Bibl. Correr, Donà delle Rose, ms. 224). Un Lexique complet des noms de personnes est donné. Il s'avère utile et même remarquable car des orientalistes y ont contribué.

Etudes faites sur les manuscrits :

Angelica Valentinetti Mendi, *Una familia veneta del Libro de Marco Polo*, PhD diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1991, qui étudie les mss. vénitiens tardifs et qui édite le ms. italien 1296 de la Bibliothèque municipale de Luques, et la première traduction castillane de Séville ; puis

en Appendice le ms. de Mantoue et l'édition vénitienne de Sessa, publiée à Venise en 1496. Cette thèse est malheureusement restée inédite. Je remercie l'auteur de m'en voir envoyé un exemplaire.

Consuelo Wager Dutschke, *Francesco Pipino and the Manuscripts of Marco Polo's 'Travels'*, PhD diss., Los Angeles, University of California, 1993, UMI Dissertations Service (Très important travail sur les manuscrits, de 1348 p.). Je ne sais pas si aujourd'hui l'on peut l'acheter sur le site des Dissertations de PhD américaines. Je crains que non. Jadis c'était possible.

Christine Gadrat-Ouerfelli, *Lire Marco Polo au Moyen Age, Traduction, diffusion et réception du « Devisement du monde »*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2015. Des recherches variées, esquissées dans beaucoup de directions, apportent des éléments nouveaux sur des mss. peu connus et peu étudiés.

Etudes d'ensemble. Je les classe par ordre chronologique :

Marcello Ciccuto, *Marco Polo, Il Milione*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1981, avec les 38 miniatures en couleurs du ms. d'Oxford ; Alvise Zorzi dans sa *Vita di Marco Polo Veneziano*, Milano, Rusconi, 1982, à qui aucun détail n'échappe ; Cesare Segre, en introduction à l'édition de Gabriela Ronchi, *Marco Polo, Milione, Le Divisament dou monde*, Milano, Mondadori, 1982, et dans la plaquette *Avventure del Milione*, Università degli Studi di Parma, 1983, qui présente des idées nouvelles sur l'histoire du texte ; Jacques Heers, *Marco Polo*, Paris, Fayard, 1983, qui s'interroge sur les itinéraires suivis, les marchandises vendues et les légendes véhiculées ; Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan, His Life and Times*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988, qui apporte beaucoup de précisions sur le personnage de Khoubilai Khan à l'époque de Marco Polo. Ce dernier fut longtemps à son service. L'édition américaine de 1988 est plus chargée de notes que la traduction française de la même année ; John Critchley, *Marco Polo's Book*, London, Variorum, 1992, qui estime que la version franco-italienne représente une version proche de l'original ; Folker Reichert, *Begegnungen mit China, Die Entdeckung Ostasiens im Mittelalter*, Sigma-ring, Thorbecke Verlag, 1992, ou en traduction italienne *Incontri con la Cina*, Milano, Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 1997), qui replace Polo dans la lignée des grands voyageurs ; John Larner, *Marco Polo and the*

*Discovery of the World*, Yale University Press, 1999, qui insiste sur le rapport de Polo avec Rustichello, sur la fabrication du livre, sur les lecteurs de Polo parmi les Humanistes ; Anja Overbeck, *Literarische Skripta in Ostfrankreich, Edition und sprachliche Analyse einer französischen Handschrift des Reisebericht von Marco Polo (Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, Cod., Holm. M 304)*, Trier, Kliomedia, 2003, qui édite le texte en dialecte lorrain ; René Kappler, *Marco Polo, Le Devisement du monde*, avec de belles photographies de Roland et Sabrina Michaud, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 2004, qui traduit le ms. franco-italien en y ajoutant des passages propres au ms. latin Z et au texte italien de Ramusio ; Alvaro Barbieri, *Dal Viaggio al Libro, Studi sul Milione*, Verona, Fiorini, 2004, qui rassemble en un volume des études variées ; Stephen G. Haw, *Marco Polo's China, A Venetian in the Realm of Khubilai Khan*, London, Routledge, 2006, qui croit à la véracité de Polo, qui clarifie les itinéraires de Marco Polo à travers la Chine et propose plusieurs nouvelles identifications de toponymes.

Les colloques consacrés à Marco Polo donnent des informations nombreuses de 1959 à 2008 : ainsi Étienne Balasz, ed., *Oriente Poliano, Studi e conferenze tenute all'Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente in occasione del VII centenario della nascita di Marco Polo, 1254-1954*, Roma, 1967 ; Frederico Masini et al., eds., *Marco Polo, 750 anni, Il viaggio, Il libro, Il diritto, Congresso internazionale, Roma 23 novembre 2004-Venezia, 25 novembre 2004*, Rome, Tiellemedia, 2006 ; Silvia Conte, ed., *I Viaggi del Milione, Itinerari testuali, Vettori di Trasmissione e Metamorfosi del Devisement du monde di Marco Polo e Rustichello da Pisa nella pluralità delle attestazioni, Venezia, 6-8 ottobre 2005*, Rome, Tiellemedia, 2008.

Ajoutons des travaux récents :

Antonio Garcia Espada, *Marco Polo y la Cruzada, Historia de la literatura de viajes a las Indias en el siglo XIV*. Madrid, Marcial Pons, 2009, aux idées nouvelles et surprenantes ; Pierre Badel, *Marco Polo, La Description du monde*, Paris, Librairie générale française, 2012, qui publie et traduit le ms. français B4 (BnF, fr. 2649), ms. tardif de la seconde moitié

du XVe siècle ; Pierre Racine, *Marco Polo et ses voyages*, Paris, Perrin, 2012, qui suit le cours de la vie de Polo et s'interroge sur le voyageur, qui lui paraît un grand reporter ; Simon Gaunt, *Marco Polo's Le Devisement du monde, Narrative Voice, Language and Diversity*, Cambridge, Brewer, 2013, qui pose habilement de nouvelles questions sur les voix narratives dans le texte du voyageur vénitien ; Hans Ulrich Vogel dont le très important ouvrage *Marco Polo Was in China, New Evidence from Currencies, Salts and Revenues*, Leiden, Brill, 2013, apporte de nouvelles preuves que Marco Polo est bien allé en Chine en se fondant sur les monnaies, le sel, et les revenus de l'empereur Yuan, c'est-à-dire sur la vie économique et financière de la Chine à cette époque ; Christine Gadrat, dont l'étude *Lire Marco Polo au Moyen Age, Traduction, diffusion et réception du Devisement du monde*, Brepols, (2015) apporte du nouveau sur des manuscrits peu connus et qui s'occupe de la réception de l'œuvre au cours de siècles ; Louis-Marie et Elise Blanchard *Marco Polo, L'incroyable voyage*, Paris, Paulsen, 2017, livre destiné au grand public cultivé, mais qui possède beaucoup d'illustrations nouvelles. Il insiste notamment sur les difficultés du voyage à travers les montagnes du Pamir.

### 3. Travaux à faire dans l'avenir

**1) Mettre sur le web le plus grand nombre possible de mss. de Marco Polo, tout particulièrement ceux qui ont été retenus comme ms. de base des éditions :** Il est important d'y avoir accès directement. Il n'est pas nécessaire de justifier longuement ce point. Il faut toujours mettre à la disposition des chercheurs les documents fondamentaux que sont les mss. Si l'on laisse seulement les bibliothèques s'en occuper, elles mettront des siècles à progresser. Il faut que les équipes de recherche contribuent aussi à la diffusion des sources de leurs travaux, à savoir les mss. Je présente ce vœu aux chercheurs rassemblés ici.

**2) Rédiger un Glossaire de la version franco-italienne :** Pour le ms. franco-italien on ne dispose que du glossaire ancien d'Elgrid Kaiser (PhD diss, Wien, 1967), qui appelle des rectifications et des compléments

d'après mon expérience et de surcroît qui n'a pas été publié. On doit demander une version à l'université de Vienne. Ce vœu formulé en 2017 a été exaucé par Eugenio Burgio, qui a publié en 2018 *Marco Polo*, « *Le Devisement dou monde* », 2, *Glossario*, Venezia, ed. Ca' Foscari, 2018. Ce glossaire concerne le seul texte franco-italien du ms. fr. 1116 de la BnF. Malgré quelques rares insuffisances, il apporte beaucoup d'informations pour comprendre un texte parfois difficile.<sup>1</sup>

**3) Des Notes et des commentaires sur les diverses versions et notamment sur le texte franco-italien seraient également souhaitables.**

**4) Etudier les mélanges linguistiques dans les diverses versions et notamment la langue composite de la version franco-italienne :** Par exemple il serait utile de faire une étude de la place respective des formes toscanes et des formes vénitiennes dans le texte de toutes les rédactions. Problème important. Il y a des formes toscanes même au sein de la version vénitienne, comme l'ont noté Alvaro Barbieri et Alvisè Andreose dans leur édition de la version vénitienne *Marco Polo, Il « Milione » veneto*, Venise, Marsilio, 1999, p. 89, par exemple à propos du *w* germanique, ainsi de la forme *guardar*. Il y a des formes toscanes comme *rici* « les coques des châtaignes » dans le chapitre relatif à l'Arbre Seul, l'Arbre Sec (version française, ch. 39, 16, leçon des mss. *A1* et *A4*). Il y a aussi des formes vénitiennes. Dans le fragment franco-italien à la langue composite que j'ai publié en 2012 dans *Medioevo Romanzo*, 26, p. 1-44, j'ai signalé la forme *canevaces* (XXIV, 27) désignant des tissus grossiers de chanvre, qui rappelle le vénitien *canevaço*, *canevazza*. Le *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano* de G. Boerio (Venezia, 1857, nouv. éd., Milan, Martello, 1976, p. 170), mentionne *canevazza* au sens du toscan *canavaccio*. Dans son étude « Marco Polo und Rustichello da Pise » publiée dans *Philologica Romanica, Erhard Lommatzsch gewidmet*, sous la direction de M. Bambeck et H. Christmann, München, Fink Verlag, 1975, p. 133-143, Carl Theodor Gossen ne relève pas ce terme.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sur les points discutables de ce livre voir mon article Ménard (2023).



Pour les mots orientaux dans mon article sur « Les mots orientaux dans le texte de Marco Polo », *Romance Philology*, vol. 63, 2009, p. 87-135, j'ai essayé d'identifier et de préciser l'origine de ces vocables au sein des sept principales rédactions, la franco-italienne, la française, la toscane, la vénitienne, la latine de Pipino, la latine de Tolède, enfin la version de Ramusio. On voit que certains mots apparaissent tardivement : pour ne prendre qu'un seul exemple, le mot *beyamini* chez Ramusio (éd. Milanese, 1980, p. 204) désignant des bœufs sauvages du Tibet, des sortes de yacks. Il serait utile de regarder systématiquement les versions particulières publiées dans l'édition digitale de Burgio, à savoir les versions *L*, *V* et *VB* à ce sujet et aussi les versions éditées par Mme Valentinetti Mendi.

Quand un terme rare se rencontre dans deux versions indépendantes (c'est le cas pour les mots arabes *zerme* et *calizene*, présents à la fois chez Ramusio et dans le ms. vénitien *Dona delle Rose* ou encore pour le mot *betel* mentionné sous la forme *tembul* chez Ramusio et *tambur* dans *Z*), il y a présomption favorable pour que le terme remonte à l'auteur. Comment deux rédactions différentes auraient-elles pu l'ajouter ?

Prenons un mot exotique comme *gasmul* « pour désigner une personne qui provient de deux sangs mêlés, métis né de l'union de deux ethnies, par exemple d'un père ouïghour et d'une femme musulmane ».<sup>2</sup> Le terme apparaît dans la version franco-italienne. C'est certainement un mot du Proche-Orient. Il pourrait venir du vénitien d'outre-mer dont a parlé Gianfranco Folena dans son étude novatrice sur le vénitien *d'oltre mar* dans le *Bolletino dell'Atlante Linguistico del Mediterraneo*, 10-12, 1968-1970, p. 331-378, puis dans *Culture et Lingue nel Veneto medievale*, 1990, Padova, Editoriale Programma, 1990, p. 227-268, suivi de « *La Romania d'oltremare, francese e veneziano nel Levante* », *ibid.*, p. 269-286. En fait, *gasmul* paraît un calque du grec byzantin *gasmoulos*.<sup>3</sup>

C'est naturel qu'il soit formé sur une base grecque puisque les Vénitiens étaient présents en Eubée et en divers lieux de la Grèce médiévale. Un mot

<sup>2</sup> Voir ma Note à ce sujet dans mon étude Ménard (2009), 110.

<sup>3</sup> Du Cange (1688), 182, sous *bas mouloi* au pluriel. Le mot apparaît sous la forme *gasmoeolos* ou *bas moelos* dans Kazhdan, ed. (1991), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, en ligne depuis 2005, pour désigner un descendant d'un père latin, souvent vénitien et d'une mère grecque ou vice versa. Voir aussi Pelliot (1959), t. I, 48-49 sous *argon*.

désignant le mélange des races doit forcément apparaître dans le vocabulaire courant d'une langue parlée au Levant. Mais les copistes ont trébuché à plusieurs reprises sur ce vocable.

Le mot *argon* de même sens est présent également dans la version franco-italienne (Eusebi 2010, LIX, p. 10), mais pour des raisons qui nous échappent il est absent de la version toscane. Il se retrouve dans la version française, chez Pipino (Prašek 1902, p. 66), dans le ms. Z (41, 11) et chez Ramusio (Milanesi 1980, p. 146). Il a donc une assez large audience. Joseph Charignon lui consacrait déjà une note, dans *Le livre de Marco Polo*, (Pékin, Nachbaur, 1924, t. I, p. 244). Dans ses *Notes on Marco Polo*, (t. I, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale/Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1959, p. 48-50) P. Pelliot estime que le mot est d'origine turque. Il l'a entendu prononcer dans l'extrême ouest de la Chine pour désigner quelqu'un né d'une union entre un ouïghour et un musulman. Il a consacré tout un développement à ce vocable (p. 48-49).

Malheureusement dans la version française, après *argon* « métis », le mot *gasmul* n'apparaît pas toujours sous la forme *gasmul*, mais sous la forme *sasmuel* dans le ms. de la version française que nous avons publié (B. L. Royal 19 D 1), tome II de notre édition *Traversée de l'Afghanistan et entrée en Chine*, édité par Jeanne-Marie Boivin, Laurence Harf-Lancner et Laurence Mathey-Maille, Genève, Droz, 2003, p. 42, ligne 20. Nous sommes là en Chine dans la province appelée *Tendut* ou *Tenduc*, au-dessus de la grande boucle du Fleuve Jaune. Il s'agit des provinces du Gansu, du Ningxia et de la Mongolie Intérieure. Le terme est donc déformé. Premier malheur ! Les éditrices du volume n'ont pas relevé ces vocables dans leur glossaire. Deuxième malheur ! Mais si l'on consulte la *Varia Lectio* de la version française p. 98, ch. 73, 20, on découvre que si les mss. *B3*, *B4* et *B5* disent *sasmul*, en revanche plusieurs mss. de la famille *A*, comme *A1*, *A2*, *A4* donnent bien *gasmul* et aussi la famille *C* ainsi que le ms. *D*. Autrement dit, la forme *gasmul* se trouve attestée dans la version française.

Au sujet des compléments qui doivent être apportés aux versions déjà publiées j'ai pris un exemple seulement dans la version française pour ne pas causer de préjudice aux auteurs des autres versions. Mais il est évident que les autres rédactions, la toscane, les diverses versions vénitiennes, ont

aussi besoin de Notes et de commentaires. Les générations futures auront de quoi s'occuper à ce sujet.

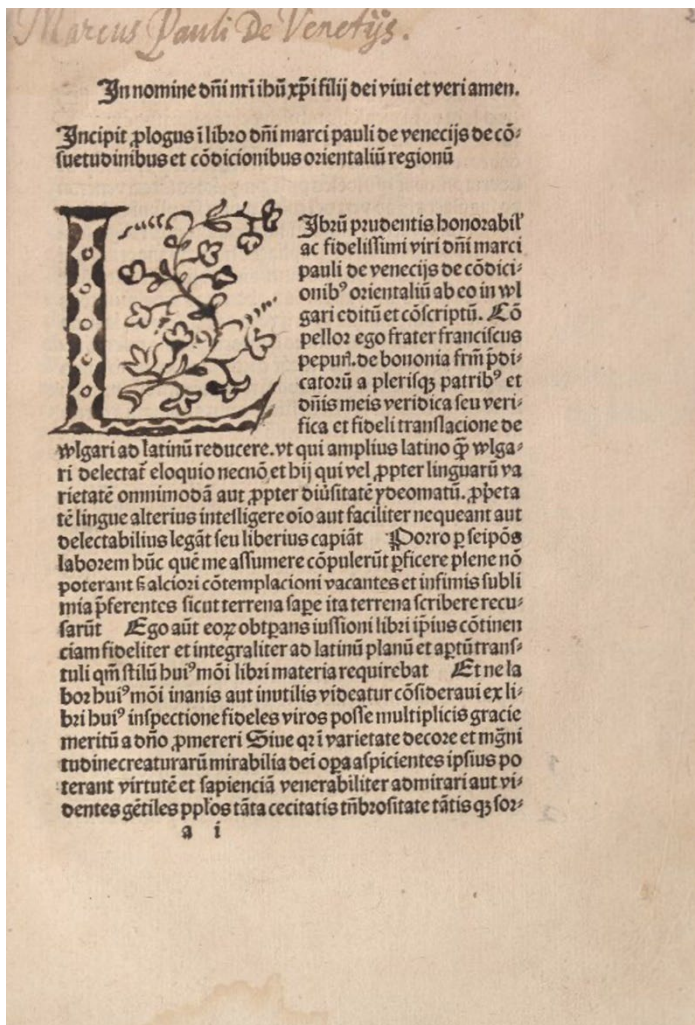


Figure 7 : L'incunable de Gerard Leeu

Source : BnF, microfilm, voir <http://ark.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb31131556j>.

5) *Editer la version de Pipino* : Faire une édition scientifique de la version de Pipino, qui a été la plus diffusée à travers les siècles, et qui a même eu

les honneurs de l'impression par Gerard Leeu (Fig. 7), sans doute à Gouda en 1483-1484. Après un an d'inactivité, l'impression de l'atelier de Gouda a repris à la fin de 1483.

Selon Consuelo Dutschke le ms. qui a servi à Leeu serait le ms. écrit sur papier conservé à la Biblioteca Marciana, lat. X. 73 (= 3445), ms. rédigé en 1465 pour le médecin Giovanni Marcanova, dont la cotte d'armes est peinte au bas du folio 1. Description du ms. par C. Dutschke, *op. cit.*, p. 956-971. Il est mentionné nominativement au folio 76 v. Mme Lotte Hellinga en reproduit le premier folio dans son étude *Texts in Transit, Manuscript to Proof and Print in the Fifteenth Century*, Leiden, Brill, 2014. Je le présente ici (Fig. 7).

L'excellent *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*<sup>4</sup> numérisé et le bon *Incunabula Short Title*,<sup>5</sup> également numérisé, mentionnent 51 exemplaires connus de l'incunable latin de Marco Polo *De consuetudinibus et conditionibus orientalium regionum*, qui provient de la traduction latine faite par Pipino dans le premier quart du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle et qui a été publiée par le célèbre imprimeur Gerard Leeu à Gouda (Pays-Bas). Deux exemplaires sont actuellement numérisés, l'un à la bibliothèque de Louvain : on y accède facilement sur le site *Incunabula Short Title Catalog*. L'autre se trouve à Vienne, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Signatur Ink 3.H.31. Il provient de la célèbre bibliothèque du Prince Eugène de Savoie. Je reproduis ici dans l'image 7 le premier folio du texte de Vienne. On pourrait ajouter quelques exemplaires non recensés. J'en connais deux : l'un à Paris à la Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève : c'est l'Incunable 1155, auquel manquent les derniers folios, l'autre que j'ai vu de près au Japon dans la Bibliothèque de l'université Meisei dans la ville de Hino très proche de Tokyo. D'autre part, dans un article « La diffusion et la circulation manuscrite d'un texte médiéval : l'exemple du *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo » publié dans *Les échanges en Méditerranée orientale*, Aix-en-Provence 2012, p. 273-288 (numérisé en 2020 dans [books.openedition.org](https://books.openedition.org)) Christine Gadrat-Ouerfelli signale à la note 26 deux

---

<sup>4</sup> Voir <https://www.gesamtkatalogderwiegendrucke.de/>.

<sup>5</sup> Voir [https://data.cerl.org/istc/\\_search](https://data.cerl.org/istc/_search).

exemplaires à la bibliothèque d'Amiens (LESC 4795 et RES 380B). Nous arrivons donc à 55 exemplaires, ce qui constitue une énorme diffusion.

Nous disposons de l'édition, faite à titre complémentaire de l'édition de la version tchèque et sans examen de l'ensemble des témoins latins conservés, imprimée en petit corps au-dessous du texte tchèque, réalisée par Justin Vacláv Prášek en 1902 dans son édition de Prague de la version tchèque de Marco Polo : *Marka Pavlova z Benátek Milion*.



**Figure 8 : Portrait de Justin Vacláv Prášek**

Source : <https://de.wikipedia.org/> (domaine public).

Prášek a publié le texte d'un ms. emmené à Vienne en janvier 1719 sur l'ordre de l'empereur autrichien Charle VI et au temps de Prášek possédé par la bibliothèque imperiale de Vienne sous le n° 3273 (Dutschke, *op. cit.* p. 789). On croyait à tort le ms. originaire d'Olmütz en Moravie. En 1928 Benedetto continue à tort de le croire dans son édition du *Milione* (p. CXXXIX). Il n'avait pas lu l'article d'Emidio Martini « Sui codici napoletani restituti dall' Austria » dans les *Atti della Reale Accademia di Archeologie, Lettere e Belle Arti di Napoli*, 9, 1924, p. 158-182, et notamment la p. 177. Après la première guerre mondiale le ms. a été restitué à l'Italie car il a été démontré qu'il provenait de la bibliothèque de l'abbaye bénédictine des saints Severino et Sossio de Naples. Aujourd'hui sa cote à la Bibliothèque nationale de Naples est *Vindobonensis lat. 50*, qui rappelle son séjour à Vienne. Ce ms. latin a paru à Prášek proche de la traduction tchèque qu'il édite, bien plus proche que les deux mss. de Pipino conservés à Prague (Fig. 9).

Je l'ai regardé rapidement il y a quelques années. Il a été décrit par Mme Consuelo Dutschke dans sa thèse (op. cit., p. 788-794). C'est un ms. du milieu du XVe siècle, mais dont le texte s'avère aujourd'hui assez abimé par l'humidité. Divers passages sont illisibles.

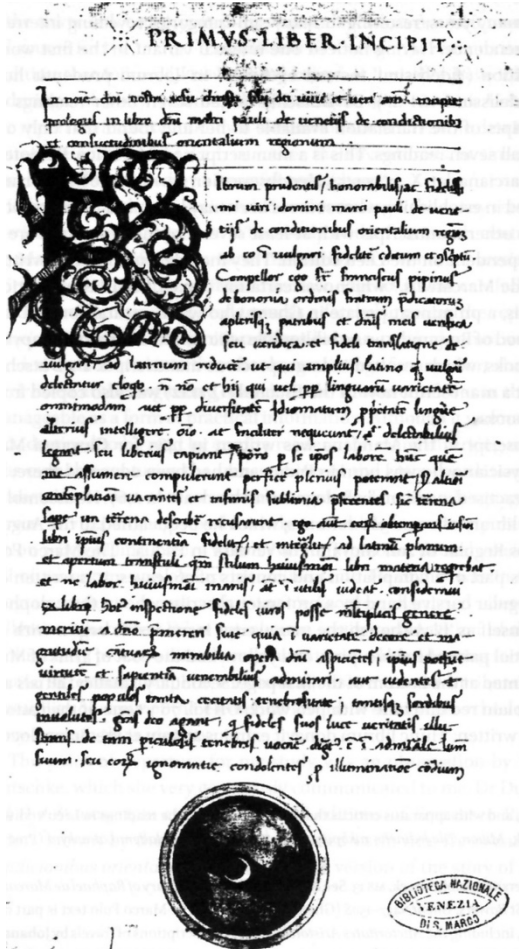


Figure 9 : Le manuscrit latin de Pipino

Source : Venezia, Biblioteca Marciana, lat. X. 73 (= 3445).

Nous disposons aussi d'une édition faite par Mme Samuela Simion dans le cadre de l'édition digitale de la Ca' Foscari à Venise. Elle se fonde sur le ms. 983 de la Biblioteca Riccardiana à Florence (milieu du XVe siècle). Pour certains passages délicats ont été exploités le ms. 131 (a S 6 14) de la Biblioteca Estense universitaria de Modène et aussi l'édition Prášek de 1902.

Dans sa thèse *Lire Marco Polo au Moyen Age*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2015, Christine Gadrat-Ouerfelli a présenté d'intéressantes observations sur le classement des mss. de Pipino, p. 66-86. Elle date cette traduction avant 1322 (p. 66), date d'achèvement du *Chronicon*, qui cite Polo, et après 1310 date du Testament de Maffeo Polo, l'oncle du voyageur, qui affirme sur son lit de mort le caractère véridique du texte de son neveu Marco Polo. Le voyageur semble toujours en vie à ce moment. On sait que Marco rédige son Testament le 9 janvier 1324. Le récit de Pipino doit dater à ses yeux de la période 1310-1322 (p. 67). Elle a aussi dressé un stemma provisoire des mss. d'après les découvertes qu'elle a faites. Elle discerne un premier groupe de six mss. qui narrent le miracle de la montagne qui se déplace, parmi lesquels se trouve le ms. dominicain du couvent de santa Maria Novella, rédigé au XIVe siècle avec une enluminure représentant Marco l'auteur, portrait imaginaire, et en face en plus petit, un frère dominicain, sans doute Pipino, ms. aujourd'hui conservé à Florence, à la Biblioteca centrale, cote Conventi soppressi C. 7 1170.

Un autre groupe d'une dizaine de mss. souligne dans le colophon final la vérité du texte ainsi que la qualité de la traduction latine (p. 74) ; ensuite un autre groupe formé de la traduction de Pipino et de son *Tractatus de locis Terre sancte* (p. 75), deux d'entre eux ont appartenu à Hartmann Schedel, le médecin de Nuremberg. Une autre série distinguée par Mme Gadrat est celle de 12 mss. copiés en Angleterre (p. 78-82). Elle avance encore d'autres arguments pour rapprocher d'autres mss. Elle dresse en p. 85 un stemma provisoire fondé sur une trentaine de mss. Ces recherches nous donnent un utile aperçu des regroupements que l'on peut discerner à première vue dans la masse des mss. de Pipino. L'entreprise mérite d'être poursuivie à grande échelle.

A mon avis, compte tenu du grand nombre de manuscrits donnant le texte de Pipino, ils sont au nombre de 63 d'après Mme Consuelo Dutschke, il faudrait une équipe de plusieurs personnes, peut-être d'une dizaine d'érudits pour engager, poursuivre et mener à son terme une véritable édition savante de Pipino.

**6) Apporter des corrections et des additions aux éditions déjà imprimées :** Dans le développement précédent j'ai pris comme exemple la version française à propos de *gasmul*, mais on peut facilement trouver aussi des exemples dans toutes les rédactions publiées.

**7) Etudier les mss. vénitiens tardifs :** Exploitation de la grosse thèse de 839 p. d'Angélica Valentinetti Mendi soutenue à l'universidad Complutense de Madrid (1991), *Una familia veneta del Libro de Marco Polo*. Elle s'occupe des mss. vénitiens tardifs et elle publie (p. 130-461) le ms. 1296 de Lucques (*Delle cose mirabile del mondo*), achevé le 20 août 1493, puis en Appendice (p. 590-700) le ms. 488 de Mantoue *Le cose mirabile de l'India e de altre parte orientale*, ensuite p. 701-815 l'édition incunable de l'imprimeur Sessa *De le meraveiose cose del mondo* (Venise, 1496). La même Angelica Valentinetti Mendi a publié à Logroño, Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, en 2008 le *Libro del famoso Marco Polo, Libro de le cose mirabile*, avec en édition synoptique sur la page de droite la première édition castillane, celle de Rodrigo de Santaella, dont la première édition a paru à Séville en 1503. Elle édite à Logroño même l'édition imprimée par Miguel de Eguía à Logroño en 1529. Sur la page de gauche elle imprime le ms. latin conservé à Séville dans la Bibliothèque Colombine (n° 11) qui a servi de modèle à Rodrigo de Santaella.

**8) Apporter des corrections aux idées soutenues par Benedetto en 1928 :** Un seul homme ne pouvait pas maîtriser à lui seul tous les problèmes posés par une tradition manuscrite aussi abondante. Sur divers points des rectifications s'imposent. Dans son compte rendu publié dans le *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 92, 1928, p. 285-293, Giulio Bertoni en a apporté des preuves. En ce qui concerne la version française elle n'est pas inférieure aux autres. On ne peut pas la mettre à part en la qualifiant de « remaniement ».



Avant d'employer le mot de remaniement il aurait fallu réfléchir sur ce terme. Cela n'a pas été le cas. Faisons-le ici. Qu'est-ce qu'un remaniement ?

Le terme ne peut s'appliquer qu'à un texte soumis à de profonds changements. Le remanieur est un homme qui veut transformer de manière importante les matériaux dont il hérite. Il les arrange, il les corrige, il les déplace, il supprime des éléments, il en ajoute d'autres. Est-cela que l'on trouve dans la version française si l'on la compare aux autres versions et tout particulièrement à la version franco-italienne ? Non. Pas du tout. La version française très souvent s'accorde mot à mot, phrase à phrase avec la version franco-italienne. C'est le même texte que l'on nous présente, mais soumis à des variantes de copistes, présentant de menues réfections, de petites suppressions ou corrections. Nous restons dans le domaine habituel de la vie des textes et de leur transmission au Moyen Age. Il faut donc renoncer à ce mot péjoratif de remaniement. Au plan linguistique et pour le style la version française s'avère notablement améliorée par rapport à la version franco-italienne.

La toscane *TA* qui abrège, la vénitienne classique *VA*, qui écourte considérablement, pourraient être considérées comme des remaniements. Mais ce n'est pas mon avis. Ce serait un jugement excessif. D'autre part, il faut renoncer à l'idée que le ms. fr. 1116 de la BnF serait très proche de la version originale (il y a de nombreuses fautes à corriger en lui et son état de langue ne permet pas de le croire), renoncer aussi à l'idée réductrice des omissions constantes, à la chimère de la reconstitution de la version intégrale. Il serait préférable de réfléchir à la fois sur ce qui relève des suppressions et sur les innovations qui paraissent remonter à l'auteur.

Au plan de la tradition textuelle il faut ajouter aux seize mss. de la version française mentionnés par Benedetto deux mss. nouveaux : le ms. de New York de la Pierpont Morgan Library, sigle *M 723* (je lui ai donné le sigle *A4* en raison de son contenu). Ce ms. était la propriété de la famille La Rochefoucauld dans son château de La Roche Guyon. Il a été vendu à l'hôtel Drouot le 2 juillet 1927. Il est orné de 43 petits dessins souvent en grisailles, rehaussées de quelques couleurs frustes. Il n'est pas très beau. Il s'unit par quelques fautes communes au ms. *A2*. (BnF, fr. 2810). Il est pour son texte et pour son illustration de qualité très moyenne. Un autre ms.

avait échappé à Benedetto, un fragment conservé à Oxford à la Bodleian Library (Bodley 261, fol. 195), qui nous donne un chapitre du texte, le chapitre concernant les redoutables Cynocéphales de l'île d'Andaman au sud-ouest de l'Inde. Nous lui avons donné le sigle *B8*.

Pour le classement des mss. nous avons opéré des changements aux idées reçues proposées par Benedetto et encore véhiculées par des érudits qui, les yeux fermés, ont suivi, l'érudite italien, tel Jacques Monfrin, dont le bref travail sur les mss. de Marco Polo se signale surtout par ses méprises. Il a été publié d'abord en 1996 par Faksimile Verlag à Lucerne (t. II, 333-351), puis malheureusement repris dans ses *Études de philologie romane*, Genève, Droz, 2001, p. 512-533. Monfrin suit naïvement les affirmations de Benedetto et les suggestions de sa disciple Kim Loan Hoang-Thi (thèse de l'Ecole des Chartes, 1967). Il croit naïvement que le ms. conservé à la British Library Cotto, Otheon D 5, est écrit en franco-italien (sur ce point il recopie Benedetto), il prétend, comme Benedetto (qu'il recopie), que la version française est remaniée (p. 516). Il dit à tort que cinq mss. sont enluminés, alors qu'il y en a huit pourvus d'images, il affirme faussement que le ms. de Stockholm est l'un de ceux-là, alors qu'il ne possède aucune illustration. De semblables erreurs se produisent toujours quand on n'a pas vu par soi-même les mss. et que l'on prétend disserter sur eux.

Je ne suis pas le seul à m'opposer à la théorie de la dégradation permanente du texte. C'était l'idée profonde de Cesare Segre. Je suis heureux qu'un savant de cette importance ait déjà manifesté à plusieurs reprises ces idées à ce sujet.

Il faut ajouter le nom de Consuelo Dutschke, auteur d'un gros PhD sur les manuscrits de Pipino *Francesco Pipino and the Manuscripts of Marco Polo's 'Travels'*, Los Angeles, University of California, 1993, p. 18, qui déclare justement qu'il est préférable de croire à des accroissements successifs plutôt qu'à un appauvrissement continu.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> « Benedetto assumed that all differences in content of manuscripts were a later deterioration or impoverishment from a fuller original; he was formed in the positivistic school of philology to presuppose the existence of one single archetype, from which all extant manuscripts must descend, diminishing in the process. But again, a simpler explanation is to see Francesco Pipino (or even someone else) returning, after the translation of the Travels had begun to circulate, to

Cesare Segre a bien marqué sa différence avec Benedetto.

Dans le *Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, volume VI, 2, *La littérature didactique, allégorique et satirique*, sous la direction de H. R. Jauss et E. Koehler, Heidelberg, Winter, 1970, il mentionne l'hypothèse de Benedetto sur des abrègements successifs, mais sans l'adopter. Il préfère parler « d'élargissements », qui lui font penser à un « Work in Progress » (p. 196), une œuvre en mouvement. Il revient sur ce grand problème en 1982 dans l'introduction à l'édition de Gabriella Ronchi. Il fait observer que la très vaste tradition manuscrite du *Milione* ne suggère pas une succession mécanique de copies, mais une dynamique de nouvelle écriture, avec des tonalités différentes. Citons-le : « L'imponente tradizione del « Milione » non presenta infatti un succedersi meccanico di copie, ma una inesauribile attività rielaborativa, che ogni volta dà un tono diverso alla voce riferita da Rustichello » (*Introduzione*, p. XV). Tout en mentionnant l'idée fondamentale de Benedetto pour qui la rédaction complète aurait été simplifiée (« la stesura già completa fu successivamente potata, alleggerita, semplificata » ; *Introduzione*, p. XVI), il propose une autre vision de l'histoire du texte : les différences du contenu qui peuvent concerner des passages ou des chapitres entiers font penser à une rédaction par strates : « Le differenze di contenuto che possono interessare brani o interi capitoli fecero immaginare una stesura a strati : Marco avrebbe via via aggiunto particolari al testo composto da Rustichello » (*Introduzione*, p. XVI). Ce concept de strates, de disposition des matériaux en couches superposées de souvenirs est une nouvelle interprétation qui n'avait jamais été présentée par la critique, une explication plus profonde, qui permet de comprendre le problème complexe de la création infiniment mieux que la théorie naïvement mécanique des perpétuelles suppressions imaginée par Benedetto.

Je renvoie les auditeurs à mon article « Cesare Segre et Marco Polo », communication au *Convegno Cesare Segre, Gli Strumenti della critica*, Roma, Accademia dei Lincei, Palazzo Corsini, 11-12 novembre 2015, dans *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, 2017, 313.

---

the Venetian source for the words to embellish this particular episode. It is simpler to posit the growth of one episode than to posit the reduction of an entire book ». Dutschke (1993), 18.

Dans l'édition de la version française j'ai avancé des idées comparables (p. 12-13). J'ai contesté les a priori contestables de Benedetto : le désir de rabaisser la version française, l'ambition téméraire de reconstituer une version primitive à l'aide de *membra disjecta*, le concept très discuté d'une édition dite intégrale, l'hypothèse arbitraire selon laquelle le texte ne connaîtrait au cours du temps que des lacunes et des dégradations. Je ne crois pas possible la reconstitution d'un archétype unique, encore moins d'un texte original. Je crois que le texte de Marco Polo est sans cesse en mouvement, que les phases successives de sa vie ne permettent pas de remonter à une première rédaction. Le concept d'édition déclarée « intégrale » relève de l'illusion. En faisant déjà comme Yule, puis comme Benedetto ou encore comme Moule et Pelliot on crée un texte composite, fait d'amalgames, fabriqué avec des morceaux disparates. À partir de versions différentes du texte de Marco Polo on ne peut pas retrouver le texte déclaré « primitif » ou « intégral » ou encore « définitif ». Les diverses rédactions parvenues jusqu'à nous ne doivent pas être arbitrairement fusionnées. Quand on procède à un tel assemblage on détruit le caractère unique de chaque version, on mélange des morceaux d'âge, de langue, et souvent aussi de styles différents, bref on fabrique un agglomérat arbitraire et aberrant. La vie du texte est faite assurément de suppressions (je ne conteste pas), mais aussi de modifications et d'additions. Les deux termes doivent être présents à l'esprit quand on réfléchit à l'histoire du texte et des versions parvenues à nous.

Je crois à l'existence de plusieurs d'archétypes, révélés par les diverses versions conservées. Nous avons des textes variés. On peut prendre l'exemple des Prologues pour observer la variété des rédactions. J'ai étudié les Prologues dans mon article « Réflexions sur le Prologue des différentes versions du *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo » dans les *Mélanges* offerts à James Dauphiné en 2009 et publiés sous le titre *Le lent brassement des livres, des rites et de la vie*, Paris, Champion, 2009, p. 97-113. Je soutiendrai aujourd'hui que ces changements remontent en grande partie non pas au copiste qui nous a donné le texte que nous lisons, mais à plusieurs archétypes où ces changements étaient déjà faits.

Le Prologue de la version française est tout à fait à part (*Pour savoir la pure verité des diverses regions du monde*). Est-ce une réfection ? Est-elle dûe à l'auteur ? Je serais tenté de le croire.

Le Prologue de Pipino est également très original : il parle seulement de lui. C'est une innovation incontestable. Les Prologues des autres rédactions, qui énumèrent les divers états de la société, présentent des variations. Il y a sept termes d'adresse après *Seignors* dans la version franco-italienne : *Seignors enperaor, et rois, dux et marquois, cuens, chevalier et borgois* (*F* dit par erreur *bargions, et toutes gens ...* Même série dans le fragment anglo-normand et dans le ms. latin *Z*. La version toscane enlève quatre termes (marquis, comtes, chevaliers et bourgeois). La vénitienne classique *VA* supprime le premier terme et en ajoute deux, *prinzipi et baroni*. Ramusio fait disparaître trois termes (les empereurs, les rois et les bourgeois). La pluralité d'archétypes est vraisemblable. Une certaine instabilité du texte est également manifeste.

D'autre part le style de la version *F* ne me semble pas non plus le style original de Rustichello que l'on peut connaître d'après la *Compilation* arthurienne qu'il nous a laissée. C'est le style d'un remanieur ou du copiste. Il est empli de lourdes répétitions au début du Prologue, de répétitions de l'adjectif *deverses* « diverses, différentes » d'abord employé avec le substantif *jenerasions des homes* « sortes d'hommes », puis avec le substantif *deversités* au sens de « curiosités, singularités » *les deversités des deverses region dou monde* (*sic* sans *s* du pluriel). Peu après *les grant* (au singulier) uni avec *diversités* (au pluriel) au sens de « curiosités » revient à nouveau. La lourdeur de l'expression est corrigée dans *Fr*. Le style de *Fr* est assurément supérieur.

De même, *Fr* permet de corriger une foule d'erreurs de *F* : de fâcheuses déformations *borgois* devenu *bargions*, des bizarreries graphiques ainsi *voç* « vous » avec *c* cédillé au lieu de *s* final. Le phénomène se répète assez souvent : ainsi peu après avec l'adjectif possessif *ses* écrit avec *c* cédillé *seç*. Benedetto supprime hardiment les *ç* de son édition, *F* commet de graves incorrections syntaxiques : ainsi après un substantif au pluriel la juxtaposition d'un adjectif au singulier qui s'y rapporte *les chouses veue por veue* (*sic*). Il emploie le relatif complément *que* au lieu d'un *qui* sujet.

Il fait d'importantes confusions temporelles en employant l'indicatif présent *voit* au lieu du passé simple *vit* ou plus loin en coordonnant une forme au conditionnel en *oie* (première personne *liroie* : il faudrait une troisième personne) avec une forme au futur en *-ont* 3<sup>e</sup> personne du pluriel (*hoiront*). Il pratique la déformation du radical des verbes : ainsi il écrit au lieu de « vous trouverez » au futur du verbe *trover* la forme aberrante *trovererés*. C'est ce qu'on lit dans le ms. ! Benedetto et Ronchi ont transcrit ainsi, mais M. Eusebi a corrigé *troverés* sans signaler la forme utilisée dans le ms. Le verbe *mettre* est écrit dans le manuscrit au futur première personne du pluriel *metreron* (*sic*) au lieu de *metrons* avec *-s* final.

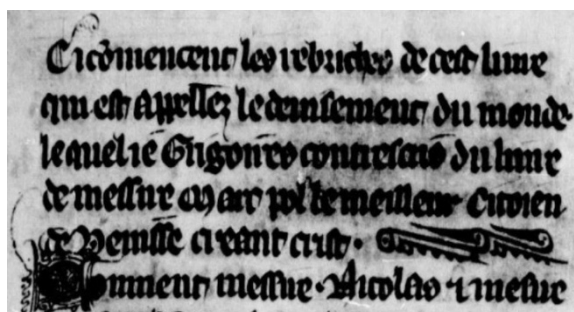


Figure 10 : Le mot *contrescrist* (ligne 3)

Source : BnF, ms. fr. 5631, fol. 1.

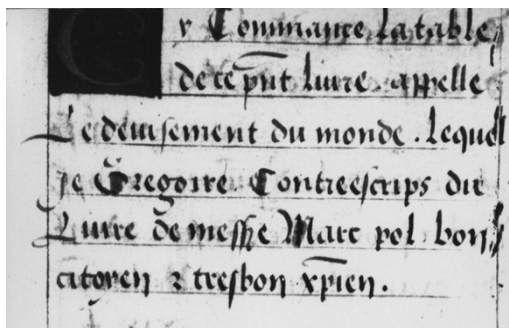


Figure 11 : Le mot *contrescrist* (ligne 4)

Source : Paris, Arsenal ms. 3511, fol. 109.

On a l'impression que le français utilisé par F est un français très approximatif, assez souvent erroné. Il y en a des preuves multiples : la succession de termes *mes auques hi ni a qu'il ne vit pas, mes ill'entendi da homes citables et de verité*, où *hi* est une déformation du pronom *il* et où *ni* imprimé en un mot dans l'édition Mario Eusebi, et *n'i* dans l'édition Gabriela Ronchi est l'adverbe italien « ne » abrégé signifiant « en » (comprendons « il y en a » ; dans le ms. tout est écrit en un seul bloc *hinia* sans séparation entre les trois éléments). La dernière partie de la phrase paraît une déformation de ce que l'on trouve dans la version française *d'ommes certains par verité*. Le mot *citables* semble une invention malheureuse.

On pourrait mentionner aussi peu après la forme défigurée *pasme* au lieu de *plasme* « façonne » qui devrait se trouver au passé, et non au présent. Très habilement Eusebi a imprimé *plasmé* pour faire du verbe un passé et plus loin écrit *chercé* avec un accent sur la voyelle finale pour « chercha ». Mais le passé des verbes de la 1ère conjugaison est en *-a* à la 3e personne, et non en *-é*. Quoi qu'on fasse, le rédacteur écrit n'importe quoi par ignorance. Son texte ne peut pas passer pour proche de la version originale. Giulio Bertoni l'a bien montré dans son compte rendu critique. Arrêtons ces comparaisons qui montrent les insuffisances de la version F. Les formes temporelles sont particulièrement maltraitées. De temps en temps des italianismes se glissent dans le texte : ainsi la forme *Venece*, la préposition *da*, l'adverbe *ne* ou l'adverbe *tropo*. Dans son édition Benedetto en ajoute un : il imprime l'adverbe italien *qui* « ici » au lieu de l'adverbe *chi* présent dans le ms. L'impression finale du lecteur est peu favorable au ms. fr. 1116. Sa langue paraît incohérente, assez souvent proche du charabia, au langage confus et désordonné, qui est un méli-mélo de formes assez souvent aberrantes.

Si l'on entrait dans le détail on pourrait relever aussi de graves erreurs de transcription commises par Benedetto.

Dans l'édition de Benedetto signalons la mauvaise lecture du verbe *contrescrire* (Fig. 10-11) et aussi dans son introduction et dans sa transcription la mauvaise lecture d'un passage de Pipino.

Comme je l'ai montré en 1998, dans *Medioevo Romanzo*, 22, 1998, p. 332-351, Benedetto a commis toute une série de fautes successives.

Voulant montrer que la version française ne méritait pas d'être considérée comme une rédaction importante, il l'a qualifié de remaniement. Pour ce faire, il a lu à tort *contrefais* dans un passage du ms. *A1*. Il s'agit de la Table des matières du ms. fr. 5631 de la BnF : *Ci commencent les rebriches* (« les rubriques », c'est-à-dire les titres des chapitres) *de cest livre qui est appellez « Le Devisement du monde », lequel je Grigoires contrescris du livre de messire Marc Pol le meilleurs citoien de Venisse creant Crist* (folio 1). Première erreur de Benedetto d'ordre paléographique. Prendre le *s* pour un *f*, puis croire que le *c* suivi de *r* était un *a*. Il devait jubiler de trouver ce qu'il souhaitait, à savoir une déclaration de profond remaniement sous la plume même du remanieur.

Malheureusement tout cela est faux.

Le ms. *A3* (Arsenal, 3511, fol. 109) donne lui aussi la Table des matières et déclare sans conteste : *Ci commence la Table de ce present livre appelle « Le Devisement du Monde » lequel je Gregoire contreescrips du livre de messire Marc Pol*.

D'autre part, si l'on regarde dans les dictionnaires de l'ancien français, ce que Benedetto ne fait pas, on découvre que *contrefaire* ne signifie pas « remanier », contrairement à ce qu'il croit et à ce qu'il affirme. La notion de *rifacimento* n'existe pas pour ce verbe. Il veut dire « faire, fabriquer d'après un modèle », puis « imiter, reproduire », parfois « feindre, imiter trompeusement, défigurer ». Aucun de ces sens n'aurait convenu au passage.

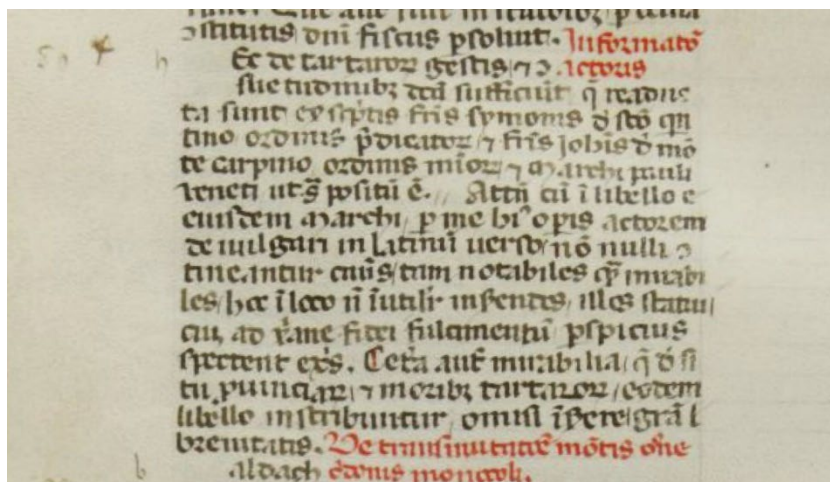
En revanche *contrescrire* a un emploi très clair en ancien français. On le trouve dans diverses chartes, comme je l'ai rappelé. Il signifie « recopier avec soin, transcrire scrupuleusement, faire une copie conforme, parfois faire une copie certifiée ». Nous sommes à l'opposé de ce que Benedetto croyait.

Grégoire ne peut pas passer pour un remanieur de toute la version française. Il apparaît comme le copiste attentif de deux mss. Un point c'est tout.

Autre faute de Benedetto dans sa transcription du ms. latin de Modène, X, 1.5, fol. 117 v, dans son livre *Marco Polo, Il Milione*, Firenze, Olschki, 1928, p. CXXXVIII, où il oublie une ligne entière (Fig. 12) et où il commet en plus diverses fautes de lecture : il lit *fundamentum* « fondement » au



lieu de *fulcimentum* « soutien, appui », mot tardif et bien plus rare et qu'il devait ignorer. Le verbe *fulcire* est connu en latin classique au sens de « soutenir », mais le substantif *fulcimentum* est rare et il n'est attesté que chez Apulée et chez Macrobe.



**Figure 12 : Ligne omise etc.**

Source : Ms. de Modène, Bibl. Estense X. 1,5 (= lat. 465), fol. 117 v°.

Et de Tartarorum gestis et consuetudinibus dicta sufficiunt que traducta sunt ex scriptis fratris Symonis de Sancto Quentine, ordinis Predicatorum (*ligne omise par Benedetto*) et fratris Johannis de Monte Carpino ordinis Minorum et Marchi Pauli Veneti, ut supra positum est. Attamen cum in libello eiusdem Marchi per me huius operis actorem de vulgari in latinum verso nonnulli contineantur cuiusdam notabiles quam mirabiles hoc in loco non inutiliter inserendos illos (*illos omise par Benedetto*) statui cum ad christiane fidei fulcimentum (*transcrit à tort fundamentum par Benedetto*) perspicuis spectent exemplis.

La ligne omise fait référence au texte latin de Simon de Saint-Quentin, une *Historia Tartarorum*, que nous connaissons aujourd'hui seulement par des extraits conservés dans le *Speculum historiale* de Vincent de Beauvais, que l'on déclare achevé en 1264. C'est le récit du voyage de Simon de Saint-Quentin en 1247 jusqu'au camp du général mongol Baiju en Arménie. Le texte de Simon de Saint-Quentin a été publié par Jean Richard à Paris chez P. Geuthner en 1965. C'est un document important sur les Mongols et sur

la Turquie seldjoukide. J. Richard soupçonne que le texte de Simon a été rédigé en 1248 et qu'il devait être destiné au pape.

Dans le long *Chronicon* rédigé par Pipino au livre 24, il est fait référence aux informations données par Marco Polo sur les Mongols. L'auteur rappelle que le récit du voyageur narre des aventures extraordinaires (*casus tam notabiles quam mirabiles*), qu'il a tenu à insérer dans son livre comme soutien de la foi chrétienne (*ad cristiane fidei fulcimentum*).

**9) Améliorations à apporter à l'édition digitale :** Vu l'intérêt de l'édition digitale, je me permets de suggérer des améliorations.

Présentation :

1. Le corps de police choisi Verdana 8,5 est trop petit. Ailleurs je vois la police DejaVu Serif 8,5. Pour le Lemmatio c'est Deja Vu Serif 12, qui est mieux.

Ces corps trop petits fatiguent les yeux. Il faudrait Times New Roman 12 ou plutôt 14.

2. Pour la présentation des pages à l'intérieur des chapitres ; dans les textes en prose il est utile de numéroter les lignes de 5 en 5. C'est indispensable pour les références que l'on est amené à donner du texte. On le fait en France en suivant les sages avis de P. Meyer (1910) et de M. Roques.<sup>7</sup>

L'introduction annonce *una edizione commentata sarrebe stata uno strumento essenziale per gli studi sulla tradizione del « Milione »*. Or, je ne vois nulle part une édition commentée. J'ai l'impression d'avoir sous les yeux des textes bruts. On m'annonce une *edizione interpretativa* pour la version *P*. Je ne la vois pas sur le web.

La bibliographie citée semble particulièrement fournie. Cette impression est une illusion. En effet dans la rubrique *Studi moderni* je vois seulement quatre de mes articles cités. C'est peu alors que j'en ai publié trente-sept !

---

<sup>7</sup> Voir Meyer (1910). Voir aussi le « Protocole d'édition des classiques français du Moyen Age » établi par Mario Roques, toujours valide, p. 1.

Je ne vois pas non plus la synthèse que j'ai rédigée *Marco Polo à la découverte de l'Asie*, Paris, Glénat & Société de Géographie, 2009, 272 p., illustr. en noir et blanc et en couleurs, avec un assez grand nombre de Notes de références. Il y en a 401 !



**Figure 13 : Khoubilai menaçant des ennemis**

Source : Ms. A1, BnF, fr. 5631, fol. 3 v°.

J'ai une explication à présenter au sujet de cette énorme omission d'articles. Certains des érudits italiens qui participent à l'édition numérique de Marco Polo sont de fervents admirateurs de Luigi Foscolo Benedetto. Les responsables de la bibliographie ont voulu réduire le plus possible les critiques sur leur grand homme en citant le moins possible les articles qui contestent les affirmations de Benedetto. Ils se sont gardés de mentionner plusieurs de mes travaux. « Ainsi Le prétendu < remaniement > du *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo attribué à Grégoire », *Medioevo Romano*, 22, 1998, p. 332-351 (avec illustr.), qui démontre les erreurs de Benedetto. De même, mon étude « Marco Polo en Angleterre », *Medioevo Romano*, 24.2, 2000,

p. 189-208, où apparaît une énorme confusion de Benedetto qui prend un texte en anglo-normand pour un texte franco-italien et qui commet plusieurs fautes de lecture sur les premières lignes qu'il croyait avoir réussi à lire. Il suffit de se reporter à l'introduction de son livre (p. xxii), où il cite quelques lignes qu'il a réussi à déchiffrer et aussi le texte complet dans mon édition du fragment.

Il y a donc des améliorations à apporter à leur attachante édition numérisée.



**Figure 14 : Départ des frères Polo**

Source : Ms. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. M 723, fol. 71 (début du texte).

**10) Etude des illustrations du texte, des rapports entre l'iconographie des différents mss., des liens entre le texte et l'image ou bien au contraire des divergences :** Pas d'enluminures dans la version franco-italienne, ni dans le fragment supplémentaire en franco-italien qui a survécu. Rien, semble-t-il, dans la version toscane ni dans la version vénitienne, rien dans le ms. de Tolède. Très peu de mss. sont ornés d'illustrations dans la version latine de Pipino. J'en ai trouvé un à Glasgow, un à Wolfenbüttel dans l'Herzog August Bibliothek parmi les Gudischen Handschriften le latin 3. Ajoutons

aussi en Espagne un manuscrit de la version aragonaise conservée à l'Escorial ms. Z. I. 2. Aucun de ces manuscrits n'a de rapports avec les autres.

C'est surtout en France que se rencontrent les mss. enluminés. Au total huit mss. de la version française sont ornés de miniatures. Quelques-uns ont très peu de miniatures. Ainsi le bon ms. A1 (Paris, BnF, fr. 5631), que Pauthier a publié en 1865, n'en possède que deux : une au début au fol. 3 v° (Fig. 13), qui montre Khoubilai Khan au début du texte dans une attitude guerrière : il est porté par un éléphant et il brandit son épée contre ses ennemis.



Figure 15 : Magiciens sortant de Xanadu le corps d'un bandit exécuté

Source : Ms. British Library, Royal 19 D 1, fol. 81 v°.

Il y a plusieurs mss. qui présentent des séries d'illustrations : 34 dans le ms. *A4*, ms. M 723 de la Pierpont Morgan Library (Fig. 14), ms. numérisé par cette Bibliothèque, images petites, dessins et couleurs sommaires, parfois quelques scènes curieuses.

Autre série : trente-huit miniatures<sup>8</sup> dans le ms. de Londres, British Library, Royal 19 D 1 (Fig. 15), notre ms. *B1*, trente-huit aussi dans le ms. d'Oxford, Bodley, 264, notre ms. *B2* (Fig. 16), beau ms. anglais, belles illustrations. Ces deux mss. sont proches et constituent un sous-groupe au sein de la famille *B*.

Deux autres mss. français possèdent un nombre considérable d'illustrations : d'abord le ms. 2810 (Fig. 17) du fonds français de la BnF, notre ms. *A2*. Ce ms., très célèbre en raison de sa beauté exceptionnelle, a fait partie des collections du duc de Berry. C'est un des chefs-d'œuvre de l'enluminure médiévale avec ses dessins profonds et ses couleurs nuancées et délicates. Il date de la première décennie du XVe siècle, vers 1410-1412. Il contient 84 miniatures de notre texte. Il a été numérisé en couleurs par la BnF. Il est donc facile de l'étudier. Il faudrait étudier l'ordonnement de ses images. La BnF ne montre plus l'original depuis longtemps. D'autre part la maison Faksimile Verlag à Lucerne l'a magnifiquement reproduit en 1996. On en trouve encore quelques exemplaires çà et là. Un exemplaire est à vendre actuellement chez Abebooks.com. Il vaut 3330 \$. Il faudrait examiner pourquoi l'illustrateur a choisi ces emplacements, qu'est-ce que le texte lui apportait à ces passages, comment l'artiste l'a-t-il rendu ou bien s'il s'en est éloigné.

---

<sup>8</sup> Il faut rectifier le nombre erroné de 36 indiqué par erreur dans notre édition Ménard (2001-2009), t. I, *Départ des voyageurs et traversée de la Perse*, 43.



Figure 16 : Image célèbre de Venise

Source : Frontispice du ms. B2, Oxford, Bodley 264, fol. 218r (début du texte).

Le ms. qui possède le plus de peintures est le ms. de Paris, Arsenal 5219, notre ms. C3 (Fig. 18), qui possède 197 miniatures, une en tête de chaque chapitre. Ce sont des peintures tardives du premier tiers du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, de l'époque de François I<sup>er</sup>. Ms. numérisé dans Gallica. Evidemment au premier coup d'œil on voit les modernisations apportées. Mais l'artiste a parfois de la puissance évocatrice. Il mériterait d'être reproduit et étudié.

Les mss. *B1* et *B2* appellent encore des recherches au sujet de leurs liens éventuels de dépendance. Le ms. *B2*, Oxford, Bodleian Library 264, est daté pour les enluminures des environs de 1400-1410 par Jonathan J. G. Alexander.<sup>9</sup> Même nombre et mêmes emplacements pour les images dans *B1* et dans *B2*. Le premier de ces mss. a été numérisé par la British Library, mais cette version digitale n'est plus accessible aujourd'hui, ce qui est très regrettable. Dans ces deux manuscrits la nature des images est profondément différente. Le ms. *B1* offre des peintures de style gothique généralement décevantes : beaucoup de murailles inexpressives ou de combats sans originalité. Une seule sorte de l'ordinaire. Je la présente ici. On y voit des magiciens sortant de Xanadu le corps d'un condamné qui a été exécuté dont ils vont faire leur repas. Notre texte se lit dans le t. II de notre édition, chapitre 74, p. 47, ligne 84-86. Très peu de lignes du texte sont consacrés à la scène. Il n'est pas question chez Marco Polo de quitter la ville ni de tenir à bout de bras le cadavre en descendant des remparts sur une échelle. Tout cela constitue une addition étrangère au texte.

Les images présentes dans ce ms. British Library, Royal 19 D 1, presque toujours sont dépourvues d'art, de charme, de poésie et d'exotisme. Elles sont très simples de facture. C'est l'inverse pour les illustrations de *B2*. Elles unissent réalisme et poésie. Elles sont faites par de grands illustrateurs.

Aucun signe de parenté entre les images de *B1* et celles de *B2*. Est-il possible, malgré cela, que *B2* s'inspire de *B1* ? Mme Consuelo Dutschke le croit. Elle a soutenu que le ms. *B2* aurait utilisé comme modèle le ms. *B1*. Elle a écrit un article à ce sujet intitulé « The Truth in the Book ; The

---

<sup>9</sup> Alexander (1996), t. II, n 13, 68-73 (voir 68).



Marco Polo Texts in Royal 19 D 1 and Bodley 264 » dans la revue *Scriptorium*, t. 52, 1998, p. 278-300. Je reste sceptique.



Figure 17 : Départ des deux frères Polo lors de leur premier voyage

Source : Ms. Paris, BnF, fr. 2810, fol. 1.

Le ms. Royal 19 D I que nous avons édité, autrement dit notre ms. *B1*, est un ms. écrit assurément en France, peut-être pour le roi Philippe VI de Valois, comme l'a supposé Marie-Thérèse Gousset.<sup>10</sup> Il aurait été exécuté par l'atelier Richard et Jeanne Monbaston d'après l'étude de Richard H. and Mary A. Rouse, *Manuscripts and their Makers*, London, Harvey Miller, et Turnhout, Brepols, 2000, t. I, p. 245-247, qui proposent comme date entre 1332 et 1337, bien avant le ms. *B2*.

Le ms. d'Oxford, Bodley 264, du début du XVe siècle, a été l'objet d'une étude intéressante par Mark Cruse, Professeur à l'université de l'Arizona, *Illuminating the Roman d'Alexandre, Bodleian Library MS. Bodley 264, The Manuscript as Monument*, Martslesham (Suffolk), D. S. Brewer, 2011, 252 p., illustrations en couleurs et en noir et blanc.

Cruse estime possible que Bodley 264 ait été produit pour quelqu'un de la famille royale française (p. 182). En tout cas au XVe siècle il a appartenu à la famille royale anglaise (p. 184). Il est aujourd'hui numérisé par la Bodleian Library, mais avec des procédés techniques perfides qui empêchent le chercheur de capturer l'image : un voile transparent s'interpose entre l'image et lui quand il veut la sélectionner. L'ordre des images s'avère également brouillé. Ces belles images en couleurs sont donc impossibles à exploiter.

Quand le ms. Royal 19 D I est-il venu en Angleterre ? Nous n'en savons rien. Dans son livre *Codex and Context* Keith Busby n'en parle pas. Il se contente de le citer rapidement (t. I, pp. 37). Nous savons qu'au XVe siècle il a appartenu à Humphrey de Lancastre, duc de Gloucester, qui fut un très grand personnage.

Je présente ici une hypothèse. Je me demande si ce personnage n'a pas reçu ce ms. de son frère, Jean de Lancastre, duc de Bedford, qui devint régent de France en juillet 1422 et qui le resta longtemps, en fait jusqu'à sa mort le 14 septembre 1435. La bibliothèque des rois de France fut « vendue » en 1424 au duc de Bedford, alors régent de France et grand bibliophile. La *librairie* du roi comptait 917 titres en 1373 dans l'inventaire établi à la mort de Charles V. La plupart des livres du roi de France furent

---

<sup>10</sup> Voir Avril et al., eds. (1996), t. 2, Kommentar, 355.

dispersés lors de l'occupation de Paris par les Anglais, notamment en 1426 et en 1435. Léopold Delisle a justement parlé de « pillage » dans ses *Recherches sur la Librairie de Charles V*, Paris, Champion, 1907, t. I, p. 137. Selon L. Delisle (*op. cit.*, p. 138) elle se composait auparavant de 1200 volumes (*op. cit.*, p. 141), surtout de manuscrits, avec quelques incunables, mais en avril 1424 il n'y avait plus que 843 oeuvres confiées à la garde des libraires. Leur valeur fut estimée à 2323 livres. Le duc de Bedford les acheta à moitié prix. Il ne déboursa que 1200 livres et il en prit possession le 22 juin 1425. La plus grande partie passa en Angleterre. On retrouve aujourd'hui dans diverses bibliothèques anglaises ces manuscrits issus, parfois frauduleusement, de la bibliothèque des rois de France !

Dans ses *Recherches sur la librairie de Charles V* (Paris, H. Champion, 1907, p. 274) Léopold Delisle signale un autre ms. de Marco Polo qui se trouve actuellement à la bibliothèque de Stockholm et qui provient de la même origine. C'est notre ms. C. Il faudrait vérifier avec soin dans les inventaires anciens de livres pour voir si le manuscrit de Marco Polo aujourd'hui enregistré à la British Library sous la cote Royal 19 D I n'y figure pas. Nous connaissons le nom d'un artiste qui a peint une partie des enluminures du texte de Marco Polo dans le ms. B2. C'est le troisième enlumineur discerné par Kathleen Scott (*op. cit.*, p. 70). Il a écrit son nom au folio 220 sur la robe du Grand Khan : *Johannes me fecit*. On lui attribue cinq miniatures, comme l'a bien rappelé K. L. Scott, en 1996 (*op. cit.*, p. 70). On lui doit notamment le frontispice assez extraordinaire sur l'espace considérable d'un demi-folio (23 cm sur 19 cm) représentant la ville de Venise au folio 218, au moment du départ des trois membres de la famille Polo, Nicolo, Matteo – appelé Maffeo en vénitien – et Marco.



**Figure 18 : Les idoles du Cathay**

Source : Une image du ms. C3, Arsenal 5219, fol. 125 v°.

Je n'ai pas le temps de m'arrêter ici sur cette prodigieuse peinture de Venise. Des érudits l'ont examiné à plusieurs reprises. Il y aurait encore des choses à dire. J'en ai parlé un peu dans ma contribution « Marco Polo en images » dans le *Studi di filologia romanza offerti a Valeria Bertolucci Pizzorusso*, Pisa, Pacini, 2006, t. II, p. 1001-1002).

Il est notable que dans ce ms. au folio 260 on voit des êtres monstrueux attribués à l'Inde, un cyclope, un sciapode, un Blemmye, monstre sans tête, sans cou, et possédant les yeux et la bouche sur la poitrine, ensuite un cynocéphale. Un peu plus loin au folio 262 au pays de *Cianba* (c'est-à-dire au Champa, dans l'actuel Vietnam), se trouve un géant chevelu, un anthropophage, un homme pourvu d'une corne. Marco Polo n'en parle nulle part.

L'artiste de cette partie du ms. a suivi une tradition qui remonte à l'Antiquité comme l'a justement montré Rudolf Wittkower dans son bel article « Marco Polo and the Pictorial Tradition of the Marvels of East » dans *Oriente Poliano*, Rome, Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1957, p. 155-171. Le miniaturiste ne s'est guère soucié du texte de Marco Polo qu'il devait illustrer.

Les travaux à conduire sur l'illustration du texte de Marco Polo ne manquent donc pas.

Deux mots de conclusion. A la fin de son compte rendu de l'édition de Benedetto Giulio Bertoni dans le *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* (t. 92, 1928, p. 293) disait justement « l'editore è troppo incline a dare come definitivo ciò che è ancora provvisorio » et il souhaitait que maints problèmes soient repris avec une plus grande pondération « con maggiore ponderatezza ». Je crois que ces sages paroles nous concernent tous. Nous avons tous essayé à maintes reprises d'éditer des textes et de réfléchir à diverses questions relatives au *Devisement du monde*. Mais nos œuvres à tous peuvent être améliorées. J'ai tenté de le montrer aujourd'hui en me fondant sur quelques passages et sur plusieurs travaux, y compris ceux auxquels j'ai collaboré. Les générations ultérieures ont encore du travail devant elles. Je leur souhaite bonne chance. *Vorrei augurare a tutti Buona Fortuna.*

## Références

- Alexander, Jonathan J. G. (1996). « A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles », dans Kathleen L. Scott, ed. *Later Gothic Manuscripts : A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles* (London : Miller), 68-73.
- Avril, François ; Gousset, Marie-Thérèse ; Monfrin, Jacques, et al., eds. (1996). *Das Buch der Wunder : Handschrift Français 2810 der Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris / Le Livre des merveilles : Manuscrit Français 2810 de la Bibliothèque nationale de France* (Luzern : Faksimile Verlag).
- Badel, Pierre-Yves (2012). *Marco Polo : La Description du monde* (Paris : Librairie générale française).

- Balasz, Étienne, ed. (1957). *Oriente Poliano : Studi e conferenze tenute all'Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente in occasione del VII centenario della nascita di Marco Polo, 1254-1954* (Roma : Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente).
- Barbieri, Alvaro, ed. (1998). *Milione : Redazione latina del manoscritto Z* (Parma : Guanda).
- Barbieri, Alvaro (2004). *Dal Viaggio al Libro : Studi sul Milione* (Verona : Fiorini).
- Barbieri, Alvaro ; Andreose, Alvise, eds. (1999). *Il « Milione » veneto, ms. CM 211 della Biblioteca Civica di Padova* (Venezia : Marsilio).
- Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Valeria, ed. (1975). *Il Milione, versione toscana del Trecento, Indice ragionato di Giorgio R. Cardona* (Milano : Adelphi).
- Bertoni, Giulio (1928). « Recensione di Benedetto 1928 », *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 92: 279-285.
- Blanchard, Élise ; Blanchard, Louis-Marie (2014). *Marco Polo : L'incroyable voyage* (Paris : Paulsen).
- Boerio, Giuseppe (1857/1976). *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano* (Venezia, nouv. éd., Milan: Martello).
- Burgio, Eugenio ; Simion, Samuela, eds. (2015). *Dei viaggi di Messer Marco Polo* (Venezia : Ca' Foscari).
- Burgio, Eugenio (2018). *Marco Polo, Le Devisement dou monde, 2. Glossario* (Venezia, Edizioni Ca' Foscari).
- Busby, Keith (2002). *Codex and Context : Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript, I* (Amsterdam-New York : Rodopi).
- Charignon, Antoine Joseph Henri (1924). *Le livre de Marco Polo, citoyen de Venise, conseiller privé et commissaire impérial de Khoubilaï Khaân, rédigé en Français sous sa dictée en 1298 par Rusticien de Pise, revu et corrigé par Marco Polo lui même en 1307* (Pékin : Albert Nachbaur).
- Ciccuto, Marcello (1981). *Il Milione* (Milano : Rizzoli).
- Conte, Silvia, ed. (2008). *I Viaggi del Milione : Itinerari testuali, vettori di trasmissione e metamorfosi del Devisement du monde di Marco Polo e Rustichello da Pisa nella pluralità delle attestazioni, Venezia, 6-8 ottobre 2005* (Roma : Tiellemedia).
- Critchley, John (1992). *Marco Polo's Book* (London : Variorum).

- Cruse, Mark (2001). *Illuminating the « Roman d'Alexandre », Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264 : The Manuscript as Monument* (Cambridge : Boydell & Brewer).
- Delisle, Léopold (1907). *Recherches sur la librairie de Charles V* (Paris : H. Champion).
- Du Cange, Charles (1688). *Glossarium ad Scriptores Mediae et Infimae Graecitatis* (Paris : Anissonios, Posuel, Rigaud).
- Dutschke, Consuelo Wager (1993). *Francesco Pipino and the Manuscripts of Marco Polo's 'Travels'*, PhD diss. (Los Angeles, University of California).
- Dutschke, Consuelo Wager (1998). « The Truth in the Book : The Marco Polo Texts in Royal 19.D.I. and Bodley 264 », *Scriptorium*, 52.2: 278-300.
- Eusebi, Mario, ed. (2010). *Il manoscritto della Bibliothèque Nationale de France Fr. 1116. I, Testo* (Roma-Padova : Antenore).
- Folena, Gianfranco (1968-1970). « Introduzione al veneziano 'de là da mar' », *Bollettino dell'Atlante Linguistico Mediterraneo*, 10-12 : 331-376.
- Folena, Gianfranco (1990). *Culture et Lingue nel Veneto médiévale* (Padova : Editoriale Programma).
- Gadrat Christine (2012). « La diffusion et la circulation manuscrite d'un texte médiéval : L'exemple du *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo », dans Elisabeth Malamut et Mohamed Ouerfelli, eds. *Les échanges en Méditerranée médiévale* (Aix-en-Provence : Presses universitaires de Provence), 273-288.
- Gadrat-Ouerfelli, Christine (2015). *Lire Marco Polo au Moyen Age : Traduction, diffusion et réception du « Devisement du monde »* (Turnhout : Brepols).
- Garcia Espada, Antonio (2009). *Marco Polo y la Cruzada : Historia de la literatura de viajes a las Indias en el siglo XIV* (Madrid : Marcial Pons).
- Gaunt, Simon (2013). *Marco Polo's Le Devisement du monde : Narrative Voice, Language and Diversity* (Cambridge : Brewer).
- Gossen, Carl Theodor (1975). « Marco Polo und Rustichello da Pisa », dans Manfred Bambeck et Hans Helmut Christmann, eds. *Philologica Romanica : Festschrift Erhard Lommatzsch gewidmet* (München : Wilhelm Fink Verlag), 133-143.
- Gousset, Marie-Thérèse (1996). « Un programme iconographique conçu par Jean sans Peur ? », dans François Avril et al., eds. (1996), 353-364.
- Haw, Stephen G. (2005). *Marco Polo's China : A Venetian in the Realm of Kubilai Khan* (London : Routledge).
- Heers, Jacques (1983). *Marco Polo* (Paris : Fayard).

- Helinga, Lotte (2014). *Texts in Transit : Manuscript to Proof and Print in the Fifteenth Century* (Leiden : Brill).
- Kaiser, Elgrid (1967). « Der Wortschatz des Marco Polo », PhD diss. (Wien, Philosophische Fakultät der Universität Wien).
- Kappler, René ; Michaud, Roland ; Michaud, Sabrina (2004). *Marco Polo : Le Devisement du monde* (Paris : Imprimerie nationale).
- Kazhdan, Alexander P., ed. (1991). *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford : Oxford University Press).
- Kim Loan Hoang-Thi. « Edition critique de la version française du livre de Marco Polo (les deux premières parties) », Positions des thèses de l'École des Chartes, 1967.
- Larner, John (1999). *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World* (London : Yale University Press).
- Martini, Emidio (1924). « Sui codici napoletani restituti dall' Austria », *Atti della Reale Accademia di Archeologie, Lettere e Belle Arti di Napoli*, 9 : 158-182.
- Masini, Federico ; Salvatori, Franco ; Schipani, Sandro, eds. (2006). *Marco Polo, 750 anni : Il viaggio, il libro, il diritto, Congresso internazionale, Roma, 23 novembre 2004 - Venezia, 25 novembre 2004* (Roma : Tiellemedia).
- Ménard, Philippe (1998). « Le prétendu 'remaniement' du *Devisement du Monde* de Marco Polo attribué à Grégoire », *Medioevo romanzo*, 22 : 332-351.
- Ménard, Philippe (2000). « Marco Polo en Angleterre », *Medioevo romanzo*, 24.2 : 189-208.
- Ménard, Philippe, ed. (2001-2009). *Le Devisement du monde*, avec Marie-Luce Chênerie, Michèle Guéret-Laferté et Philippe Ménard (tome I) ; Jeanne-Marie Boivin, Laurence Harf-Lancner, Laurence Mathey-Maille (tome II) ; Jean-Claude Faucon, Danielle Quérueil, Monique Santucci (t. III) ; Joël Blanchard et Michel Quéréuil (t. IV) ; Jean-Claude Delclos et Claude Roussel (t. V) ; Dominique Boutet, Thierry Delcourt et Danièle James-Raoul (t. VI) (Genève : Droz).
- Ménard, Philippe (2006). « Marco Polo en images : Les représentations du voyageur au Moyen Âge », dans Pietro G. Beltrami, Maria Grazia Capusso, Fabrizio Cigni, and Sergio Vatteroni, dir. *Studi di filologia romanza offerti a Valeria Bertolucci Pizzorusso* (Pisa : Pacini), t. II, 993-1022.
- Ménard, Philippe (2009). *Marco Polo à la découverte de l'Asie* (Grenoble : Éditions Glénat & Société de Géographie).
- Ménard, Philippe (2009). « Les mots orientaux chez Marco Polo », *Romance Philology*, 63 : 87-135.



- Ménard, Philippe (2009). « Réflexions sur le Prologue des différentes versions du *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo », dans Monique Léonard, Xavier Leroux and François Roudaut, eds. *Le lent brassement des livres, des rites et de la vie : Mélanges offerts à James Dauphiné* (Paris : Champion), 97-113.
- Ménard, Philippe (2012). « Deux nouveaux folios inédits d'un fragment franco-italien du *Devisement du Monde* de Marco Polo », *Medioevo romanzo*, 26 : 1-44.
- Ménard, Philippe (2017). « Cesare Segre et Marco Polo », dans *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Atti dei Convegni Lincei*, 313, *Convegno per Cesare Segre : Gli strumenti della critica (Roma, 11-12 novembre 2015)*, 89-108.
- Ménard, Philippe (2023). « Observations critiques sur le manuscrit français 1116 de la Bibliothèque nationale de France », *Francigena* 9, 219-248.
- Ménard, Philippe ; Chênerie, Marie-Luce ; Guéret-Laferté, Michèle, eds. (2001). *Marco Polo, Le Devisement du monde, Tome I : Départ des voyageurs et traversée de la Perse* (Genève : Droz).
- Meyer, Paul (1910). « Instructions pour la publication des anciens textes français », *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des chartes*, 71 : 224-233.
- Milanesi, Marica, ed. (1980). *Giovanni Battista Ramusio Navigazioni e Viaggi*, t. III (Torino : Einaudi).
- Monfrin, Jacques (1996). « La tradition du texte de Marco Polo », dans François Avril et al., eds. (1996), 337-351.
- Monfrin, Jacques (2001). *Études de philologie romane* (Genève : Droz).
- Overbeck, Anja (2003). *Literarische Skripta in Ostfrankreich : Edition und sprachliche Analyse einer französischen Handschrift des Reiseberichts von Marco Polo (Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, Cod. Holm. M 304)* (Trier : Kliomedia).
- Pelliot, Paul (1959-1973). *Notes on Marco Polo* (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale/Adrien-Maisonneuve).
- Racine, Pierre (2012). *Marco Polo et ses voyages* (Paris : Perrin).
- Reichert, Folker (1992). *Begegnungen mit China : Die Entdeckung Ostasiens im Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen : Thorbecke).
- Reichert, Folker (1997). *Incontri con la Cina : La scoperta dell'Asia orientale nel Medioevo* (Milano : Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana).
- Richard, Jean (1965). *Simon de Saint-Quentin ; Histoire des Tartares* (Paris : P. Geuthner).
- Ronchi, Gabriella (1982). *Marco Polo, Milione ; Le Divisament dou monde : Il Milione nelle redazioni toscana e franco-italiana* (Milano : Mondadori).

- Rossabi, Morris (2009). *Khubilai Khan : His Life and Times* (Berkeley : University of California Press).
- Rouse, Richard H. ; Rouse, Mary A. (2000). *Manuscripts and their Makers : Commercial Book Producers in Medieval Paris 1200-1500* (London : Miller ; Turnhout : Brepols).
- Segre, Cesare (1982), « Introduzione », dans Gabriella Ronchi (1988), *Marco Polo ; Milione. ...*, XI-XXIX.
- Segre, Cesare ; Ronchi, Gabriella ; Milanese, Marica (1983). *Avventure del Milione* (Parma : Zara).
- Valentinetti Mendi, Angelica (1991). *Una familia veneta del Libro de Marco Polo* (Madrid : Universidad Complutense de Madrid).
- Vogel, Hans Ulrich (2013). *Marco Polo Was in China : New Evidence from Currencies, Salts and Revenues* (Leiden : Brill).
- Wittkower, Rudolf (1957). « Marco Polo and the Pictorial Tradition of the Marvels of the East », dans Étienne Balazs, ed. (1957), 155-172.
- Zorzi, Alvise (1982). *Vita di Marco Polo Veneziano* (Milano : Rusconi).



# The Textual Transmission of the *Devisement dou monde*: Old Problems and New Insights

Alvise Andreose

The textual history of Marco Polo's *Devisement dou monde*, best known as *Milione*, is one of the most complex and intricate in medieval tradition.<sup>1</sup> After the research of Luigi Foscolo Benedetto,<sup>2</sup> there is no doubt that the original version of the text, the result of the cooperation between Marco Polo and Rustichello da Pisa during their incarceration in a Genoese prison in 1298, was written in “Franco-Italian”, the Italianised French used by Italian writers for chivalric, historical, didactic, moral, or religious works during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> Benedetto's prolegomena to the critical edition of 1928<sup>4</sup> – entitled *Introduzione. La tradizione manoscritta* – is devoted to the systematic examination of the manuscript transmission.<sup>5</sup> In the first chapter,<sup>6</sup> the Italian scholar identifies the ms. in Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *français* 1116 (designated «F») as the best surviving witness of the *Devisement dou monde* from a linguistic point

---

<sup>1</sup> On the title *Milione*, by which the work is generally known in the Italian tradition, see Benedetto (1930a), (1930b). See also Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2017).

<sup>2</sup> Benedetto (1928a). See also Benedetto (1924), (1929), (1930c), (1932), (1959-1960).

<sup>3</sup> On the use of this expression to indicate the language of the *Devisement dou monde*, see Andreose (2015b); Zinelli (2016), 229, 240, 255. Among the few scholars who still reject Benedetto's conclusion is Barbara Wehr, who has tried, without success, to prove that the *Devisement dou monde* was written originally not in Franco-Italian, but in Venetian, see Wehr (1993), (1999), (2001), (2004).

<sup>4</sup> Benedetto (1928b).

<sup>5</sup> Benedetto (1928a).

<sup>6</sup> Benedetto (1928a), XI-XXXI.

of view. This codex is the only complete copy<sup>7</sup> to preserve the language in which the work was originally written.<sup>8</sup> The quality of its readings, however, does not seem to be as excellent. In Benedetto's view, it is a quite distant copy of the original, because it sometimes offers an erroneous or abridged text. In particular, the comparison with other witnesses of the book (which we shall examine in the following pages) led him to believe that F derives, through one or more intermediaries, from an exemplar that had lost a part of the original contents.<sup>9</sup> That is why Benedetto chooses F as the base manuscript for his edition, but often corrects its readings on the basis of other authoritative witnesses and modifies its spelling to homogenise the form of the text.<sup>10</sup> The successive editions by Gabriella Ronchi (1982) and Mario Eusebi (2010) reproduce the characteristics of the manuscript more faithfully.<sup>11</sup>

In the chapters II-IV of his *Introduzione*, Benedetto examines three important versions of the *Devisement dou monde* that translate the text into different languages: into French («FG»), into Tuscan («TA»), and into a northern Italian variety («VA»).<sup>12</sup> Linguistic evidence suggests that they derive from Franco-Italian exemplars – indicated, respectively, as «F<sup>1</sup>», «F<sup>2</sup>», and «F<sup>3</sup>» – which were very similar to F in contents and structure.<sup>13</sup> Compared to the latter, they generally exhibit a more succinct and less reliable text, but sometimes they turn out to be useful for correcting its omissions and mistakes.

---

<sup>7</sup> A fragment of four folios very similar to F was discovered by Chiara Concina about fifteen years ago and studied by herself and Philippe Ménard. See Concina (2007); Ménard (2012); Andreose, Concina (2016), 16-24. On this manuscript, see below.

<sup>8</sup> The fragment contained in the ms. British Library, Cotton Otho D v, which Benedetto (1928a), XXXI-XXXIII, considered to be another witness of the Franco-Italian redaction, shows in fact Anglo-Norman linguistic features and does not display significant similarities to other manuscript families of the *Devisement dou monde*. See Ménard (2000), (2001), 69-70.

<sup>9</sup> Benedetto (1928a), XXXI.

<sup>10</sup> Benedetto (1928a), XXVIII-XXX; Ménard (2005), 407-408 n. 2.

<sup>11</sup> See Ronchi (1982); Eusebi (2010), (2018). The manuscript was first published by Roux de Rochelle (1824), 1-296.

<sup>12</sup> Benedetto (1928a), XXXIV-CXXXII.

<sup>13</sup> Benedetto (1928a), XCIX.

The ancestor called «FG» by Benedetto is a rewriting into “good French” – that is to say, a fourteenth-century standard French, free of phono-morphological and lexical Italianisms – which was produced in France a few years after the composition of the work, between 1310 and 1312.<sup>14</sup> It is transmitted by seventeen manuscripts, divided into three distinct subfamilies.<sup>15</sup> According to a certainly authentic passage, attested only in a group of witnesses, this translation was made from a copy belonging to the French nobleman Thibaut de Chepoy. He had been sent into the Mediterranean by Charles de Valois, who was preparing an expedition in the Levant to claim his rights to the throne of Constantinople.<sup>16</sup> In 1307, Thibaut was in Venice, where he received from Marco Polo «the first copy» (*la premiere coppie*) of the *Deisement dou monde* for his lord, which he then brought with him to France.<sup>17</sup> The text published by Guillaume Pauthier in 1865<sup>18</sup> on the basis of three manuscripts<sup>19</sup> nowadays has been replaced by the critical edition founded on all extant witnesses that a team of scholars directed by Philippe Ménard issued between 2001 and 2009.<sup>20</sup> One of the most important findings of this editorial undertaking is the rectification of Benedetto’s view that FG would not be a simple translation of the original text, but a veritable reworking (*rimaneggiamento*), attributable to a certain «Grégoire» who is mentioned in the table of contents of two manuscripts. Ménard has proved, however, that this Grégoire was a mere copyist and the French version corresponds *mot à mot* to that attested in

---

<sup>14</sup> See Ménard (2005), 420: «La version française a dû être confectionnée sans doute en 1310-1311. Nous avons un *terminus a quo*: le retour de Thibaut à Paris en 1310 et un *terminus ante quem*: la date de novembre 1312 où, dans les comptes de Mahaut d’Artois, il est fait mention de sommes versées à trois enlumineurs pour un *roman du Grant Khan*». Cf. also Ménard (1998), 345-348; (2001), 27. Benedetto (1928a), LX, though, had assumed that FG was accomplished in 1308.

<sup>15</sup> See Benedetto (1928a), XXXIV-LXXV; Ménard (2001), 40-69. Benedetto knew only fifteen manuscripts.

<sup>16</sup> Ménard (2001), 24-27; (2005), 419-420.

<sup>17</sup> Ménard (2001), 115.

<sup>18</sup> Pauthier (1865).

<sup>19</sup> Paris, BnF, fr. 2810, 5631, 5649.

<sup>20</sup> Ménard (2001-2009). I may also mention the edition by Badel (1998), based on a single manuscript.

F.<sup>21</sup> For this reason, the acronym «FG» was shelved in favour of «Fr», which is now used in Marco Polo studies.<sup>22</sup>

The Tuscan translation «TA» was made in the first half of the fourteenth century<sup>23</sup> from a model very close to F, and circulated especially in a merchant milieu.<sup>24</sup> It is represented by five fourteenth-century manuscripts, preserving the text in its original linguistic form,<sup>25</sup> and by a Latin translation dating back to the same century, known as «LT».<sup>26</sup> The latter, however, contaminates the text of TA with that of the Latin version by Francesco Pipino.<sup>27</sup>

The Tuscan translation was edited for the first time by Giovanni Battista Baldelli Boni in 1827 on the basis of the manuscript in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale II, IV, 88.<sup>28</sup> This choice depended essentially on the alleged antiquity of the codex<sup>29</sup> and its linguistic features, which led Baldelli Boni to consider it as «l'Ottimo» ('the Best') among the Tuscan

---

<sup>21</sup> Ménard (1998), 348-351; (2001), 28-31.

<sup>22</sup> In the last chapter of the *Introduzione*, devoted to hard-to-classify witnesses, Benedetto (1928a), CCI-CCX, also deals with the Catalan translation «K», which is preserved by three manuscripts written in three different languages: Catalan, Aragonese, French. This is an abridged version, which does not play an important role in establishing the critical text. The Catalan and Aragonese witnesses have been published respectively by Gallina (1958) and Nitti (1980). A philological study of the K family and a "critical" translation into modern French have recently been provided by Reginato (2022), who has confirmed the idea expressed by Benedetto (1928a), CCX, that the Catalan version is derived from a source close to Fr.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1994), XV. On this question see the summary of Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 29-30.

<sup>24</sup> Benedetto (1928a), LXXX, XCIX; Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1994), 325.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Benedetto (1928a), LXXX-LXXXIV. It should be remembered, in addition, that a large selection of chapters from TA was included by the Florentine writer Antonio Pucci within his *Libro di varie storie*. See Benedetto (1928a), LXXXV-LXXXIX; Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1994), 333-335.

<sup>26</sup> See Benedetto (1928a), LXXXIV-LXXXV; Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1994), 325-337; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 31-35. LT was published by Roux de Rochelle (1824), 297-494. Santoliquido (2019) prepared a new edition as his doctoral dissertation under the direction of Eugenio Burzio.

<sup>27</sup> On Pipino's translation, see below.

<sup>28</sup> Baldelli Boni (1827).

<sup>29</sup> According to a late annotation (1458), the manuscript would have been copied before 1309, but a number of scholars have raised doubts about this date. See Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1994), 328-329; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 29.

witnesses of the work.<sup>30</sup> The same text was published – with small changes – by Adolfo Bartoli in 1863 and Dante Olivieri in 1912 and 1928.<sup>31</sup> A critical edition based on all extant manuscripts was published by Valeria Bertolucci Pizzorusso in 1975. In this book, the text is accompanied by an important commentary (*Indice ragionato*) by Giorgio Raimondo Cardona.<sup>32</sup>

The translation «VA» was produced at the beginning of the fourteenth century, certainly before 1322 (and perhaps before 1314), in North-Eastern Italy.<sup>33</sup> It often offers a concise text, characterised by several omissions, so that it proves to be less useful than Fr and TA to ameliorate the text represented by F.<sup>34</sup> The critical edition issued by Alvaro Barbieri and myself in 1999 is basically founded on the ms. in Padua, Biblioteca Civica, CM 211, which was copied in 1445 by the Venetian nobleman Niccolò Vitturi.<sup>35</sup> Despite its relatively late date, this codex is the best among the four witnesses transmitting the text of VA in its original linguistic form. Although Benedetto, relying on previous studies,<sup>36</sup> spoke of «redazione veneta» ('Venetian redaction' or, more precisely, 'Venetan redaction'), the linguistic analysis of the manuscripts occupying the highest positions on the stemma – particularly of the fragment contained in the ms. Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, 3999 (first half of the fourteenth century) – nevertheless reveals that VA circulated in Emilia and Lombardy in earliest times, but not in Veneto.<sup>37</sup> That is why it is more appropriate to designate this version as «North-Eastern Italian» or «Northern Italian».

<sup>30</sup> See Baldelli Boni (1827), vol. I, VII. This designation, as demonstrated by Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1994), 340-342, was created by Apostolo Zeno.

<sup>31</sup> Bartoli (1863); Olivieri (1928a).

<sup>32</sup> See Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1994); Cardona (1994). The edition by Bertolucci Pizzorusso is based essentially on the ms. Florence, BNC, II, IV, 136.

<sup>33</sup> This date can be deduced from the fact that the Latin translation P, which was made from an exemplar of VA, was made before 1322 (or 1314). See below.

<sup>34</sup> On VA, see Benedetto (1928a), C-CXXXII; Barbieri (1999); Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 37-61.

<sup>35</sup> Barbieri, Andreose (1999).

<sup>36</sup> I.e. those of Olivieri (1904-1905), (1908) and Pelaez (1906). See Andreose (2002), 663-664.

<sup>37</sup> See Andreose (2002), and particularly the observations of Andreose (2016b), 237-238: «È da notare [...] che dei quattro rami in cui si articola lo *stemma* della famiglia, soltanto uno presenta in una posizione relativamente alta testimoni di origine veneta: il ms. CM 211 della Biblioteca Civica di Padova (= VA<sup>3</sup>, 1445), il 557 della Burgerbibliothek di Berna (VA<sup>5</sup>, sec. XVI in.) e il perduto codice appartenuto al marchese Ippolito Venturi Ginori Lisci (VA<sup>4</sup>, sec. XV in.).»



VA is the family of witnesses that generated the greatest number of descendants. At a very early stage, it was turned into Latin twice. The most ancient translation (known as «P») was made by the Dominican friar Francesco Pipino da Bologna after 1310 and before 1322 (or, perhaps, before 1314).<sup>38</sup> The second one (known as «LB») was made before 1333-1334, presumably in Lombardy.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, there exists a Tuscan adaptation, «TB», preserved by seven manuscripts,<sup>40</sup> which in the fifteenth century gave birth to another Latin translation («LA») and a German version.<sup>41</sup> A collateral of TB is at the origin of a wide group of witnesses<sup>42</sup> that includes five manuscripts and a series of early editions dating back to the fifteenth-

---

dipendenti tutti e tre da un unico capostipite. Il testimone più antico di tale ramo, il Riccardiano 1924 (VA<sup>2</sup>, sec. XIV m.), non è però veneto, ma quasi sicuramente lombardo. Da un collaterale di VA<sup>2</sup> discende poi la versione toscana TB, da cui deriva a sua volta la versione latina LA. Gli altri tre rami sono costituiti da un frammento recante evidenti tratti linguistici bolognesi (il ms. 3999 della Biblioteca Casanatense di Roma, VA<sup>1</sup>, della metà del sec. XIV), dalla redazione latina del frate bolognese Francesco Pipino (P, p. 1310, a. 1322) e dalla redazione latina LB (a. 1333-1334 [...]). Quest'ultima [...] pare aver circolato soltanto in Lombardia e potrebbe essere originaria di tale area. Tutto induce a ritenere, dunque, che la versione VA sia giunta nel Veneto abbastanza tardi (sec. XV). La sua diffusione a Venezia non è documentata prima del 1445, data di VA<sup>3</sup>. [...] [S]ono soltanto due le copie sicuramente esemplate nella città lagunare – VA<sup>3</sup> e il ms. 1296 della Biblioteca Statale di Lucca, che si colloca nei piani bassi dello *stemma* della famiglia».

<sup>38</sup> See Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 64-67, and also Dutschke (1993), 216-220. Since the *Liber* is mentioned in another work by Pipino, the *Chronicon*, which basically tells of events that occurred by the year 1314, numerous scholars consider this date as the *terminus ad quem*, see Manzoni (1894-1895), 269-270; Zaccagnini (1935-1936), 69-70; Reichert (1997), 174 n. 123 and 125, 239-240; Ménard (2017), 202-203. The final sections of the *Chronicon*, however, mention facts which happened in 1316, 1317, 1322, see Dutschke (1993), 218. For a critical survey of the various hypotheses see *ibid.*, 216-220; Grisafi (2014), 46-48.

<sup>39</sup> See Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 43-45, 178-179, 210. It should be noted, however, that this *terminus ad quem* is not certain. Cf. Andreose (2016b), 237 n. 23.

<sup>40</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CV-CVIII, knew only six manuscripts. The seventh was identified by Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1994), 325-326. See also Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 45-47.

<sup>41</sup> This translation appears in the *editio princeps* of Marco Polo's book, printed by Friedrich Creussner in Nuremberg in 1477, see Benedetto (1928) CXIV-CXIX; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 48-49. LA, too, circulated in Germany and was translated into German during the first half of the fifteenth century. See *ibid.*, 59-61.

<sup>42</sup> See Benedetto (1928a), CXXIV-CXXXI; Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1983); Valentinetti Mendi (1992), 91-115; Gobbato (2010); Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 40-43.

sixteenth centuries, among which the most important is the Spanish translation by Rodrigo Fernández de Santaella printed in Sevilla in 1503.<sup>43</sup>

The Latin translation P, whose original title is *Liber de conditionibus et consuetudinibus orientalium regionum*, is the subject of a separate chapter of Benedetto's introduction.<sup>44</sup> It is attested by over sixty manuscripts, according to the most recent accounts.<sup>45</sup> Without a doubt, it was the version of Marco Polo's book that met with the greatest success during the Middle Ages, because it mainly circulated among churchmen and scholars.<sup>46</sup> In the prologue, Pipino claims to have undertaken the translation by order of his superiors. His work, he adds immediately, was inspired by the desire to adapt the text linguistically and stylistically to the taste of a wider and more educated readership than that to which the work originally was addressed. Moreover, he expresses the intention to provide his audience with a religious interpretation of some passages of the book.<sup>47</sup> The most relevant changes from the original version are the division of the contents into three books, homogeneous in length, and the introduction into the text of judgments condemning the oriental beliefs and practices contrary to Christian doctrine. Furthermore, the translation shows a certain tendency to group together the information more rationally, following a trend already visible in its source VA.

Because of the vast and complex textual tradition, a critical edition of P based on all extant manuscripts is still missing, even though attempts at classifying the various redactions have been made by Consuelo Wager Dutschke and Christine Gadrat-Ouerfelli.<sup>48</sup> Over a century ago, Justin

---

<sup>43</sup> The bibliography on this translation is very extensive. For further information one should consult the fundamental studies by Gil (1987) and Cátedra (2006). See particularly the critical edition by Angélica Valentinetti Mendi (2008), who also publishes the Italian manuscript used by Santaella (Sevilla, Biblioteca Colombina, Sala Cristóbal Colón, ms. 11).

<sup>44</sup> On Pipino's translation, see especially Dutschke (1993); Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 63-94; Ménard (2017).

<sup>45</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 384-385, Burgio, Simion (2018), 174-175 n. 8

<sup>46</sup> The success of Pipino's version continued into the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. See Benedetto (1928a), CXLIX-CLIII, and Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 86-91. Among the translations, the Portuguese version published in Lisbon in 1502 by the German typographer Valentim Fernandes deserves particular mention. On this redaction see Pereira (1922).

<sup>47</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLIV. See also Simion (2015a), *Prefazione* 1-3.

<sup>48</sup> Dutschke (1993), 245-261; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 71-86.

Václav Prášek edited, at the foot of the Czech translation, the version transmitted by the ms. Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, Vindobonensis Latinus 50 (then in Vienna), and recorded the variants from two manuscripts in Prague and from P's *editio princeps* (Gouda, 1483-1484) in the apparatus.<sup>49</sup> In recent times, Samuela Simion has published the edition of the text contained in the ms. Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 983.<sup>50</sup>

The penultimate chapter of the *Introduzione* is devoted to a group of witnesses that, in Benedetto's view, would prove the existence of a textual «phase prior to F» (*fase anteriore a F*) and the other families considered up until now.<sup>51</sup> Benedetto starts by examining the most famous post-medieval version of Marco Polo's book, the Italian translation published by Giovanni Battista Ramusio in the *Secondo volume delle Navigazioni e viaggi* (Venezia, 1559).<sup>52</sup> This redaction, known as «R», contains many variations and additions compared to F. In attempting to detect its sources, Benedetto identified a small but significant number of versions that often offer better readings than F and the related families Fr, TA, VA. The most important among these is the Latin translation «Z», which has a shortened text in some chapters, but in others displays supplementary contents of undoubted authenticity. Accordingly, the hypothesis is proposed that this redaction depends on a Franco-Italian exemplar that was more complete and correct than that from which F Fr TA VA derive.<sup>53</sup> Although the only extant witness of Z – the manuscript in the Archivo y Biblioteca Capitulares de Toledo, Zelada 49.20<sup>54</sup> – was copied around 1450-1460,<sup>55</sup> numerous pieces of evidence suggest that the translation was made in the first four decades of the fourteenth century, presumably in the first quarter.<sup>56</sup> Benedetto, who first discovered this version and recognised its

<sup>49</sup> Prášek (1902). See Dutschke (1993), 237.

<sup>50</sup> Simion (2015a).

<sup>51</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLVIII-CC.

<sup>52</sup> Ramusio (1559), 2r-60r. See also Milanese (1978-1988), vol. III, 7-297; Simion (2015b).

<sup>53</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXIII-CLXXIII. This theory will be discussed in the following pages.

<sup>54</sup> See the description of the manuscript in Barbieri (1998), 578-580.

<sup>55</sup> Mascherpa (2007-2008), 15-18.

<sup>56</sup> A *terminus ad quem* may be deduced from the works of the Dominican friars Pietro Calò da Chioggia and Filippino da Ferrara, which contain extracts from Z, see Benedetto (1928a), CCXIV-CCXVI; (1959-1960), 573-575; Dutschke (1993), 1227-1259; Amadori (1998);

relevance, did not take the text from the Toledo manuscript, which he did not know, but from a direct copy, commissioned in 1795 by the *abbé* Giuseppe Toaldo (1719-1797), professor of geography and astronomy at the University of Padua, and now preserved at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan.<sup>57</sup> The Zelada codex was localised in 1932 by the British collector and savant Sir Percival David, who was searching for it on behalf of Arthur Christopher Moule.<sup>58</sup> The latter could thereby publish the transcription of the Toledan manuscript in the second volume of his edition of Marco Polo's book issued in 1938, which is also signed by Paul Pelliot.<sup>59</sup> Over the past three decades, the increasing interest in Z's version stimulated several investigations, culminating in the critical edition prepared by Alvaro Barbieri (1998)<sup>60</sup> and the studies by Giuseppe Mascherpa, which examine all witnesses directly or indirectly related to this redaction.<sup>61</sup>

A part of the additional materials that distinguish Z from F Fr TA VA is also shared by the versions «L» and «V». The former is a Latin compendium, preserved by six manuscripts,<sup>62</sup> which was made from a Franco-Italian model<sup>63</sup> in the fourteenth century (before 1372). L remained unpublished for a long time and only recently has been published in electronic

---

Mascherpa (2008); Gobbato (2015); Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 96, 167-173, 179-180. Calò's *Legendae* were composed after 1330-1332 and before 1340, see Poncelet (1910), 31; Devos (1948), 258. Filippino's *Liber de introductione loquendi* was written after 1325 and before 1347, see Dutschke (1993), 1228-1229. For these texts, see also below.

<sup>57</sup> Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, ms. Y 160 sup.

<sup>58</sup> Barbieri (1998), 569-573; (2004c), 58-59; (2016), 37-42. In the same year, the manuscript was also identified by the American scholar James Homer Herriott (1937).

<sup>59</sup> Moule, Pelliot (1938), vol. II. In fact, the volumes containing the critical translation and Z's edition were produced solely by Moule. The commentary of Pelliot (1959-1973) appeared posthumously as a separate publication.

<sup>60</sup> Barbieri (1998).

<sup>61</sup> Mascherpa (2007-2008), 15-18; (2008); (2017); (2018); (2024).

<sup>62</sup> Burgio, Mascherpa (2007), 133; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 102-103, 404; Buzzoni et al. (2016), 656-657; Burgio (2018), 69-70 n. 2. Benedetto (1928a), CLXXVIII-CLXXX, knew only four manuscripts.

<sup>63</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXXVIII-CLXXXI; Burgio (2018).

form by Eugenio Burgio,<sup>64</sup> who is currently preparing the critical edition.<sup>65</sup> Although it is usually thought to be written in Veneto on the basis of linguistic clues,<sup>66</sup> its language does not exhibit characteristics specific to this area, but only general features of northern Italian varieties.<sup>67</sup> The study of its textual transmission reveals that it circulated in Ferrara (in Emilia-Romagna) and Padua (in Veneto) at an earlier time, and spread to Flanders in the fifteenth century.<sup>68</sup>

The Venetian version V is transmitted by a single fifteenth-century codex (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Hamilton 424). Although its text is disfigured by frequent corruptions and misunderstandings, Benedetto proved that its source was an authoritative manuscript, occupying a very high position on the stemma.<sup>69</sup> The in-depth analyses conducted by Samuela Simion<sup>70</sup> have confirmed Benedetto's hypothesis that V derives from a «Latin translation of a Franco-Italian text».<sup>71</sup>

According to Benedetto's interpretation, the Italian translation by Rasmusio («R») resulted from the collation of five different texts.<sup>72</sup> P served as the principal model in terms of contents, style and book structure.<sup>73</sup> A second source that also played a key role in the text's construction was a Latin witness belonging to Z's family, now lost, which is to be identified with the codex «of wonderful antiquity» (*di maravigliosa antichità*) that

---

<sup>64</sup> Burgio (2015). At the end of her volume on the medieval transmission and reception of Marco Polo's book, Christine Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 404-413, gives the first seven chapters of L on the basis of the codex Venice, Museo Civico Correr, 2408, and has recorded variants from four other manuscripts in the apparatus.

<sup>65</sup> Buzzoni et al. (2016), 655-660.

<sup>66</sup> Burgio, Mascherpa (2007), 144-146; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 102-103; Burgio (2018), 70 n. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Burgio, Mascherpa (2007), 142-147; Burgio (2018), 77-78. See also Andreose (2016b), 242.

<sup>68</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 103-105, 404-411.

<sup>69</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXXIII-CLXXVIII.

<sup>70</sup> Simion (2007-2008); (2011), 33-37; (2019), 68-72, 79-110. On this subject, see below.

<sup>71</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXXVII-CLXXVIII.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Benedetto (1928a), CLVIII-CXCIII, particularly CLXII, CLXXXVII-CXCIII. Research carried out by a team of scholars directed by Eugenio Burgio between 2009 and 2015 confirmed and clarified Benedetto's conclusions. See Burgio (2011), VII-XXXVI; Andreose (2015a).

<sup>73</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXII («base originaria e principale, per la sostanza e per lo stile e per la squadratura dell'opera»).

Ramusio claims to have borrowed from a Venetian nobleman of the Ghisi family in the prologue to his translation.<sup>74</sup> Textual evidence shows that this source – designated by Benedetto as «Z<sup>1</sup>» – offered a more correct and complete text than the one attested in the Zelada codex, so that the testimony of R turns out to be of fundamental importance for reconstructing the shape of the original Z.<sup>75</sup> Benedetto identifies two other sources of Ramusio in the versions L and V, even though their influence on the translation seems to be smaller than that of P and Z.<sup>76</sup> A more significant contribution was given by the Venetian translation «VB»,<sup>77</sup> preserved by three fifteenth-century manuscripts and a sixteenth-century fragment<sup>78</sup> but presumably dating back to the previous century,<sup>79</sup> which features various interpolations and additions. Its text – now available thanks to Pamela Gennari's edition<sup>80</sup> – derives basically from a source similar to F, though some readings indicate sporadic contact with Z.<sup>81</sup>

Several passages in the *Introduzione* express the idea that F and the families of manuscripts offering a similar text in terms of contents and structure (Fr TA VA) depend on a common source that had lost some of the original data,<sup>82</sup> which are instead preserved in Z and, to a lesser extent, in L and V.<sup>83</sup> Benedetto's opinion about the genealogical relations between these three versions, however, is more nuanced. At first, he claims that Z V L form «a single group» compared to F Fr TA VA,<sup>84</sup> within which V

<sup>74</sup> Milanese (1978-1988), vol. III, 32 n. 1. See also Ramusio (1559), 7r; Simion (2015b), *Prefazione* 68.

<sup>75</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXVII-CLXIX. See also Benedetto (1940).

<sup>76</sup> The results of Benedetto (1928a), CLXXVIII, CLXXXI, were refined by Burgio (2011), XXIX-XXXIII (par. by A. Andreose), XXVI-XXIX (par. by P. Gennari and E. Burgio).

<sup>77</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXXXVIII-CXCI. See Burgio (2011), XXXIII-XXXVI (par. by A. Andreose).

<sup>78</sup> Andreose (2018-2019).

<sup>79</sup> Simion (2018), 110-113.

<sup>80</sup> Gennari (2008-2009); (2015).

<sup>81</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXXXII-CLXXXVII; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 107-109.

<sup>82</sup> Benedetto (1928a), LXXX, XCIX, CXIII, CC, CXX ff.

<sup>83</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLVIII. See also *ibid.*, CLXXXII, CC.

<sup>84</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXXXII: «Z, V, L costituiscono, di fronte alle famiglie studiate nei precedenti capitoli, un unico gruppo. Oltre alle numerose novità che hanno, come vedemmo, in comune, si consideri la loro concordia in certe lezioni tipicamente differenziali rispetto a F

and L represent a «distinct subgroup».<sup>85</sup> Immediately afterwards, though, he argues that Z V L presuppose a Franco-Italian text, which looked, overall, like F in style and order but presented, in some places, a considerably richer text, and maintains that V and L derive «independently from each other» from an intermediate textual phase between the «primitive form» attested by the Toledan manuscript and Z<sup>1</sup> (= R) and «that preserved today by F».<sup>86</sup> This idea springs from the observation that V and L share some, probably original, variants with Z, but lack most of the *addenda* that distinguish the Zelada codex and Ramusio's translation from the rest of the *Devisement's* witnesses.<sup>87</sup>

From a theoretical point of view, the pages devoted to the relationships between Z V L, which are so important to the reconstruction of the early stages of the manuscript transmission and, accordingly, the establishment of the critical text, are also the weakest of the whole introduction. Benedetto's lack of familiarity with the principles of Lachmann's method emerges not only from the contradictions within his argument, but especially from his failure to distinguish between “agreement in error” and “agreement in exact reading”.<sup>88</sup> Although it is true, at least in principle, that the theory of the progressive impoverishment of the original text<sup>89</sup> could account for the existence of two groups of families, respectively L V

---

[...]. Anche esaminati individualmente, *V* e *L* mostrano il loro stretto rapporto con *Z*, non solo pei nuovi passi comuni già segnalati, ma anche per caratteristiche coincidenze testuali».

<sup>85</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXXXII: «*V* e *L* costituiscono a loro volta, di fronte a *Z* e *Z*<sup>1</sup>, un sottogruppo distinto. Più che la comunanza di certe novità non attestate altrimenti e l'evidenza di certe consonanze formali, ce ne persuade l'analogo impoverimento del contenuto: manca ad entrambi la maggior parte dei passi che fanno il pregio caratteristico di *Z* e *Z*<sup>1</sup>. Né si tratta soltanto di soppressioni. La materia in questione vi appare ridotta a fuggevoli cenni, ad enigmatici echi».

<sup>86</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXXXII (see also CC).

<sup>87</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXXXII: «la ricchezza del testo su cui fu compiuta la versione latina oggi attestata da *Z* e da *R* [...], probabilmente assai vicina all'integrità originaria, si trova quasi identicamente ridotta negli attuali *V* e *L*».

<sup>88</sup> See the remarks by Barbieri (2004c), 62: «Benedetto non ha proposto uno *stemma* per i piani alti della tradizione poliana. Bisogna del resto tenere presente che A e B non sono famiglie di manoscritti nel senso vero e proprio della parola. Una rigorosa classificazione genealogica, visualizzata da uno schema di filiazione, è dunque possibile solo per le singole redazioni. Per questa ragione, Benedetto ha dato soltanto due *stemmata* parziali: per la versione oitanica trentesca FG e per la versione veneto-emiliana VA».

<sup>89</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXXXII, CC.

and F Fr TA VA, which would reflect two different textual forms, the fact remains that the presence of authentic readings in Z V L not found in any other manuscript has no “conjunctive” value and does not suffice to prove their kinship, unless one admits that the author introduced changes into the first draft of his book at a later date – an hypothesis that Benedetto firmly rejects as «not necessary nor useful», though «abstractly more than legitimate». <sup>90</sup> The Italian scholar not only will not correct this fallacious argument in his successive studies of Marco Polo’s book, but will even formalise it into the theory of a bipartite tradition.

The idea that the *Devisement*’s witnesses divide into two groups, «A» and «B», whose ancestors derive from a corrupted archetype (O<sup>1</sup>), is presented by Benedetto for the first time in an essay published in 1929,<sup>91</sup> with which he replies to the sharp criticism of his critical edition advanced by Giulio Bertoni.<sup>92</sup> He finally adopts this classification in the prologue of the “critical translation” of Marco Polo’s book which appeared in 1932.<sup>93</sup> Even though, as said above, the idea of a bifid stemma does not emerge clearly from the 1928 introduction, which is doubtless the fundamental reference point for the *Devisement*’s textual state, it met immediately with considerable success. It was already referred to in a review-article by Mario Casella published in 1929<sup>94</sup> and was quoted afterwards in a number of general overviews to illustrate Benedetto’s conclusions.<sup>95</sup> In actuality, this model proves to be inadequate for the description of his conception of the earliest stages of the manuscript transmission and especially seems to be too reductive compared to the more complex reality of the data.

---

<sup>90</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CXCIX.

<sup>91</sup> Benedetto (1929), 17-18, 23, 59.

<sup>92</sup> Bertoni (1928).

<sup>93</sup> Benedetto (1932), XXI-XXII (for more on this issue, see below). Benedetto refers to the division of the manuscript transmission into two main branches also in later studies, see e.g. Benedetto (1959-1960), 526.

<sup>94</sup> Casella (1929), 200 n. 1.

<sup>95</sup> Terracini (1933), 372-375; Moule, Pelliot (1938), vol. I, 41; Larner (1999), 4, 58, 185; Barbieri (1998), 568-569; (2004c), 52-56; (2004b), 140-141, 146; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 16-109. See also Battaglia Ricci (1992), 86 n. 6; Reichert (1997), 169-180.



The real existence of the B-group is one of the points of Benedetto's *recensio* that raises the most serious questions. The notion of the connection between L V Z is not deduced from common errors, but from the fact that all three share some additions which are missing from the remaining families F Fr TA VA. This supplementary material consists of single expressions, phrases or short sentences that appears to be original and, for this reason, cannot be considered as *Bindefehler*. Apart from these brief additions, L and V offer the same text as the A-group, so, in the following studies, the idea gained weight that the Toledan manuscript – which we will designate as «Z» according to a consolidated tradition – and Z<sup>1</sup>, one of the main sources of R, derive from an exemplar very close to the Franco-Italian original, and the other versions were produced through a progressive reduction of the original text. It should be remembered that, in two papers which appeared in 1929 and 1930, the above-mentioned Mario Casella and the classical philologist Aurelio Peretti insisted on the authenticity of the adjunctive information passed on by the Zelada codex and, to a lesser extent, by the Ramusian translation.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, both scholars excluded that these variants were added by Marco Polo after his return to Venice, reiterating a conviction that already was expressed by Benedetto.<sup>97</sup> The latter in 1932 published an Italian translation of the *Devisement dou monde* that was based on the presupposition that Z and R depend on a source nearer to the original than any other manuscript.<sup>98</sup> In the 1928's critical edition, Benedetto reported the *addenda* of Z<sup>1</sup> and R only in the apparatus,<sup>99</sup> but, four years later, he attempted a reconstruction of the original contents of the book, integrating texts written in different languages into the Italian translation. That is why this work is usually referred to as a “critical translation”.<sup>100</sup> The same solution was adopted, some time later, by Arthur Christopher Moule in the English translation contained in

---

<sup>96</sup> Casella (1929); Peretti (1930).

<sup>97</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CXCVIII-CXCIX.

<sup>98</sup> Benedetto (1932).

<sup>99</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CC, CXX-CXXI. See also Barbieri (2016), 32-33.

<sup>100</sup> Barbieri (2016), 35-37.

the first volume of his edition which appeared in 1938.<sup>101</sup> The discovery of the Toledan manuscript, which took place in 1932, as seen above, allowed him to confirm Benedetto's hypothesis about the antiquity of Z and, at the same time, to base his text on a more authoritative exemplar than the eighteenth-century copy used by the Italian scholar.<sup>102</sup>

In 1933, the Italian linguist Benvenuto Terracini issued an article bearing the significant title *Ricerche e appunti sulla più antica redazione del Milione* ('Research and notes on the earliest redaction of the *Milione*').<sup>103</sup> Building on the conclusions of Benedetto's analysis and taking advantage of Casella's and Peretti's contributions, Terracini proposed a more precise classification of the witnesses occupying the highest positions on the stemma. He developed the idea – already suggested (albeit vaguely) by Benedetto<sup>104</sup> – that the group composed by Z and R (which he indicates with «Z<sup>1</sup>»)<sup>105</sup> forms an isolated branch of the tradition and that the remaining versions, including L and V, represent different stages in a progressive impoverishment of the original text. In his view, the A-branch does not derive from the original or from an archetype, but depends on a sub-archetype offering an abridged version of the original draft (this sub-archetype

---

<sup>101</sup> Moule, Pelliot (1938), vol. I. On Moule's edition see Benedetto (1939); Barbieri (2016), 40-43.

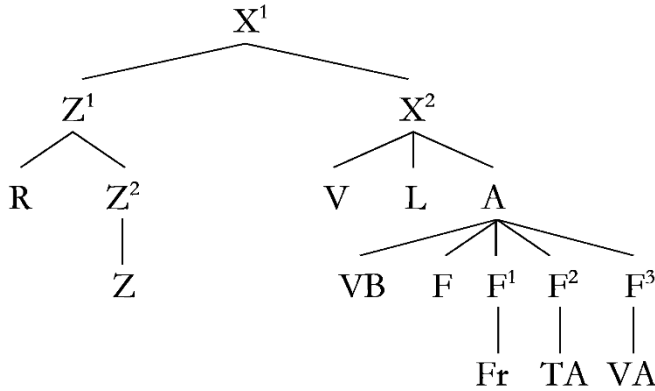
<sup>102</sup> Without diminishing the importance of the discovery, it should be noted that the diplomatic edition of Moule did not represent a substantial improvement on Benedetto's text, since Toaldo's copy proved to be very faithful to its model.

<sup>103</sup> Terracini (1933).

<sup>104</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXXXII, CC. See the observations by Casella (1929), 215: «la divisione di due famiglie A e B, nata da una necessità di chiarezza espositiva e determinata dalla volontà di isolare, nella storia della propagazione del testo, la questione ramusiana, serve a documentare che siamo alla presenza di una molteplicità di redazioni, varie di contenuto, più o meno affini, più o meno conservative, ma tutte risalenti a un apografo franco-italiano incompleto ed errato».

<sup>105</sup> As said above, the same abbreviation is used by Benedetto to indicate the «Ghisi» codex, that is to say the exemplar of the Z family that served as a source for Ramusio's translation. See Benedetto (1928a), CLXVIII-CLXIX.

is designated as «X<sup>2</sup>»). For representing the relationships between the main redactions, Terracini drew the following figure:<sup>106</sup>



In Terracini's view, the text reduction would have taken place in two stages: in the ancestor «X<sup>2</sup>», the alleged source of L, V and A; and in A, which would be at the origin of VB, F and the Franco-Italian exemplars F<sup>1</sup>, F<sup>2</sup>, F<sup>3</sup>, from which Fr, TA, VA derive respectively.<sup>107</sup>

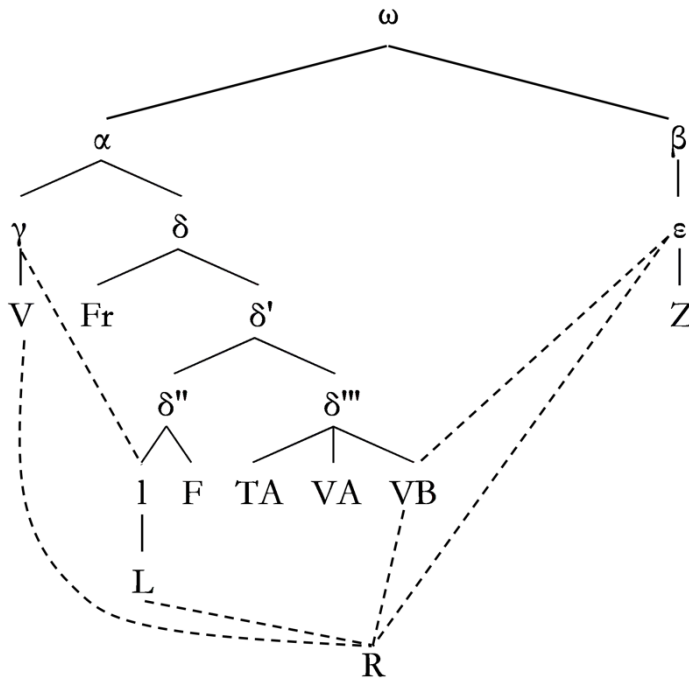
The idea that there existed two textual stages between the archetype and F Fr VA TA was adopted and developed by Eugenio Burgio and Mario Eusebi, who, in a major paper published in 2008, re-examined the textual transmission of the *Devisement dou monde* and drew up, for the first time in Marco Polo studies, a real *stemma codicum*.<sup>108</sup> Drawing on the research of Terracini, they proposed a new genealogical classification of the manuscripts. According to their hypothesis, Z constitutes a separate branch of the tradition, called «β», whereas V, L, and VB are placed in the other branch, called «α»: V derives directly from α, together with its collateral

<sup>106</sup> Terracini (1933), 417.

<sup>107</sup> I refrain from considering some of the weaknesses of Terracini's reconstruction, about which see Barbieri (2004c), 61.

<sup>108</sup> Burgio, Eusebi (2008).

« $\delta$ », which includes Fr, L, F, TA, VA, VB; L forms the « $\delta$ ''-group» with F; and VB belongs to the « $\delta$ '''-group», together with TA and VA:<sup>109</sup>



I will not examine all of the differences between Burgio and Eusebi's and Terracini's classifications, but I would like to focus on the fact that, in both proposals, the Franco-Italian version F occupies a quite low position on the stemma compared to that of Z. In the first hypothesis, the ms. BnF fr. 1116 is separated from the archetype by two *codices interpositi*; in the second one, by four. These conclusions agree with Benedetto's opinion that the original text would have passed through «various phases of a progressive shortening» and F would represent «one of these phases».<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Burgio, Eusebi (2008), 45.

<sup>110</sup> Benedetto (1928a), XXXI.

Although various important scholars<sup>111</sup> believe that Z is more faithful to the original draft written in Genoa than F, there are a good number who disagree. Already in the nineteenth century, Giovanni Battista Baldelli Boni (1827),<sup>112</sup> Giovanni Giuseppe Bianconi (1862),<sup>113</sup> Guillaume Pauthier (1865)<sup>114</sup> and Henry Yule (1871)<sup>115</sup> proposed that the additions found in Ramusio's text might be developments posterior to the first redaction. This idea received further attention after Benedetto identified the

---

<sup>111</sup> In addition to the studies discussed above, we should mention Barbieri (2004c), 60-62; (2004b), 145-154; Burgio (2017).

<sup>112</sup> Baldelli Boni (1827), vol. I, XVII: «[...] è da avvertire, che avventurosamente, il celebre viaggiatore, mosso probabilmente dalla grata accoglienza, fatta dai più, alla sua opera, non si ristette dal ritoccarla ed ampliarla anche posteriormente; lo chè potè fare, spogliando i suoi diffusi memoriali raccolti in viaggiando, e di cui fa ei stesso menzione. E una, o più di quelle impinguate copie, ebbe a mano il dotto e avventuroso Ramusio».

<sup>113</sup> Bianconi (1862), 60-61: «Forse M. Polo ebbe [= some passages attested only in Ramusio's version] narrate verbalmente in Patria: ma egli avvertitamente aveale forse escluse da' suoi scritti come indegne di esservi registrate. Alcune giunte del Ramusio vengono senza dubbio da questa fonte, la tradizione orale».

<sup>114</sup> Pauthier (1865), vol. I, XIV: «[Marco Polo] avait sans doute fait une rédaction pour lui-même, laquelle, après sa mort, aura été trouvée dans ses papiers, ou recueillie de sa bouche, et qui aura passé ensuite avec une foule d'autres additions, moins authentiques, dans la rédaction italienne publiée par Ramusio». See also Pauthier's comment about a detail found only in R: «C'est là évidemment un développement postérieur à la rédaction primitive, qui porte cependant un grand cachet de vérité, et qui n'a pu émaner oralement, ou par écrit, que de Marc Pol lui-même» (*ibid.*, vol. II, 572-573 n. 10). The hypothesis that the alleged additions would depend on the author's oral accounts, already proposed by Bianconi (see previous note), is discussed by Roques (1955), 405, and Vogel (2013), 21-22.

It should be mentioned that Pauthier (1865), vol. I, LXXXVIII-XCI, developing an idea of Paulin Paris (1851), 12-13, also claimed that Fr's source was a version revised and corrected by Marco Polo. For arguments against this hypothesis, see Yule, Cordier (1903), vol. I, 92-94, and especially Benedetto (1928a), LVIII-LIX, LXXVIII-LXXIX. Pauthier's view was adopted by Langlois (1921), 253-255, Bertoni (1928), 289-290, and, recently, by Battaglia Ricci (1992), 87; (2001), XVII-XXII. See Barbieri (2004b), 150; Burgio, Eusebi (2008), 22-23; Burgio (2017), 3-4.

<sup>115</sup> Yule, Cordier (1903), vol. I, 100: «I suppose that Polo in his latter years added with his own hand supplementary notes and reminiscences, marginally or otherwise, to a copy of his book; that these, perhaps in his lifetime, more probably after his death, were digested and translated into Latin; and that Ramusio, or some friend of his, in retranslating and fusing them with Pipino's version for the *Navigazioni*, made those minor modifications in names and other matters which we have already noticed. The mere facts of digestion from memoranda and double translation would account for a good deal of unintentional corruption. See also *ibid.*, 101.

Z-version. Since his critical edition appeared in 1928, numerous philologists and historians – Giulio Bertoni (1928),<sup>116</sup> Dante Olivieri (1928),<sup>117</sup> Roberto Cessi (1929),<sup>118</sup> Ronald Latham (1958),<sup>119</sup> John Kenneth Hyde (1982),<sup>120</sup> John Critchley (1992),<sup>121</sup> John Larner (1999),<sup>122</sup> Lucia Battaglia Ricci (2001),<sup>123</sup> Philippe Ménard (2001),<sup>124</sup> Jean Richard (2007)<sup>125</sup> and others<sup>126</sup> – have supposed that the *addenda* distinguishing Z<sup>i</sup> and R from

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Bertoni (1928), 290-291. On Bertoni's opinion about the source of Fr, see note 114.

<sup>117</sup> Olivieri (1928b), 574-575.

<sup>118</sup> Cessi (1929), 476: «Due sono le redazioni del libro dei viaggi di Marco Polo: la prima, quella genovese, dettata in volgare franco-italiano su narrazione dell'autore dal concaptivo Rustichello; la seconda, veneziana, stesa in latino volgare dallo stesso Marco, col sussidio della prima non senza modificazioni ed aggiunte, suggerite da postumi ricordi». Cessi's conclusions were criticised by Benedetto (1930c).

<sup>119</sup> Latham (1958), 25 n.: «There is a good deal of evidence to support the view that the Latin version used by Ramusio was written later than (F) and embodied alterations and additions»; *ibid.*, 26 n.: «There is at least one indication that Z may contain additions made after Marco's imprisonment in Genoa...».

<sup>120</sup> Hyde (1982), 130-131. See particularly Hyde's view about R and Z's additions: «This must have been exactly the kind of thing that Marco's audience desperately wanted to hear, and it is incredible that any copyist would omit such passages once they had been inserted into the text. It is far more probable that they represent late additions made by Marco himself, dredged perhaps from his memory by persistent questioning, written down too late for incorporation into the main tradition, which is known to have proliferated well before the date of Marco's death» (*ibid.*, 131). This hypothesis was adopted by Jackson (1998), 85.

<sup>121</sup> See Critchley (1992), 161-177. First of all, this scholar tries to prove, through a statistical analysis of the lexicon, that the supplementary parts of Z do not derive from a Franco-Italian text, but were composed directly in Latin. Secondly, he examines the contents and reaches the conclusion that «[t]he great variety of Z's additions suggests they are answers elicited by intelligent quizzing, perhaps by the same questioner, perhaps by several. They were added piecemeal, tagged on to an original draft which consisted 'only of a few things which he still kept in mind'» (*ibid.*, 173; quotation from Moule, Pelliot [1938], vol. I, 73). For a criticism of these theories, see Barbieri (2004b), 146 and n. 53.

<sup>122</sup> Larner (1999), 4, 58, 185. For Larner, «there are virtually two versions of the Book. The first, 'A', is that begun in prison in 1298. The second, 'B', is a rewriting of the A text which includes many additions, clarifications, sometimes omissions, which was produced some time after Marco's return from Genoa to Venice. In this view 'B' is a restatement which is directed perhaps to a more private and restricted readership»; but see the reservations expressed in Barbieri (2004b), 146-147.

<sup>123</sup> Battaglia Ricci (2001), VIII-XXIV.

<sup>124</sup> Ménard (2001), 17-19.

<sup>125</sup> Richard (2007), 1489, 1501 and n. 22.

<sup>126</sup> See also Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 100. A similar, but more nuanced, view is held by Leonardo Olschki (1960), 110-111: «Our author must have made a wide acquaintance at Venice in these years [i.e. the years following his return], and his book must have been transcribed on various occasions, under his own supervision, in an attempt to satisfy the curiosity of a public ever

all remaining witnesses are the product of Marco Polo's reworking of his book.<sup>127</sup> Those who claim, alternatively, that this supplementary information is not only authentic, but also original,<sup>128</sup> counter the arguments used by the supporters of the theory of authorial revision by means of criteria of explanatory coherence.<sup>129</sup> Since there exist a number of errors shared by all manuscripts which prove their derivation from an archetype, it is unlikely that the Venetian traveller introduced additions and modifications into a corrupted copy without correcting its defects.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, it can be ruled out that Z was made by Marco Polo himself or on his behalf, because it contains translation mistakes.<sup>131</sup> Some scholars have pointed out that the textual disorder present in many chapters and the lack of a real conclusion at the end of the book seem to exclude a revision on the part of the author.<sup>132</sup> Internal structural and stylistic evidence is also produced to support the notion of a single redaction. The passages transmitted solely in Z<sup>1</sup> and R not only combine and fit perfectly with the shorter text passed on by F and the rest of the tradition,<sup>133</sup> but also bear the typical features of Rustichello's style.<sup>134</sup>

---

more hungry for information as the links with the Far East became more strongly forged in this century and the attempts to reach it by land and sea became more frequent. This editorial activity explains in part the numerous variants in the various versions of the book that bear the author's imprint in their style and subject matter». Olschki's opinion is quoted by Segre (1970), 196.

<sup>127</sup> For an overview of these positions, see Barbieri (2004b), 145-147; Burgio, Eusebi (2008), 22-23; Burgio (2017), 4-5.

<sup>128</sup> Burgio (2017), 3, has pointed out that such a distinction was introduced into Marco Polo studies by Casella (1929). While the first term indicates the authenticity of the contents, the second one refers to «their original presence in the first account». See also Pasquali (1952), 108. It should be mentioned that a few scholars deny the authenticity of some or all the additions transmitted by Z and R and consider them as late interpolations. See e.g. Dieu (1947), 112-113; Reichert (1997), 172. See also Pauthier's opinion cited in note 114.

<sup>129</sup> The arguments in favour of the authenticity of Z's *addenda* are summarised in Pasquali (1952), 107-108, and Barbieri (2004c), 60-62; (2004b), 147.

<sup>130</sup> Casella (1929), 215-217. On this reasoning, see the clarifications by Peretti (1930), 221.

<sup>131</sup> Benedetto (1930c), 209-210.

<sup>132</sup> Barbieri (2004b), 147.

<sup>133</sup> Peretti (1930), 226.

<sup>134</sup> Terracini (1933), 423-428.

The arguments for the single-redaction theory are certainly compelling, but far from being satisfactory, because they, in various cases, are unsuitable for explaining the complexity of the data which has emerged from research. It has been noted that a fact recorded only by Z<sup>1</sup> – the victory of the Golden Horde qan Toqta (Toctay) over the Mongol general Noqai (Nogay) and the latter's death<sup>135</sup> – took place in Autumn 1299, that is to say after the date of composition mentioned in the *Devisement's* prologue<sup>136</sup> and after the release of the Pisan and Venetian prisoners held by the Genoese authorities.<sup>137</sup> We consider it highly unlikely that the chronological reference contained in the first lines of the work («au tens qu'il avoit .MCCXCVIII. anç que Jeçucrit nesqui») <sup>138</sup> indicates exclusively the beginning of the drafting process and not its end, and that the cooperation between Marco and Rustichello might have continued after they left Genoa.<sup>139</sup>

Other and perhaps more decisive evidence in favour of the multiple-redaction theory arises from recent research on the manuscript transmission. The idea that the book underwent a revision after Marco's return to Venice, finds confirmation in Z's history. Several facts prove that this redaction circulated very early among members of the Dominican Order in North-Eastern Italy, especially in Veneto. The *Legendae* by Pietro Calò da Chioggia, written after 1330/1332 and before 1340, and the *Liber de introductione loquendi* by Filippino (or Filippo) da Ferrara, composed after 1325 and before 1347,<sup>140</sup> contain some passages extracted from Z. The two friars knew each other and both resided for a period at the convent attached

<sup>135</sup> Barbieri (1998), 548 (chap. 164, par. 10-13).

<sup>136</sup> Spuler (1943), 75-76; Latham (1958), 26 n.; Reichert (1997), 162, 172; Wehr (1993), 307; Battaglia Ricci (2001), VIII-IX, XII-XIV; Barbieri (2004b), 151-154; Richard (2007), 1501; Zagni (2011).

<sup>137</sup> Gallo (1955), 75; Cigni (1994), 14 n. 7; Battaglia Ricci (2001), XIV; Barbieri (2004b), 153 n. 75; Bertolucci Pizzorusso (2011b), 261; Zagni (2011), 91.

<sup>138</sup> Eusebi (2018), 35 (*Prol.* 4).

<sup>139</sup> See Ménard (2001), 22; (2017), 202; Battaglia Ricci (2001), IX, XIV-XV; Barbieri (2004b), 152-154. It must be remarked that the beginning of this passage («Sed noveritis insuper quod ...»), see Barbieri [1998], 548) suggests that it was inserted later into the first draft.

<sup>140</sup> The first work consists of a collection of hagiographic legends, the second one is a conversation manual. See also note 56.



to the Basilica of Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice. Accordingly, it is reasonable to think that the copy of Z that served as their source was deposited at the library of this convent.<sup>141</sup> In the following centuries, too, Z seems to have circulated only in Venice.<sup>142</sup> Around 1450, the cartographer Fra Mauro, a monk of the Camaldolese monastery of S. Michele di Murano, created a marvellous *mappamundi* (today in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice). For the representation of Eastern Asia's regions, he drew on a manuscript of Marco Polo's book very close to the Zelada codex (which I will henceforth designate as «Z<sup>fm</sup>»).<sup>143</sup> In addition, it should not be forgotten that Giovanni Battista Ramusio used an exemplar of this redaction for his Italian translation published in 1559, as mentioned several times before. Finally, the linguistic analysis of Giuseppe Mascherpa has shown that the Latin of Z displays typical Venetian features.<sup>144</sup>

A Venetian origin is also probable for the translation V.<sup>145</sup> Developing some suggestions of Benedetto,<sup>146</sup> Samuela Simion has recently succeeded in identifying a number of conjunctive innovations connecting this version with Z. She has demonstrated that V's source was a Latin manuscript very similar to the Toledan codex, but lacking most of the additional information which is particular to the latter.<sup>147</sup> Two papers of Giuseppe Mascherpa<sup>148</sup> and Veronica Gobbato<sup>149</sup> have proved that the Z-redaction progressively increased in size over the course of time. More particularly, they have established that the exemplar used by Pietro Calò and Filippino da

<sup>141</sup> Amadori (1998); Gadrat (2010), 68-70; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 180-182; Gobbato (2015), 356-359.

<sup>142</sup> Z probably circulated also in Venice's inland, because an inventory of the convent of San Nicolò in Treviso compiled in 1347 records a copy of Marco Polo's book bearing a title very similar to that reported by Calò and Filippino. See Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 183.

<sup>143</sup> Cattaneo (2004-2005), 171-178, 182-90; (2011), 191-219; Falchetta (2006), 64-67; Burgio (2009), 84-94; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 101, 228-230.

<sup>144</sup> Burgio, Mascherpa (2007), 123-132; Mascherpa (2007-2008), 42-77.

<sup>145</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXXIV; Simion (2007-2008), VIII-XXIII; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 106.

<sup>146</sup> Benedetto (1928a), CLXXIV-CLXXVIII.

<sup>147</sup> Simion (2019), 68-72, 79-110. See also Simion (2011), 33-43.

<sup>148</sup> Mascherpa (2008). See also Mascherpa (2007-2008), 164-171.

<sup>149</sup> Gobbato (2015).

Ferrara was less rich than the version attested in the Zelada codex and Ramusio's translation, and closer to F and the rest of the tradition (Fr TA VA; L V VB).<sup>150</sup> This conclusion may be corroborated by another clue. It is possible to deduce from the references contained in Calò's *Legendae* that his model exhibited the same numeration and the same number of chapters as the Franco-Italian version F.<sup>151</sup> Such pieces of evidence lead to the conclusion that Z is the product of a multiple-redaction, which involved successive additions and modifications. The first and the second textual stage are reflected respectively in V and in Calò and Filippino's source, the third in Z<sup>t</sup>, Z<sup>fm</sup> and R.<sup>152</sup> It should be noted, however, that new studies suggest that Ramusio made his translation from a text containing further author's variants compared to both the model of the Zelada codex and that of Fra Mauro.<sup>153</sup> Hence, the possibility emerges that there were at least four stages of Z's elaboration.

Recent results of philological research enable us to shed new light on the issue of the supposed division of the witnesses into two branches and the position of F in relation to the original draft. A major contribution to a better understanding of the earliest stages of the *Devisement dou monde*'s textual history comes from the investigation of the context in which the book was composed. A long series of studies conducted over the last few decades on the diffusion of Old French literature in Italy have identified a group of over thirty French manuscripts transcribed in Genoa by Pisan prisoners captured in the naval battle of Meloria in 1284.<sup>154</sup> Marco Polo and Rustichello da Pisa conceived and created their work in a milieu where a centre of book production was actively copying French manuscripts directed at a local audience. Several analyses have pointed out the strong resemblance between F and the manuscripts copied in the Pisan-Genoese

---

<sup>150</sup> Mascherpa (2008), 174-180; Gobbato (2015), 352-355. See also Mascherpa (2017), 46-49.

<sup>151</sup> Benedetto (1959-1960), 574-575; Barbieri (2004c), 55; Burgio, Mascherpa (2007), 150-151 n. 93.

<sup>152</sup> See the classification recently proposed by Simion (2017), 27; (2019), 86.

<sup>153</sup> Andreose (2017); Mascherpa (2017), (2018).

<sup>154</sup> Of the vast bibliography on this topic only a small selection of titles will be given here: Avril, Gousset (1984), 23-53; Gousset (1988); Benedetti (1990); Cigni (1993), (2009), (2010); Zinelli (2015).

*scriptorium* in terms of spelling and language.<sup>155</sup> Although it is not possible to establish with precision where F was produced, it is reasonably certain that it passed through the hands of a reader originating from western Tuscany (Pisa or Lucca) at a very early time.<sup>156</sup> The short fragment of the Franco-Italian version discovered about fifteen years ago by Chiara Concina<sup>157</sup> is very similar in form and content to F.<sup>158</sup> All these lines of evidence not only entitle us to connect these two witnesses of Marco Polo's book with the French manuscripts copied by Pisans in Genoa during the last fifteen years of the thirteenth century, but also lead us to conclude that the original Franco-Italian text mainly circulated in Tuscany and in the northern Tyrrhenian area. In this respect, it is perhaps useful to recall that the Tuscan translation TA was made from an exemplar akin to F.<sup>159</sup>

The intensive activity of copying and reworking texts in the Genoese prison might explain some characteristics of the textual transmission of Marco Polo's book. The chapter CXC of the Franco-Italian version is devoted to the «island of Madeigascar» (*isle de Madeigascar*).<sup>160</sup> The variant *Madeigascar* is shared by all witnesses<sup>161</sup> with the exception of Z, which exhibits the reading *Mogdaxo*,<sup>162</sup> and, only partly, of V, which offers an intermediate form: *Madaschor*.<sup>163</sup> Nowadays, all scholars accept the view originally put forward by Alfred Grandidier (1892) and then developed by Paul Pelliot,<sup>164</sup> that the term *Madeigascar* attested in most manuscripts is simply a corruption of *Mogdaxo* found in Z. The place name definitely

<sup>155</sup> Andreose (2015b), 269-272; (2016a), 103-105, 109-110; Zinelli (2015), 84-86, 90, 92; Andreose, Concina (2016), 24-32.

<sup>156</sup> See Andreose (2015b), 273; (2016a), 110. The early circulation of F in western Tuscany is proved by a marginal note on folio 82r, written by a hand contemporary with the manuscript, which exhibits features typical of Pisa and Lucca variety.

<sup>157</sup> Concina (2007); Ménard (2012); Andreose, Concina (2016), 16-24.

<sup>158</sup> Andreose, Concina (2016), 20-24, 29-32.

<sup>159</sup> Benedetto (1928a), LXXX; Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1994), 349-350.

<sup>160</sup> Ms. BnF fr. 1116, 91r. See also Eusebi (2010), 213 (apparatus); (2018), 220 (apparatus).

<sup>161</sup> Pelliot (1959-1973), 779 No. 287.

<sup>162</sup> Barbieri (1998), 414 (chap. 124, par. 1).

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Simion (2019), 323 (chap. 106, par. 1). See also Simion (2011), 40.

<sup>164</sup> See Grandidier (1892), 24-28; Grandidier, Grandidier (1903), IX-XI; Pelliot (1959-1973), 779-781 No. 287. Cf. furthermore Cardona (1994), 656-658; Milanese (1978-1988), vol. III, 286 n. 1; Battaglia Ricci (2000), 10-11; Simion, Burgio (2015), *Lemmario*, under the heading *Magastar* (by Antonella Ghersetti and Eugenio Burgio).

does not indicate the modern Madagascar, which, in the seventeenth century, was so called from the erroneous reading transmitted by F and the majority of the *Deisement*'s versions (Fr L R TA VA VB),<sup>165</sup> but the peninsula of Mogadishu. It is interesting to note that the chapter index copied on the first folios of F exhibits the reading *Mogclasio*,<sup>166</sup> which is a wrong transliteration of the correct form *Mogdasio*. In medieval writing systems, it may happen that *d* erroneously is interpreted as the sequence of *c* and *l*. The presence of a double reading in F suggests that its copyist transcribed the chapter index and the text of the chapter CXC from two different models. While the source of the chapter displayed the erroneous variant *Madeigascar*, that of the index had the right term *Mogdasio*. This second source was probably situated higher up on the stemma than the ancestor which was at the origin of all the witnesses that offer the incorrect form of the place name – that is to say, the entire tradition with the exception of Z.

It is questionable whether (and how) F's copyist could have had access to this very authoritative manuscript. We cannot exclude the possibility that copies of the Z-version circulated in Tuscany in the first quarter of the fourteenth century, even though this is highly unlikely for the reasons stated above. The most economical hypothesis to explain the double reading in F is that it was transcribed in a place where several exemplars of the *Deisement dou monde* were present, among which there existed one that was very close to the original.<sup>167</sup> This assumption has profound implications for the history of the text, because it corroborates the theory emerging from recent scholarship that the "shorter" redaction transmitted by F and most of the other manuscript families (Fr L TA VA V VB) should not be considered as the result of a process of abridgement, but as reflecting a textual stage prior to that attested in Z and, partly, in R. By modifying the definition proposed by Benedetto, we could designate this latter stage of the text as "the phase posterior to F".

For the time being, the present state of research on *Deisement*'s textual transmission does not permit us to establish a definitive classification of

---

<sup>165</sup> Cardona (1994), 656-657.

<sup>166</sup> Andreose (2016a), 111-113, 125.

<sup>167</sup> Andreose (2016a), 114.

the manuscripts. Perhaps we will be able to draw a conclusion about the relationship between Z (and R) and the rest of the tradition in the future. The philological work started by Benedetto over ninety years ago has not come to an end yet, despite the significant results obtained by the scholars who continue to concern themselves with the exciting and challenging problems posed by the manuscript transmission of Marco Polo's book.

## References

- Amadori, Saverio (1998). “*Mirabilia - exempla*: Marco Polo e Filippino da Ferrara, *Divisament dou monde* e Liber mensalis. Forme di ricezione dell'opera poliana e strumenti per la predicazione: Due differenti sistemi di rappresentazione?”, in *XI Convegno Internazionale di Studi “Preaching Tools and their Users”, International Medieval Sermon Studies Society (Erfurt, 17-21 July 1998)*. Unpublished.
- Andreose, Alvise (2002). “La prima attestazione della versione VA del *Milione* (ms. 3999 della Biblioteca Casanatense di Roma): Studio linguistico”, *Critica del testo*, 5: 655-668.
- Andreose, Alvise (2015a). “Le fonti di Ramusio e il loro trattamento nella compilazione de *I Viaggi di Messer Marco Polo*: Preliminari”, in Simion, Burgio (2015). URL [http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/main/intro\\_03.html#Preliminari](http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/main/intro_03.html#Preliminari) (2018-02-15).
- Andreose, Alvise (2015b). “Marco Polo's *Devisement dou monde* and Franco-Italian Tradition”, *Francigena*, 1: 261-291.
- Andreose, Alvise (2016a). “Primi sondaggi per una localizzazione del ms. BnF fr. 1116: La lingua delle rubriche”, in Anna Maria Babbi and Chiara Concina, eds. *Francofonie medievali: Lingue e letterature fuori di Francia (secc. XII-XV)* (Verona: Fiorini), 109-128.
- Andreose, Alvise (2016b). “Tradizione e fortuna del *Devisement dou monde*: Note di lettura su *Lire Marco Polo au Moyen Âge* di Christine Gadrat-Ouerfelli”, *Romania*, 134: 228-246.
- Andreose, Alvise (2017). “«... io essendo giovanetto n'ho udito molte fiare dire ...»: Alcune riflessioni sulle fonti dei *Viaggi di messer Marco Polo* di Giovanni Battista Ramusio”, *Quaderni Veneti*, n.s. 6/2: 31-44.
- Andreose, Alvise (2018-2019). “Marco Polo a Padova: Su un manoscritto poco noto del *Milione*”, *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia Galileiana di Scienze Lettere*

- ed Arti, Parte III, Memorie della Classe di Scienze morali Lettere ed Arti*, 131: 169-206.
- Andreose, Alvise; Concina, Chiara (2016). “A monte di *F e f*: Il *Deisement dou monde* e la *scripta* dei manoscritti francesi di origine pisano-genovese”, in Antonio Pioletti and Stefano Rapisarda, eds., *Forme letterarie del medioevo romanzo: Testo, interpretazione e storia = Atti dell’XI Congresso della SIFR (Catania, 22-26 settembre 2015)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino), 15-37.
- Avril, François; Gousset, Marie-Thérèse (1984). *Manuscrits enluminés d’origine italienne*, vol. II: *XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, avec la collaboration de Claudia Rabel (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale).
- Badel, Pierre-Yves, ed. (1998). Marco Polo, *La description du monde* (Paris: Librairie générale française).
- Baldelli Boni, Giovanni Battista, ed. (1827). *Il Milione di Marco Polo: Testo in lingua del secolo decimoterzo ora per la prima volta pubblicato ed illustrato*, 2 vols. (Firenze: da’ torchi di Giuseppe Pagani).
- Barbieri, Alvaro, ed. (1998). Marco Polo, *Milione: Redazione latina del manoscritto Z* (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo-Guanda).
- Barbieri, Alvaro (1999). “Introduzione”, in Barbieri, Andreose (1999), 23-65.
- Barbieri, Alvaro (2004a). *Dal viaggio al libro: Studi sul Milione* (Verona: Fiorini).
- Barbieri, Alvaro (2004b). “Marco, Rustichello, il ‘patto’, il libro: Genesi e statuto testuale del *Milione*”, in Barbieri (2004a), 129-154.
- Barbieri, Alvaro (2004c). “Quale *Milione*? La questione testuale e le principali edizioni moderne del libro di Marco Polo”, *Studi mediolatini e volgari*, 42 (1996): 9-46 = Barbieri (2004a), 47-91.
- Barbieri, Alvaro (2016). “Il *Livre de messire Marco Polo*: Storia di un’impresa filologica e editoriale”, in Simion (2016), 25-44.
- Barbieri, Alvaro; Andreose, Alvise, eds. (1999). Marco Polo, *Il «Milione» veneto: Ms. CM 211 della Biblioteca Civica di Padova* (Venezia: Marsilio).
- Bartoli, Adolfo, ed. (1863). *I viaggi di Marco Polo, secondo la lezione del codice Magliabechiano più antico* (Firenze: Le Monnier).
- Battaglia Ricci, Lucia (1992). “*Milione* di Marco Polo”, in Alberto Asor Rosa, ed., *Letteratura italiana: Le opere*, vol. I: *Dalle origini al Cinquecento* (Torino: Einaudi), 85-105.
- Battaglia Ricci, Lucia (2000) “Del Madagascar, dell’uccello grifone, delle donne cinesi e di altro ancora”, in Vtilio Masiello, ed., *Studi di filologia e letteratura italiana in onore di Gianvito Resta*, 2 vols. (Roma: Salerno), 3-25.

- Battaglia Ricci, Lucia, ed. (2001). Marco Polo, *Milione* (Milano: Sansoni).
- Benedetti, Roberto (1990). “*Qua fa’ un santo e un cavaliere ...: Aspetti codicologici e note per il miniatore*”, in Aldo Rosellini, ed., *La grant Queste del Saint Graal (La grande Ricerca del Santo Graal): Versione inedita della fine del XIII secolo del ms. Udine, 177* (Udine: Vattori), 31-47.
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo (1924). “Il vero testo di Marco Polo”, *Il Marzocco*, 19, 27 January 1924: 1.
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo (1928a). “Introduzione: La tradizione manoscritta”, in Benedetto (1928b), IX-CCXXI.
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo, ed. (1928b). Marco Polo, *Il Milione: Prima edizione integrale* (Firenze: Olschki).
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo (1929). *Filologia e geografia: Critica di una critica* (Firenze: Ricci).
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo (1930a). “Ancora del nome «Milione»”, *Il Marzocco*, 25, 16 November 1930: 4.
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo (1930b). “Perché fu chiamato «Milione» il libro di Marco Polo”, *Il Marzocco*, 25, 14 September 1930: 1-2.
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo (1930c). “Varietà marcopoliane: Di una pretesa redazione latina che Marco Polo avrebbe fatta del suo libro”, *Archivio storico italiano*, ser. 7, vol. 13, year 88: 207-216.
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo, ed. (1932). *Il libro di Messer Marco Polo Cittadino di Venezia detto Milione dove si raccontano Le Meraviglie del Mondo, ricostruito criticamente e per la prima volta integralmente tradotto in lingua italiana* (Milano-Roma: Treves).
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo (1939). Review of Moule, Pelliot (1938), *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 4: 628-644.
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo (1940). “Nota marcopoliana: A proposito del codice Ghisi”, *Rendiconti della R. Accademia d’Italia: Classe di scienze morali e storiche*, s. 7, 1: 15-45.
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo (1959-1960). “Ancora qualche rilievo circa la scoperta dello Z toledano”, *Atti dell’Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, 94: 519-578; also published as a separate pamphlet (Torino: Accademia delle Scienze, 1960).
- Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Valeria (1983). “Recuperi (e smarrimenti) di manoscritti veneti del *Milione*”, in *Scritti in onore di G. B. Pellegrini*, 2 vols. (Pisa: Pacini), vol. I, 357-370.

- Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Valeria, ed. (1994). Marco Polo, *Milione: Versione toscana del Trecento* (Adelphi: Milano). 1st ed. 1975.
- Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Valeria (2011a). *Scritture di viaggio: Relazioni di viaggiatori ed altre testimonianze letterarie e documentarie* (Roma: Aracne).
- Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Valeria (2011b). “Testamento in francese di un mercante veneziano (Famagosta, gennaio 1294)”, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, s. 3, 18 (1988): 1011-1033 (= Bertolucci Pizzorusso (2011a), 243-268).
- Bertoni, Giulio (1928). Review of Benedetto (1928b), *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 92: 285-293.
- Bianconi, Giovanni Giuseppe (1862). *Degli scritti di Marco Polo e dell’uccello Ruc da lui menzionato*, memoria del Prof. Cav. G[iovanni] Giuseppe Bianconi letta alla Accademia delle Scienze il 6 e 13 Marzo 1862 (Bologna: Gamberini e Parmeggiani).
- Burgio, Eugenio (2009). “«Cartografie» del viaggio: Sulle relazioni fra la *Map-pamundi* di Fra Mauro e il *Milione*”, *Critica del testo*, 12: 59-106.
- Burgio Eugenio, ed. (2011). *Giovanni Battista Ramusio ‘editor’ del Milione: Trattamento del testo e manipolazione dei modelli = Seminario di ricerca (Venezia, 9-10 settembre 2010)* (Roma-Padova: Antenore).
- Burgio Eugenio, ed. (2015). *Redazione L*, in Simion, Burgio (2015), URL [http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/testi\\_completi/L\\_marcato-main.html](http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/testi_completi/L_marcato-main.html) (2018-02-15).
- Burgio Eugenio (2017). “Tra Aden e Alessandria: Sull’esistenza di varianti d’autore nel *Milione*”, in Paolo Divizia and Lisa Pericoli, eds., *Il Viaggio del testo = Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Filologia italiana e romanza (Brno, 19-21 June 2014)* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso), 3-22.
- Burgio Eugenio (2018). “*Milione* latino; 2. Qualche appunto sull’ipotesto del *Liber qui vulgari hominum dicitur El Melione* (epitome L)”, in Luca Di Sabatino, Luca Gatti and Paolo Rinoldi, eds., «*Or vos conterons d’autre matiere*»: *Studi di filologia romanza offerti a Gabriella Ronchi* (Roma: Viella), 69-86.
- Burgio, Eugenio; Eusebi, Mario (2008). “Per una nuova edizione del *Milione*”, in Conte (2008), 17-48.
- Burgio, Eugenio; Mascherpa, Giuseppe (2007). “*Milione* latino: Note linguistiche e appunti di storia della tradizione sulle redazioni Z e L”, in Renato Oniga and Sergio Vatteroni, eds., *Plurilinguismo letterario* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino), 119-223.



- Burgio, Eugenio; Simion, Samuela (2018). “La ricezione medievale del *Devisement dou monde* (secoli XIV-XV)”, *Medioevo romanzo*, 42: 173-194.
- Buzzoni, Marina; Burgio, Eugenio; Simion, Samuela; Modena, Martina (2016). “Open Versus Closed Recensions (Pasquali): Pros and Cons of Some Methods for Computer-assisted Stemmatology”, *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, 1 September 2016: 652-669, URL <https://doi.org/10.1093/lc/fqw014> (2018-02-05).
- Cardona, Giorgio Raimondo (1994). “Indice ragionato”, in Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1994), 489-761.
- Casella, Mario (1929). “Il libro di Marco Polo”, *Archivio storico italiano*, s. 7, vol. 11, year 87: 193-230.
- Cátedra, Pedro M., ed. (2006). *Libro del famoso Marco Polo veneciano. Edición en facsimile de la impresa en Logroño por Miguel de Eguía (1529)*, publicada [...] por el «Instituto Biblioteca Hispánica» del Centro Internacional de Investigación de la Lengua (Fundación San Millán de la Cogolla), 2 vols. (San Millán de la Gogolla: Cilengua).
- Cattaneo, Angelo (2003). “Fra Mauro *cosmographus incomparabilis* and his *mappamundi*: Documents, Sources, and Protocols for Mapping”, in Diogo Ramada Curto, Angelo Cattaneo, André Ferrand Almeida, eds., *La cartografia europea tra primo Rinascimento e fine dell’Illuminismo = Atti del Convegno internazionale The Making of European Cartography (Firenze, BNCF-EUI, 13-15 dicembre 2001)* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki), 19-48.
- Cattaneo, Angelo (2004-2005). “Scritture di viaggio e scrittura cartografica: La *mappamundi* di Fra Mauro e i racconti di Marco Polo e Niccolò de’ Conti”. *Itineraria*, 3-4: 157-202.
- Cattaneo, Angelo (2011). *Fra Mauro’s Mappa Mundi and Fifteenth-century Venice* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Cessi, Roberto (1929). “L’opera di Marco Polo”, *Rivista mensile della città di Venezia*, 7: 465-476; also published as a separate pamphlet (Venezia: Libreria emiliana, 1929).
- Cigni, Fabrizio (1993). “Manoscritti di prose cortesi compilati in Italia (secc. XIII-XIV): Stato della questione e prospettive di ricerca”, in Saverio Guida and Fortunata Latella, eds., *La filologia romanza e i codici = Atti del Convegno (Messina, 19-22 dicembre 1991)*, 2 vols. (Messina: Sicania), vol. II, 419-441.
- Cigni, Fabrizio, ed. (1994). *Il romanzo arturiano di Rustichello da Pisa*, edizione critica, traduzione e commento (Pisa: Cassa di risparmio di Pisa / Ospedaletto: Pacini).

- Cigni, Fabrizio (2009). "I testi della prosa letteraria e i contatti col francese e col latino: Considerazioni sui modelli", in Lucia Battaglia Ricci and Roberta Cella, eds., *Pisa crocevia di uomini, lingue e culture: L'età medievale = Atti del Convegno (Pisa, 25-27 ottobre 2007)* (Roma: Aracne), 157-181.
- Cigni, Fabrizio (2010). "Manuscripts en français, italien, et latin entre la Toscane et la Ligurie à la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Implications codicologiques, linguistiques et évolution des genres narratifs", in Christopher Kleinhenz and Keith Busby, eds., *Medieval Multilingualism in England, France, and Italy: The Francophone World and its Neighbours = Proceedings of the 2006 Conference at the University of Wisconsin-Madison* (Turnhout: Brepols), 187-217.
- Concina, Chiara (2007). "Prime indagini su un nuovo frammento franco-veneto del *Milione* di Marco Polo", *Romania*, 125: 342-369.
- Conte, Silvia, ed. (2008). *I viaggi del Milione: Itinerari testuali, vettori di trasmissione e metamorfosi del Devisement du monde di Marco Polo e Rustichello da Pisa nella pluralità delle attestazioni = Atti del Convegno internazionale (Venezia, ottobre 2005)* (Roma: Tiellemedia).
- Critchley, John (1992). *Marco Polo's Book* (Aldershot: Variorum).
- Devos, Paul (1948). "Le miracle posthume de saint Thomas l'apôtre", *Analecta Bollandiana*, 66: 231-275.
- Dieu, Léon (1947). "Marco Polo: Quel est le texte authentique de sa relation", *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique (RHE)*, 42: 110-119.
- Dutschke, Consuelo W. (1993). "Francesco Pipino and the Manuscripts of Marco Polo's 'Travels'", PhD diss. (Los Angeles: University of California).
- Eusebi, Mario, ed. (2010). *Il manoscritto della Bibliothèque nationale de France fr. 1116*, vol. I: *Testo* (Roma-Padova: Antenore).
- Eusebi, Mario, ed. (2018). Marco Polo, *Le Devisement dou monde*, vol. 1: *Testo* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari), URL <http://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-223-9> (2020-05-10).
- Falchetta, Piero (2006). *Fra Mauro's World Map* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Gadrat, Christine (2010). "Le rôle de Venise dans la diffusion du livre de Marco Polo (XIV<sup>e</sup>-début XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle)", *Médiévales*, 58: 63-78.
- Gadrat-Ouerfelli, Christine (2015). *Lire Marco Polo au Moyen Age: Traduction, diffusion et réception du Devisement du Monde* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Gadrat-Ouerfelli, Christine (2017), "Du *Devisement du monde* au *Milione*: Métamorphoses du récit de Marco Polo à travers ses titres", in Barbara Fleith, Réjane

- Gay-Canton and Géraldine Veysseyre, eds., *De l'(id)entité textuelle au cours du Moyen Âge tardif: XIII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Garnier), 85-100.
- Gallina, Annamaria, ed. (1958). *Viatges de Marco Polo: Versió catalana del segle XIV* (Barcelona, Editorial Barcino).
- Gallo, Rodolfo (1955). “Marco Polo, la sua famiglia e il suo libro”, in *Nel VII centenario della nascita di Marco Polo* (Venezia: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti), 63-193.
- Gaunt, Simon (2013). *Marco Polo's Le Devisement du Monde: Narrative Voice, Language and Diversity* (Cambridge, Brewer).
- Gennari, Pamela (2008-2009). “«Milione», redazione VB: Edizione critica commentata”, PhD diss. (Venezia: Università Ca' Foscari). URL [http://dspace.unive.it/bitstream/handle/10579/937/Gennari\\_955311.pdf?sequence=1](http://dspace.unive.it/bitstream/handle/10579/937/Gennari_955311.pdf?sequence=1) (2018-02-15).
- Gennari, Pamela, ed. (2015). *Redazione VB*, in Simion, Burgio (2015), URL [http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/testi\\_completi/VB\\_marcato-main.html](http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/testi_completi/VB_marcato-main.html) (2018-02-15).
- Gil, Juan, ed. (1987). *El libro de Marco Polo anotado por Cristóbal Colón; El libro de Marco Polo, versión de Rodrigo de Santaella* (Madrid: Alianza).
- Gobbato, Veronica (2010). “Quattro testimoni della redazione VL del Milione di Marco Polo: Analisi ecdotica ed edizione”, PhD diss. (Verona: Università degli Studi).
- Gobbato, Veronica (2015). “Un caso precoce di tradizione indiretta del «Milione» di Marco Polo: Il «Liber de introductione loquendi» di Filippino da Ferrara O.P.”, *Filologia mediolatina*, 22: 319-367.
- Gousset, Marie-Thérèse (1988). “Étude de la décoration filigranée et reconstitution des ateliers: Le cas de Gênes à la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle”, *Arte medievale*, 2: 121-152.
- Grandidier, Alfred (1892). *Histoire de la géographie de Madagascar*, deuxième tirage revu et augmenté (Paris: Hachette) (1<sup>a</sup> ed. 1885).
- Grandidier, Alfred; Grandidier, Guillaume (1903). *Collection des ouvrages anciens concernant Madagascar*, vol. I (Paris: Comité de Madagascar).
- Grisafi, Attilio (2014). “Il ‘Milione’ di Marco Polo: Aspetti testuali e linguistici della traduzione latina di Francesco Pipino da Bologna”, *Itineraria*, 13: 45-69.
- Guerri, Domenico (1990) “Le meraviglie del mondo di messer Marco Polo detto Milione”, *Scuola e cultura*, 9, 1933: 491-511 = Id., *Scritti danteschi e d'altra letteratura antica*, a cura di Antonio Lanza (Anzio, De Rubeis), 273-287.

- Herriott, J. Homer (1937). "The 'Lost' Toledo Manuscript of Marco Polo", *Speculum*, 12: 456-463.
- Hyde, John Kenneth (1982). "Real and Imaginary Journeys in the Later Middle Ages", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 65: 125-147.
- Jackson, Peter (1998). "Marco Polo and his 'Travels'", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 61/1: 82-101.
- Langlois, Charles Victor (1921). "Marco Polo", in *Histoire littéraire de la France*, ouvrage commencé par des religieux bénédictins de la Congrégation de Saint-Maur et continué par des membres de l'Institut (Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belle-lettres), vol. XXXV (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale), 232-259.
- Larner, John (1999). *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World* (New Haven – London: Yale University press)
- Latham, Ronald, ed. (1958). *The Travels of Marco Polo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books).
- Manzoni, Luigi (1894-1895). "Frate Francesco Pipino da Bologna de' PP. Predicatori, geografo, storico e viaggiatore", *Atti e Memorie della Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Provincie di Romagna*, s. 3, 13: 257-334.
- Mascherpa, Giuseppe (2007-2008). "Nuove indagini sulla tradizione latina Z del *Milione* di Marco Polo", PhD diss. (Siena: Università degli Studi).
- Mascherpa, Giuseppe (2008). "San Tommaso in India: L'apporto della tradizione indiretta alla costituzione dello stemma del *Milione*", in Alberto Cadioli and Paolo Chiesa, eds., *Prassi ecdotiche: Esperienze editoriali su testi manoscritti e testi a stampa (Milano, 7 giugno e 31 ottobre 2007)* (Milano: Cisalpino), 171-184.
- Mascherpa, Giuseppe (2017). "Sulla fonte Z del *Milione* di Ramusio: L'enigma di Quinsai", *Quaderni Veneti*, n.s. 6/2: 45-64.
- Mascherpa, Giuseppe (2018). "Una Venezia d'Oriente: Gli splendori di Quinsai nella tradizione del *Deisement dou monde*", in Giuseppe Mascherpa and Giovanni Strinna, eds., *Predicatori, mercanti, pellegrini: L'Occidente medievale e lo sguardo letterario sull'Altro tra l'Europa e il Levante. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Sassari, 11-12 maggio 2016)* (Mantova: Universitas Studiorum), 63-88.
- Mascherpa, Giuseppe (2024). *Costellazione Z: Nuove indagini sul Milione latino del codice Zelada (Toledo, Archivo y Biblioteca Capitulares, 49-20)* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari), in press.
- Massano, Riccardo (1986). "Polo, Marco", in Vittore Branca, ed., *Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana*, vol. III (Torino: UTET), 489-494.

- Ménard, Philippe (1998). “Le prétendu ‘remaniement’ du *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo attribué à Grégoire”, *Medioevo romanzo*, 22: 332-351.
- Ménard, Philippe (2000). “Marco Polo en Angleterre”, *Medioevo Romanzo*, 24: 189-208.
- Ménard, Philippe (2001). “Introduction”, in Ménard (2001-2009), vol. I, 9-116.
- Ménard, Philippe, ed. (2001-2009). Marco Polo, *Le devisement du monde*, édition critique publié sous la direction de Ph. M., 6 vols. (Genève: Droz).
- Ménard, Philippe (2003). “Le problème de la version originale du *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo”, in François Livi, ed., *De Marco Polo à Savinio: Écrivains italiens en langue française* (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne), 7-19.
- Ménard, Philippe (2005). “L’édition du *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo”, *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, year 149, 1: 407-435.
- Ménard, Philippe (2012). “Deux nouveaux folios inédits d’un fragment franco-italien du *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo”, *Medioevo Romanzo*, 36: 241-280.
- Ménard, Philippe (2017). “Marco Polo transposé en latin par Pipino”, in Emilie Goudeau, Françoise Laurent and Michel Quereuil, eds., «*Le monde entour et environ*»: *La geste, la route et le livre dans la littérature médiévale. Mélanges offerts à Claude Roussel* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires de l’université Blaise Pascal), 193-205.
- Milanesi, Marica, ed. (1978-1988). Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, 6 vols. (Torino: Einaudi).
- Monfrin, Jacques (1996). “La tradition du texte”, in Marco Polo, *Le Livre des Merveilles: Manuscrit français 2810 de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris – Das Buch der Wunder: Handschrift Français 2810 der Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris*, 2 vols. (Luzern: Faksimile Verlag), vol. II, 337-351.
- Moule, Arthur Christopher; Pelliot, Paul, eds. (1938). Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, 2 vols. (London: George Routledge & Sons).
- Nitti, John J., ed. (1980). *Juan Fernández de Heredia’s Aragonese Version of the Libro de Marco Polo* (Madison: The Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies).
- Olivieri, Dante (1904-1905). “Di una famiglia di codici italiani dei Viaggi di Marco Polo”, *Atti del Reale Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 64: 1639-1666.

- Olivieri, Dante (1908). "Ancora sulle redazioni venete dei «Viaggi» di Marco Polo", in *Atti del sesto Congresso geografico italiano adunato in Venezia dal 26 al 31 maggio 1907*, 2 vols. (Venezia, Premiate officine grafiche C. Ferrari), vol. II, 288-295.
- Olivieri, Dante, ed. (1928a). Marco Polo, *Il Milione secondo la riduzione italiana della Crusca riscontrata sul manoscritto arricchita e rettificata mediante altri manoscritti italiani* (Bari: Laterza). 1st ed. 1912.
- Olivieri, Dante (1928b). Review of Benedetto (1928b), *Studi medievali*, n.s. 1: 571-579.
- Olschki, Leonardo (1960). *Marco Polo's Asia: An Introduction to his "Description of the World" Called "Il Milione"* (Berkeley: University of California press). Original Italian edition: 1957.
- Paris, Paulin (1851). "Nouvelles recherches sur les premières rédactions du voyage de Marco Polo", *L'Institut: Journal universel des sciences et des sociétés savantes en France et à l'étranger*, 181, January 1851: 1-4; also published as a separate pamphlet (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1851).
- Pasquali, Giorgio (1952). *Storia della tradizione e critica del testo*, 2nd ed. (Firenze: Le Monnier). 1st ed. 1934.
- Pauthier, Guillaume, ed. (1865). *Le livre de Marco Polo, citoyen de Venise, conseiller privé et commissaire imperial de Khoubilai-Khaân, rédigé en français sous sa dictée en 1298 par Rusticien de Pise*, 2 vols. (Paris: Didot).
- Pelaez, Mario (1906). "Un nuovo testo veneto del «Milione» di Marco Polo", *Studi romanzi*, 4: 5-65.
- Pelliot, Paul (1959-1973). *Notes on Marco Polo*, publ. par Louis Hambis, 3 vols. (Paris, Imprimerie nationale).
- Pereira, Francisco Maria Esteves, ed. (1922). *Marco Paulo: O livro de Marco Paulo; O livro de Nicolao Veneto; Carta de Jeronimo de Santo Estevam, conforme a impressão de Valentim Fernandes, feita em Lisboa em 1502* (Lisbõa: Oficinas gráficas da Biblioteca nacional).
- Peretti, Aurelio (1930). "Per la storia del testo di Marco Polo", *Archivio storico italiano*, s. 7, vol. 13, year 88: 217-247.
- Poncelet, Albert (1910). "Le légendier de Pierre Calo", *Analecta Bollandiana*, 29: 1-131.
- Prášek, Václav, ed. (1902). *Marca Pavlova z Benátek, Milion: Dle jediného rukopisu spolu s příslušným základem latinským* (Prague: Čes. Akademie).

- Ramusio, Giovanni Battista (1559). *De i viaggi di Marco Polo, gentil'huomo venetiano*, in Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Secondo volume Delle Navigationi et viaggi [...]* (Venezia: Giunti), ff. 2r-60r.
- Reginato, Irene, ed. (2022). Marco Polo, *Le Devisement dou Monde, Version catalane (K)* (Paris: Garnier).
- Reichert, Folker E. (1997). *Incontri con la Cina: La scoperta dell'Asia orientale nel Medioevo* (Milano: Biblioteca francescana). Original German edition: 1992.
- Richard, Jean (2007). "Marco Polo et les Tartares du Ponant: Sur les chapitres oubliés du *Devisement du monde*", *Comptes Rendus des Séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 151: 1489-1504.
- Ronchi, Gabriella (1982). Marco Polo, *Milione – Le divisament dou monde: Il Milione nelle redazioni toscana e franco-italiana* (Milano: Mondadori).
- Roques, Mario (1955). Review of Louis Hambis, ed., Marco Polo, *La description du Monde*, 1955; Albert t'Stertevens, ed., *Le Livre de Marco Polo ou le Divisement du Monde*, 1955, *Romania*, 76: 399-408.
- Roux de Rochelle, Jean-Baptiste Gaspard (1824). "Voyages de Marco Polo", in *Recueil de voyages et de mémoires publiés par la Société de géographie*, 8 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie d'Éverat/Arthus Bertrand, 1824-1866): vol. I, 1-494.
- Santoliquido, Vito (2019). "Il «Liber descriptionis» di Marco Polo nel ms. parigino BnF, lat. 3195: Edizione critica e studio", PhD diss. (Venezia: Università Ca' Foscari).
- Segre, Cesare (1970). "Les formes et traditions didactiques", in Hans-Robert Jauss and Erich Köhler, eds., *Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, vol. VI/2 (Heidelberg: Winter), 97-201.
- Simion, Samuela (2007-2008). "Il *Milione* secondo il manoscritto Hamilton 424 della Staatsbibliothek di Berlino: Edizione critica", PhD diss. (Venezia: Università Ca' Foscari).
- Simion, Samuela (2011). "Struttura e fonti di V", in Burgio (2011), 27-44.
- Simion, Samuela (2015a). *Redazione P*, in Simion, Burgio (2015), URL [http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/testi\\_completi/P\\_marcato-main.html](http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/testi_completi/P_marcato-main.html) (2018-02-15).
- Simion, Samuela (2015b). *Redazione R*, in Simion, Burgio (2015), URL [http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/testi\\_completi/R\\_marcato-main.html](http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/testi_completi/R_marcato-main.html) (2018-02-15).

- Simion, Samuela (2015c). *Redazione V*, in Simion, Burgio (2015), URL [http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/testi\\_completi/V\\_marcato-main.html](http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/testi_completi/V_marcato-main.html) (2018-02-15).
- Simion, Samuela, ed. (2016). Luigi Foscolo Benedetto, *Livre de messire Marco Polo, citoyen de Venise, appelé Milion, où sont décrites les Merveilles du monde*, vol. I: *Traduzione critica secondo le carte inedite del lascito di Ernest Giddey* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari), URL <http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/libri/978-88-6969-102-7/> (2018-02-15).
- Simion, Samuela (2017). “Tradizioni attive e ipertesti: Ramusio ‘editore’ del *Milione*”, *Quaderni Veneti*, n.s. 6/2: 9-30.
- Simion, Samuela (2018). “Orienti vecchi e nuovi nel *Lapidario del Prete Gianni*”, in Giuseppe Mascherpa and Giovanni Strinna, eds., *Predicatori, mercanti, pellegrini: L'Occidente medievale e lo sguardo letterario sull'Altro tra l'Europa e il Levante = Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Sassari, 11-12 maggio 2016)* (Mantova: Universitas Studiorum), 89-118.
- Simion, Samuela (2019). Marco Polo, *Il Devisement dou monde nella redazione veneziana V (cod. Hamilton 424 della Staatsbibliothek di Berlino)* (Edizioni Ca' Foscari: Venezia), URL <http://doi.org/10.30687/978-88-6969-321-2> (2020-05-15).
- Simion, Samuela; Burgio, Eugenio, eds. (2015). Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Dei viaggi di Messer Marco Polo: Edizione critica digitale* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari), URL <https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/en/edizioni4/libri/978-88-6969-00-06/> (2018-02-15).
- Spuler, Bertold (1943). *Die Goldene Horde: Die Mongolen in Russland 1223-1502* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz).
- Terracini, Benvenuto (1933). “Ricerche ed appunti sulla più antica redazione del *Milione*”, *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, ser. 6, vol. 9: 369-428.
- Valentinetti Mendi, Angélica (1992). *Una familia veneta del libro de Marco Polo* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense).
- Valentinetti Mendi, Angélica, ed. (2008). *Libro del famoso Marco Polo: Libro de le cose mirabile* (Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos).
- Vogel, Hans Ulrich (2013). *Marco Polo Was in China: New Evidence from Currencies, Salts and Revenues* (Leiden: Brill).
- Wehr, Barbara (1993). “A propos de la genèse du «Devisement dou monde» de Marco Polo”, in Maria Selig, Barbara Frank and Jorg Hartmann, eds., *Le passage à l'écrit des langues romanes* (Tübingen: Narr), 299-326.



- Wehr, Barbara (1999). "Zum Reisebericht von Marco Polo in der lateinischen Fassung von Fra Pipino da Bologna", in Hubert Petermann and Rudolf Kettmann, eds., *Latin vulgaire - latin tardif, V = Actes du V<sup>e</sup> Colloque international (Heidelberg, 5-8 sept. 1997)* (Heidelberg: Winter), 117-132.
- Wehr, Barbara (2001). "Zum altvenezianischen Fragment VA<sup>1</sup> des Reiseberichts von Marco Polo", in Luigia Morini, ed., *La cultura dell'Italia padana e la presenza francese nei secoli XIII-XV* (Pavia 11-14 settembre 1994) (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso), 111-142.
- Wehr, Barbara (2004). "Eine Crux im Text von Marco Polo: *rondes*", in Volker Noll and Sylvia Thiele, eds., *Sprachkontakt in der Romania: Zum 75. Geburtstag von Gustav Ineichen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer), 147-158
- Yule, Henry; Cordier, Henri, eds. (1903). *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray). 1st edition: 1871.
- Zaccagnini, Guido (1935-1936). "Francesco Pipino traduttore del «Milione» cronista e viaggiatore in Oriente nel secolo XIV", *Atti e Memorie. R. Deputazione di Storia Patria per l'Emilia e la Romagna*, ser. 5, 1: 61-95.
- Zagni, Giovanni (2011). "Note sulla datazione del *Milione* alla luce della storia dell'Orda d'Oro", *Studi mediolatini e volgari*, 57: 87-91.
- Zinelli, Fabio (2015). "I codici francesi di Pisa e Genova: Elementi per la definizione di una *scripta*", *Medioevo romanzo*, 39: 82-127.
- Zinelli, Fabio (2016). "Espaces franco-italiens: Les italianismes du français-médiéval", in Martin Glessgen and David Trotter, eds., *La régionalité lexicale du français au Moyen Âge = Volume thématique issu du colloque de Zurich (7-8 septembre 2015)* (Strasbourg: ÉliPhi), 207-269.

# On the Way to an Integral Edition of the Book of Marco Polo: A First Attempt to Create a Digital Edition

Samuela Simion, Mario Eusebi  
and Eugenio Burgio

## Introduction

In this paper we will present a new scholarly digital project: the critical edition of the book of Marco Polo – more precisely, the critical reconstruction of the contents of the lost original text, presented in a hypertextual frame, in the form of a “critical translation”.<sup>1</sup> The project was created by Marina Buzzoni and Eugenio Burgio, and awarded a grant by Ca’ Foscari University Research Committee. Work has begun at the end of 2017, thanks to the commitment of a team of young Venetian researchers and some Italian scholars (among others, Alvise Andreose, Chiara Concina, and Giuseppe Mascherpa). The critical edition of the *Devisement dou monde* (henceforth *DM*) is the logical development of the philological work begun by Mario Eusebi and Eugenio Burgio in 2005, and of the digital experiment with the edition of Giovanni Battista Ramusio’s *Dei Viaggi* which we have completed.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank Irene Reginato and Jo-Ann Titmarsh for their help with the translation into English. The article was written and discussed by three authors; Samuela Simion wrote paragraphs 1, 4-6; Mario Eusebi wrote paragraph 2; Eugenio Burgio wrote paragraph 3.

<sup>2</sup> Simion, Burgio (2015) (available at the following link: <http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/main/index.html>). For the intellectual framework of the “Ramusio digitale” see Burgio (2011); Buzzoni, Burgio (2014); Simion, Burgio (2016); Simion (2017a).

On this occasion we would like to present the intellectual reasons that have bolstered – and still bolster – our project, and to show a demo that illustrates its operational mechanisms.

Finally, our talk also aims to seize the opportunity to invite anyone interested in our project – philologists, historians, anthropologists, geographers and so on – to cooperate with us, in order to produce a (hopefully) authoritative tool devoted to knowledge of Asia in the European Middle Ages.

## 1. The *DM* Digital Edition between “Old” and “New” Philology

Over the last twenty years, digital edition projects have multiplied, creating different products with different goals and methods. For instance, the list drawn up by Patrick Sahle at <http://www.digitale-edition.de> contains more than 400 titles. Sahle’s list and literature<sup>3</sup> suggest that the interests of editors have focused on two types of products: (a) firstly, the so-called *éditions génétiques*, which are enhanced by the ability of digital tools to represent text variance; (b) secondly, the “documentary” editions, which often include the digitization of the codex in its material form and of the transcription of texts, in order to “synchronize” ancient folios and their transcripts. The documentary edition is a necessity when we publish archive documents and *testimonia unica*, or when the main study-object is the material physiognomy of the ancient artifacts (for example, when we study the paleographic or codicological physiognomy of a manuscript). However, behind these documentary editions, we often perceive a fascination with the great historical “objectivity” of the single “document”, and some perplexities for reconstructive operations that inevitably depart from that “objectivity”. With the “new” Digital Philology once again we see the shadow of the “old” opposition between reconstruction and preservation of the text, between diachronicity and synchronicity. It seems to us that the

---

<sup>3</sup> In particular, see Leonardi (2007), 65-75; Italia (2016), 246-250. For a critical balance of digital editing see Driscoll and Pierazzo (2016) (also for references); Robinson (2016).

qualities of the digital medium – ductility, interactivity, simultaneous display of data and ease of inquiry – can be exploited for more ambitious outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

In our case, the two main objectives of the *DM* critical edition are:

(a) firstly, to provide scholars and readers with a text based on a reconstruction hypothesis, immediately verifiable, step by step, by checking the multiple sources;

(b) secondly, to make available to scholars/readers, in every possible form – from short quotations to full text –, all the sources used and evaluated in the definition of our hypothesis, and thus to guarantee both a “free” and a contextual reading provided with a comment that “weighs” the value of the sources.

We are completely aware that it is impossible to reconstruct the linguistic form of the “original” text, as well as of any “original” text written in a vernacular language in the Middle Ages. For this reason, we intend to work on the reconstruction of the content of the *DM*, which will be presented in the form of a “critical translation”. The text – its critical reconstruction –, introduction, comments, and word list will be translated into English, and only the manuscript sources will remain in their original language. The choice of English is obviously a matter of editorial policy, in view of an international circulation of our work (the same reason, essentially, that prompted Polo and Rustichello to choose French as the language of their book).

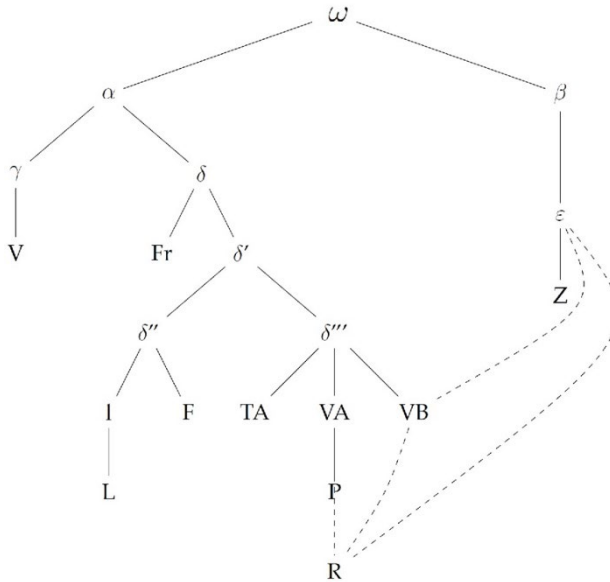
## 2. The *DM* Manuscript Tradition

As Philippe Ménard and Alvisè Andreose have recalled in their articles, the tradition of Marco Polo’s book is really intricate: more than 140 manuscripts, divided into several versions, which transmit the text in different languages, with different titles, and with greatly different contents. In fact, the great interest of readers and scribes determined a high level of textual variation. The tradition is almost entirely composed of translations, often tailored to the public they were addressed to, and the time they were written

---

<sup>4</sup> For the advantages offered by digital editions, see Buzzoni (2016), 59-61.

in. There is only one surviving Franco-Italian manuscript, ms. BnF fr. 1116, known as F; and this fact is important for any attempt to reconstruct the history of the original text.



**Figure 1: Burgio and Eusebi's Diagram (2008)**

And equally the fact that more than one significant version, in addition to F, survives in a codex unus is important. In the case of F, the question is to decide how much of its hybrid language of French, Tuscan and Venetian is to be attributed to its authors or its copyists;<sup>5</sup> but let us recall the case of the Latin version Z. As everyone knows, its codex unus (Toledo, Archivo y Biblioteca Capitulares, Zelada 49.20) contains about 200 passages that are absent in F and in some important versions. It is really difficult to evaluate if they are scribe's or redactor's interpolations, because they often provide some historical and ethnographic information that a Western

<sup>5</sup> In addition to F, a fragment of four folios, f, has been recently discovered by Chiara Concina. For some analysis of their peculiar linguistic mixture see Concina (2007); Ménard (2009), (2012), 233-239; Andreose (2015a), (2015b), (2015c); Andreose and Concina (2016).

copyist could not invent without first-hand experience. These passages are partially recorded in other versions, for instance the Venetian V, the Latin epitome L and Ramusio's *Dei Viaggi*. They were first used by Benedetto 1928 and Terracini 1933, and have been more recently used by Eusebi and Burgio as evidence to hypothesize the existence of a more complete *DM* than the one attested by F and the versions named in our 2008 diagram as “ $\delta$  Constellation” (Figure 1).

On the other hand, however, the Toledan Z is very shortened in its first part, and lacks about 60 chapters compared to F; for this reason, Ménard observed that “le manuscrit Z ne mérite pas la confiance aveugle qui lui a été portée”.<sup>6</sup>

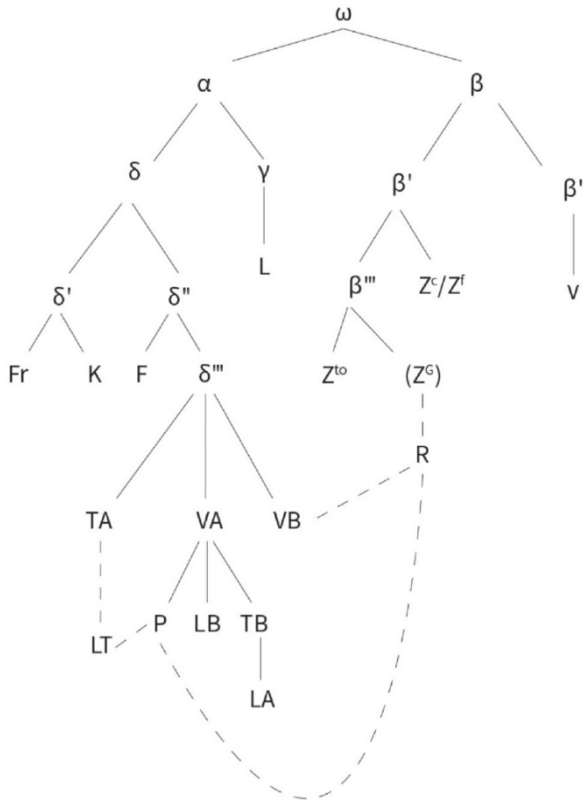
But the Z version should not be reduced just to the Toledo witness: we know that Ramusio read this text in a more complete codex, at that time owned by the Venetian Ghisi family. And also, some recent studies concerning some texts produced by the Dominican friars in fourteenth-century Italy reveal that version Z is more shifting than the Toledan copy lets us imagine.<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, for their *Legendarium* and *Liber de introductione loquendi*, the friars Pietro Calò of Chioggia and Filippino of Ferrara used a Z text which was more faithful to F in terms of lexicon, syntax and content than the Toledan-Ghisi group. This evidence weakens Benedetto's hypothesis (shared by us in these years) that the Toledan Z reflected the most ancient and conservative phase of the *DM* textual history.

Actually, it seems more likely to distinguish two diachronic phases in the so-called “Z Constellation” ( $\beta$  in our 2008 diagram): a first phase consisting of a text that is still richer and more complete than the “ $\delta$  Constellation”, whose traces can be found in Pietro Calò and Filippino of Ferrara. A second phase, attested in Toledan Z / R, due to Polo's revision of a copy of his text, and characterized by additions and a substantial formal re-elaboration. We are aware that the strong limit of this hypothesis lies in the scarcity of evidence provided by indirect witnesses; however, it may be summarized by the diagram of Figure 2.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ménard (2001-2009), vol. I, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Mascherpa (2008); (2009), 85-101; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 165-182; Gobbato (2015).



**Figure 2: A New Diagram of *DM* Tradition (2017)**

The Venetian version V, which shares readings and similar features with both  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ , might perhaps give answers to the transmission means and relationships between the two constellations, but is often unreliable due to a large number of mistakes in the text of the only available copy, ms. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Hamilton 424.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Generally, V shares with Z “characteristic readings” (or, according to Trovato’s definition, “confirmatory readings”, “i.e. readings which characterize, besides indicative errors, a group of witnesses”; Trovato (2014), 116) rather than significant errors (or *Leitfehler*); these readings alone may not be sufficient to demonstrate relationship, because V is a translation from a Latin model: therefore, theoretically, the confirmatory readings could depend on common translation

Despite all this, it is possible to recognize some relevant traits in the *DM* tradition, such as common errors, and the presence of textual cells that have the same content in every version. These constant traits justify the classification proposal at the basis of our project. It also boosts our confidence in the possibility of going beyond the traditional groupings in the two families A and B traced by Benedetto (1928) and still used by many Polian scholars.

Our critical text will be reconstructed on the basis of the hypothesis set out in the second diagram (Figure 2), but this does not mean that we will apply it automatically: its function will be to logically support the choices we will adopt in the definition of the text, and which will be discussed in the comment (so as to allow the reader to share or reject them).

As Richard Trachsler and Lino Leonardi recently wrote about the edition of an important medieval romance, *Guiron le Courtois*, our goal is not to set up a Lachmanian edition but, simply, a critical edition.<sup>9</sup>

Some words about the “critical translation”. We said that this choice is a direct consequence of the impossibility of restoring the French-Italian primitive language.

As Alvaro Barbieri writes, doing a “critical translation” means choosing between several textual variants – whose variance resides in differences in content – on the basis of a reconstruction hypothesis. In this way, the translation is the result of a philological operation: it may be considered a “test bench” of a *textus restituito* which would otherwise be impossible; and, actually, choosing between two or more possible content solutions in translating is the same as reconstructing the text on the basis of conjectures concerning the readings of the witnesses. The critical translation of the *DM* is, of course, an artificial text, and the result a compromise, but it allows

---

choices. Nevertheless, there are a great number of agreements: it is more likely that V comes from  $\beta$  branch, or, alternatively, that it is a contaminated witness. Some examples of V physiognomy are presented in Simion (2017b), (2019).

<sup>9</sup> Leonardi and Trachsler (2015), 71.



us to reconstruct the original content, and to present and discuss the process that generated it.<sup>10</sup>

Our edition is not an “absolute beginner” in the field of *DM* philology, and some critical translations serve as milestones: they are Benedetto’s critical texts (1928, 1931, 1932),<sup>11</sup> the English “integral” translation by Moule and Pelliot (1938), and the edition provided by René Kappler (2004). The difference between these translations and our edition is, obviously, that they were printed in a book, and did not rely on the hypertext “pages”. It is not an insignificant difference. Our opinion, in fact, is that the goal we are pursuing would hardly be achievable in the form of a printed book: a traditional book can’t account for every single step in processing the sources, nor can it explain how their manipulation has taken place. Such an apparatus would be impracticable and very difficult to handle, and even misleading.

### 3. A “Case Study”: The Town of Achbaluch

Chapter CV of F provides a good example of the problems raised by the reconstruction of the *DM* and by its representation on paper or on digital media.<sup>12</sup> This chapter establishes a connection between the “monograph” *de rebus Mongalorum* and the description of China. It also suggests the order of the geographical descriptions, divided between “Catai”, the Mongolian North, and “Mangi”, the former Song South (conquered by Khubilai in

---

<sup>10</sup> Barbieri (2016), 35, writes that a critical translation is a good strategy to get out of the *impasse* caused by insurmountable textual divergences, and it consists of delegating the fusion of testimonies which are so formally different to a translation into a modern language, that it would be unreasonable to adopt the traditional comparative method (in Barbieri’s exact words: “traduzioni critiche, ossia [...] versioni in lingua moderna mediante le quali un editore dà concretezza di attuazione ad un modello di ricupero testuale che non sarebbe realizzabile nei modi ortodossi dell’ecdotica classica. Quando le attestazioni manoscritte di un’opera siano lontanissime l’una dall’altra per la diversità della *facies* linguistica o per l’estrema divaricazione del dettato e della lezione, non è evidentemente possibile procedere ad una *constitutio textus* effettuata secondo principi lachmanniani. In tali casi rimane tuttavia la possibilità di allestire un testo artificiale, un prodotto di compromesso che usi la traduzione in lingua moderna quale strategia di conguaglio per uscire dall’*impasse* d’insuperabili divergenze testimoniali”).

<sup>11</sup> See also Simion (2016).

<sup>12</sup> This philological case, and the “invisible city” of Achbaluch, are discussed in Burgio (2014).

1276). The text describes an *itinerarium*, marked by two places: the former is the stone bridge over the Pulisanghin – the Sanggan River, which runs through the northwestern provinces of Shanxi and Hebei –, <sup>13</sup> described in F CIV, which connects the “monograph” to the geographical description. The latter, the two roads that bifurcate near Giugiu – today Zhuozhou, Hebei Province – <sup>14</sup> anticipate the double series of descriptions: the one to “ponent” leads to the South-Western regions of the “Catai” (F CVI ff.) and the other, to “sciloc”, heads South-South East (F CXXXVI ff.). <sup>15</sup>

Here is the Franco-Italian text (F): <sup>16</sup>

**Table 1: The Great City of Giogiu**

[1] <i>Ci devise de la grant cité de Giogiu.</i>	<i>Here he tells of the great city of Giogiu.</i>
[2] Et quant l'en s'en part de cest pont et il est alés troynte miles por ponent trouvant toutes foies bieles erberges et vignes et chans, adonc treuve une cité qui est apelés Giogiu, grant et biele.	And when one sets out from this bridge [...] and he is gone thirty miles by the sunsetting, always finding beautiful [...] inns [...] and [...] vineyards and [...] fields, [...] then [...] he finds a city which is called Giogiu, great and beautiful.
[3] Hi a maintes abaïe de ydres; il vivent de merchandie et des ars; il hi se laborent dras de soie et doré et biaux sendal; et il hi a maintes herbergieries qe erbergient les viandanç.	There are many abbeys of idolaters [...] they live by trade and by crafts [...] cloths of silk and of gold and beautiful [...] sendals are made there. And there are many [...] inns [...], where the wayfarers lodge. [...]
[4] Et quant l'en est parti [48a] de ceste ville et alés un mil, adonc treuve l'en deus voies, que le une ala a ponent et le autre a sciloc. [5] Celle dou ponent est dou Catai et celle do siloc vait ver la grant provence dou Mangi.	And when one is departed from this town and gone one mile, then one finds two roads which the one goes to sunsetting and the other to sirocco. That of the sunsetting is [...] of Catai, and that of the sirocco goes toward [...] the great province of Mangi.

<sup>13</sup> Pelliot (1959-1973), 812 nr. 318 (“Pulisanghin”).

<sup>14</sup> Pelliot (1959-1973), 736 nr. 241 (“Giogiu”).

<sup>15</sup> Kappler (2004), 118 n. 1.

<sup>16</sup> The English translation is by Moule and Pelliot (1938), 256-257, without integrations from other versions.

<p>[6] Et sachiés tout voiremant qe l'en chevauche por ponent por la provence dou Catai bien .x. jornee, et toutes foies treuve l'en maintes belles cités et maint biaux chastiaus, de grant mercandies et de grant ars, et biaux chans et bielles vingnes et domescs jens.</p>	<p>And you may know quite truly that one rides by the sunseting through the province of Catai quite ten days journeys [...]. And one always finds many beautiful cities and many beautiful villages [...] of great trade and of great industry, and [...] beautiful [...] fields [...] and beautiful vines and settled people [...].</p>
<p>[7] N'i a chouses qe a mentovoir face: por ce ne voç en diron rien. [8] Et adonc laiseron de ceste maitiere et voç conteron de un roïame que Taianfu est appellés.</p>	<p>There is nothing which does to mention, so we shall tell you nothing about it. And then we shall leave this matter and shall tell you of a kingdom which is called Taianfu.</p>

Table 2 shows the layout of the contents in the corresponding chapters of the most important versions of the *DM*.

**Table 2: The City of Giugiu in the Other Versions of the *DM***

F, cv	Fr, 105	TA, 105	VA, LXXXIV	P, II 28	TB, 47	VB, LXXIV	L, 85	V, 50, 6-10	Kc, 35 4-9
[2-3] Giugiu: Description	2-3 (Ginguin)	1-2 (Giougui)	1-3 (Grogin)	1-2 (Gyn)	1-2 (Giogim)	1-2 (Cingui)	1-2 (Giogiu)	6 (Chuigion)	4 (Guingui)
[3] Manufacturing in Giugiu; Accommodations for Travelers	3	3-4	3-4	2-4	2	3-4	2	7	5
[4-5] The Two Roads	4-5	5-6	5	5	3-4	5	3	8	6-7
[6] The Road to Catai: Description of the Landscape in the First Ten <i>Journees</i>	6	7	6	6-7	5	6-7	3	9	8

[6] The Character of the Inhabitants	6	7	6	8	5	7	-	7	8
[Achbaluch]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
[7-8] <i>Transitio</i> : Tainfu Shall Be the Object of Next Chapter	7	8	-	-	-	-	-	10	9
	(Taiamfu)	(Taiamfu)							(Camianffu)

The table indicates a macroscopic fact: all the witnesses offer the same information, and in the same order, but Ramusio adds the description of the city of “Achbaluch”, the first step of the journey West, before the reign of “Taiamfu” (Taiyuan, today capital of Shanxi),<sup>17</sup> which is described in the following chapter.<sup>18</sup> Here is the Ramusio text:

**Table 3: Of the City of Gouza**

Delle condizioni della città di Gouza. Cap. 28.	Of the city of Gouza.
[1] Partendosi da questo ponte et andando per trenta miglia alla banda di ponente, trovando di continuo palazzi, vigne et campi fertilissimi, si trova una città nominata Gouza, molto bella et molto grande, nella qual sono molte abbacie di idoli, le cui genti vivono di mercantie et arti.	After having passed this bridge, proceeding thirty miles in a westerly direction, through a country abounding with fine buildings, amongst vineyards and much cultivated and fertile grounds, you arrive at a handsome and considerable city, named Gouza, where there are many convents of the idolaters. The inhabitants in general live by commerce and manual arts.

<sup>17</sup> During the Yuan dynasty, Taiyuan was the administrative capital of Hedong District (northern Shanxi). See Pelliot (1959-1973), 842, nr. 348 (“Taiamfu”).

<sup>18</sup> The other versions: Kc, 36; Z, 48; V, 51, 1-6; Fr, 105; F, CVI; L, 86; TA, 105; VA, LXXXV; P, II 29; VB, LXXV; R, II 29. Quotations are from the following editions: Z = Barbieri (1998); V = Simion (2019); F = Eusebi, Burgio (2018); K = Reginato (2015-2016); L = Burgio (forthcoming); TA = Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1975); VA = Barbieri, Andreose (1999); P = interpretative edition provided by Simion on the basis of the manuscript Firenze, Bibl. Ricc., 983; TB = Amatucci (1982-1983); VB = Gennari (2010).

<p>[2] Ivi si lavorano panni d'oro et di seda et belli veli sottilissimi, et sonvi molti alloggiamenti per i viandanti.</p>	<p>They have manufactures of gold tissues and the finest kind of gauze. The inns for accommodating travellers are there numerous.</p>
<p>[3] Partendosi da questa città et andando per un miglio si trovano due vie, una delle quali va verso ponente, l'altra verso sirocco: per la via di ponente si va per la provincia del Cataio, per la via di sirocco alla provincia di Mangi.</p>	<p>At the distance of a mile beyond this place, the roads divide; the one going in a westerly, and the other in a south-easterly direction, the former through the province of Kataia, and the latter towards the province of Manji.</p>
<p>[4] Et sappiate che dalla città di Gouza fino al regno di Tainfu si cavalca per la provincia del Cataio dieci giornate, sempre trovando molte belle città et castella, fornite di grandi arti et mercantie, et trovando vigne et campi lavorati: et de qui si porta il vino nella provincia del Cataio, perché in quella non vi nasce vino; vi sono ancho molti alberi mori, che con la foglia sua gli abitanti fanno di gran seda.</p>	<p><i>From the city of Gouza it is a journey of ten days through Kataia to the kingdom of Ta-in-fu; in the course of which you pass many fine cities and strong places, in which manufactures and commerce flourish, and where you see many vineyards and much cultivated land. From hence grapes are carried into the interior of Kataia, where the vine does not grow. Mulberry trees also abound, the leaves of which enable the inhabitants to produce large quantities of silk.</i></p>
<p>[5] Tutte quelle genti sono domestiche, per la moltitudine delle città poco discoste l'una dall'altra et frequentatione che fanno gli abitanti di quelle, perché sempre vi si trovano genti che passano, per le molte mercantie che si portano continuamente d'una città all'altra; et in cadauna di quelle si fanno le ferie.</p>	<p>A degree of civilisation prevails amongst all the people of this country, in consequence of their frequent intercourse with the towns, which are numerous and but little distant from each other. To these the merchants continually resort, carrying their goods from one city to another, as the fairs are successively held at each.</p>
<p>[6] Et in capo di cinque giornate delle predette dieci, dicono esservi una città piú bella et maggior dell'altre chiamata Achbaluch, fino alla quale verso quella parte confina</p>	<p>At the end of five days journey beyond the ten that have been mentioned, it is said that there is another city still larger and more handsome named Achbaluch, to</p>

<p>il termine della cacciagione del signore, dove niuno ardisce di andar alla caccia, eccetto il signore con la sua famiglia et chi è scritto sotto il capitano de' falconieri; ma da quel termine innanzi può andarvi, pur che sia nobile.</p>	<p>which the limits of his majesty's hunting grounds extend, and within which no person dare to sport, excepting the princes of his own family, and those whose names are inscribed on the grand falconer's list; but beyond these limits, all persons qualified by their rank, are at liberty to pursue game.</p>
<p>[7] Nondimeno quasi mai il Gran Can non andava alla caccia per quella banda, per la qual cosa gli animali salvatichi erano tanto accresciuti et moltiplicati, et specialmente le lepori, che guastavano le biade di tutta la detta provincia; la qual cosa fatta intendere al Gran Can, v'andò con tutta la corte, et furon presi animali senza numero.</p>	<p>It happens, however, that the Grand khan scarcely ever takes the amusement of the chase on this side of the country, and the consequence is, that the wild animals, especially hares, multiply to such a degree, as to occasion the destruction of all the growing corn of the province. When this came to the knowledge of his majesty, he repaired thither, with the whole of his court, and innumerable multitudes of these animals were taken.<sup>19</sup></p>

Things are a little more complex than suggested in Table 3. We have highlighted in bold the passage missing in the tradition (the description of “Achbaluch”), which is not the only differential element of R: we have indicated in italics two passages whose context is similar to that of F (but which don't appear in it), and whose content is confirmed by some of the witnesses mentioned here, and in particular in Chapter 47 of version Z:

---

<sup>19</sup> The translation into English is by Marsden (1818), 391-392.

**Table 4: Z, 47**

<p>[1] Cum ab isto ponte disceditur et itum est .XXX. miliaribus per ponentem, inveniendō continue herbas, vineas et campos, invenitur quedam civitas nomine Çonça pulcra et magna valde. [2] In ea sunt multe abbatię ydolorum. [3] Vivunt quidem gentes de mercimoniis et artibus. [4] Ibi laborantur drappi aurei et de syrico, et pulcre sidones.</p>	<p>And when one sets out from this bridge and he is gone thirty miles by the sunsetting, always finding grass and vineyards and fields, then one finds a city which is called Çonça, very beautiful and great. There are many abbeys of idolaters. People live by trade and by crafts. Cloths of gold and of silk and beautiful sandals are made there.</p>
<p>[5] Et &lt;cum&gt; ab ista civitate discedendo itum est per miliare unum, inveniuntur due vie, per unam quarum itur versus ponentem, per aliam versus sirochum. [6] Et noveritis <u>quod a civitate Çonçu usque ad regnum Tayanfu equitatur per provinciam Cathay</u> .X. dietis, semper inveniendō multas pulcras civitates et castra de magnis artibus et mercimoniis munitas, et inveniendō vineas et campos, <i>in quibus multum nascitur syricum.</i></p>	<p>And when one is departed from this town and gone one mile, then one finds two roads which the one goes to sunsetting and the other to sirocco. And you must know <u>that from the city of Çonça to the kingdom of Ta-in-fu one rides through Katai</u> quite ten days journeys, and one always finds many beautiful cities and many beautiful villages of great trade and of great industry, and vines and fields, in which large quantities of silk rise.</p>
<p>[7] <i>Sunt omnes gentes domestice propter spissitudinem civitatum.</i> [8] <i>Et frequentantur ita vie illarum civitatum quod semper inveniuntur gentes trans-euntes, etcetera.</i></p>	<p>They are settled people <i>in consequence of the great number of towns.</i> <i>Their roads are very busy, and one may find a lot of people passing by them and so on.</i></p>

We have highlighted the passages which only appear in Z text. As often happens in the *DM*, two different structures frame the information: the first one is identified in the versions closest to F that are part of group  $\delta$ ; the second one is recognizable in the Z / R texts and in some more or less close editions (V and L in particular). Let's consider them in detail.

(a) Group  $\delta$  (F, Fr, TA, and partially K) and V close the chapter with a proleptic transition, which is typical of the *DM* structure, and often expounded by translators and compilers:

**Table 5: The End of the Chapter in V and in Group ̅**

V, par. 10	Or in questo luogo non sono chosse da dir et inperzò non diremo, ma diremo de altre chosse.
Fr, par. 7	Mais pour ce qu'il n'y a chose qui a conter face, ne vous en diray ore riens. Si vous conteray d'un royaume qui Taianfu est appellés.
Kc, par. 8	E al cap d'aquestes .x. jornades, troba hom un reyalme qui s'apela Canianffu.
TA, par. 8	Quivi nonn-à altro a ricordare; però ci partiremo di quie, ed anderemo ad uno reame chiamato Taianfu.

It is reasonable to assume that this conclusion is original. One fact supports this hypothesis: the editor of Z, who omits it, retrieves the important information it contains (the next step of the *itinerarium* leads to Taianfu) by anticipating it in the body of the text (we show it in italics):

**Table 6: The Way to Taianfu in Version Z**

Z, par. 6	Et noveritis quod a civitate Çonçu usque ad regnum Tayanfu equitatur per provinciam Cathay .X. dietis [...]
V, par. 9	Et sapié chi chavalcha per ponente per la provinzia del Chataio ben diexe zornade [...]
Fr, par. 6	Et {quant} l'en chevauche .x. journees vers ponent par la province du Catay [...]
Kc, par. 8	E seguín lo camí del ponent, cavalca hom .x. jornades [...]
L, par. 3	qua itur versus provinciam de Chatay bene .X. dietis versus occidentens [...]
TA, par. 7	E sappiate veramente che l'uomo cavalca per ponente per la provincia del Catai bene .x. giornate [...]
VA, par. 6	Sì se chavalcha per ponente per la provinzia de Chatai ben diexe zornade [...]
P, par. 6	Per provinciam autem Cathay itur per plagam illam per dietas decem [...]
TB, par. 5	E quando l'uomo cavalca nel ponente per la provincia del Catai, va bene x giornate [...]
VB, par. 6	E chaminando per dita strada de ponente per la provincia del Chatay, per .X. çornade [...]

It should be noted that R follows Z in moving the information (because of the suppression of the final transition): “Et sappiate che dalla città di Gouza



fino al regno di Tainfu si cavalca per la provincia del Cataio dieci giornate [...]” (par. 4).

(b) Only Z partially confirms the presence of white mulberry trees in the fields on the ten-day journey (indicated by R in par. 4):

**Table 7: The Detail of White Mulberry Trees along the Journey**

Z, par. 6	[...] et inveniendō vineas et campos, <i>in quibus multum nascitur syricum.</i>
V, par. 9	[...] senpre va trovando [...] ezian vigne e chanpi [...]
Fr, par. 6	[...] toutes foiz trovant [...] biaux chans et belles vingnes [...]
Kc, par. 8	[...] troba [...] vies e lochs delitables e pratz [...]
L, par. 3	[...] continue per [...] per pulcros agros et vineas.
TA, par. 7	[...] tuttavia trovando [...] belle vigne e àlbori assai [...]
VA, par. 6	[...] tuta fiata trovando [...] de belli chanpi e zardini [...]
P, par. 6	[...] ubi agri multi optimi sunt et viridaria pulcra valde [...]
TB, par. 5	trovando [...]
VB, par. 7	[...] e contadi belli e ben coltivadi [...].

(c) Following (almost) all  $\delta$  witnesses, the people that Polo meets during his ten-day journey are civilized:

**Table 8: [...] et domesces jens**

VB, par. 7	[...] e contadi belli e ben coltivadi [...].
Fr, par. 6	[...] domesces gens.
Kc, par. 8	[...] e gens domèstiques
L, par. 3	<i>omits</i>
TA, par. 7	[...] gente dimestica.
VA, par. 6	[...] domesticha zente.
P, par. 8	[...] domestici valde sunt et affabiles.
TB, par. 5	[...] ed èvi dimestica gente.
VB, par. 7	[...] tuta gente molto demestiga et da bene.

Only Z, par. 7-8, provides more detailed information: “Sunt omnes gentes domestice propter spissitudinem civitatum. Et frequentantur ita vie illarum civitatum quod semper inveniuntur gentes transeuntes, etcetera”: and a partial trace of this is in V, par. 9: “[...] et spesega molta zente”.

Z, therefore, agrees with R, but in a partial and not immediately evident way; the passage quoted in Table 9 explains why:

**Table 9: Z and R Agreement (1)**

Z (Z <sup>to</sup> ), par. 7 – Sunt omnes gentes domesticæ propter spissitudinem civitatum. Et frequentantur ita viæ illarum civitatum quod semper inveniuntur gentes transeuntes, etcetera.	R, par. 5 – Tutte quelle genti sono domestiche, per la moltitudine delle città poco discoste l'una dall'altra et frequentatione che fanno gli habitanti di quelle, perché sempre vi si trovano genti che passano, per le molte mercantie che si portano continuamente d'una città all'altra; et in cadauna di quelle si fanno le ferie.
--	---

Z is shorter than R and the presence of *etcetera* in the Toledan copy indicates that its copyist – or perhaps the copyist of its antigraph – shortened the text he was transcribing as he did on other occasions, and pointed out the abbreviation clearly. The same operation must have taken place (but without being pointed out by *etcetera*) in the case of Table 10:

**Table 10: Z and R Agreement (2)**

Z (Z <sup>to</sup> ), par. 6 – [...] et inveniendò vineas et campos, in quibus multum nascitur syricum.	R, par. 4 – [...] et trovando vigne et campi lavorati: et de qui si porta il vino nella provincia del Cataio, perché in quella non vi nasce vino; vi sono ancho molti alberi mori, che con la foglia sua gli habitanti fanno di gran seda.
---	--

Two observations arise from our analysis: (a) the  $\delta$  versions transmit a textual state of the *DM* similar to F, which is shorter than the version which was to be contained in the Z antigraph of the Toledan codex and which can be read, like a watermark, in Ramusio's text; (b) at this moment, it is of little interest whether the shortness of F /  $\delta$  is the result of the abbreviation of a longer text (reconstructable by Z / R), or if Z / R keeps the trace of a second intervention by Polo in its text, in order to enrich it and complete it. The important thing is that the R / Z text is, as in other cases, a witness of original information *not kept* in the  $\delta$  versions.

And what about the final section of R? And what about “Achbaluch”, a place on the edge of Khublai’s hunting reserve?<sup>20</sup> As Hallberg noted, Ramusio’s description has no correspondence in medieval geographic knowledge of Asia,<sup>21</sup> and is not present in any other versions of the *DM*, but it is not really a nonce word. “Hachbaluch”, in fact, appears in the famous map produced by the Camaldolese Fra Mauro between 1448 and 1453 in the atelier of the Venetian island of San Michele, now preserved in the Marciana National Library (Figure 3).<sup>22</sup> The landmark (FM \* 2306) can be seen in the “Catai” region, South-West of the “Ponte mirabile [...] super el qual se traversa el fiume Polisanchin” (FM \*2315),<sup>23</sup> between the pictures representing the two cities of “Zouza” (FM \*2318) and “Tainfu” (FM \*2278) (Figure 3). Hallberg wrote: “cette ville est probablement la même qu’Acbaluc de Polo”,<sup>24</sup> and Pelliot drew a correct consequence from his words:

Ramusio, our only source here, writes “Achbaluch”. Now, Fra Mauro, in 1459, mentions on his map a city “Hacbaluch” near a city “Zouza” (*Zu*, 36; Hallberg, 224, 236 [...]). “Hacbaluch” is certainly a wrong form of “Achbaluch” and it cannot be an abbreviation for “Acbaluc Mangi”, since “Acbaluc Mangi” is also mentioned by Fra Mauro.<sup>25</sup> But, if we note that “Zouza” is very near the abnormal forms “Gouza” and “Çonça?” peculiar

<sup>20</sup> R, II 16 is devoted to Khubilai’s hunting parties: the game reserve lies two days’ journey away from Cambalù, towards grec (i.e. North-East), but F, XCIII 2 reading is *midi* (South), and this information is more consistent with R, II 28 6 text: “Et quant le Grant Sire ha demoré trois mois en la cité que je voç ai nomé desovre, et ce fu decembre et jenner et fevrier, adonc se part de cest cité dou mois de mars et ala ver midi dusque a la mer Hosiane, qui hi a deus jornee”. See Pelliot (1959-1973), 115-118. nr. 90 (“Caccia Modun”).

<sup>21</sup> S.v. “Acbaluc” Hallberg (1906), 5, only quotes the occurrence in *DM*.

<sup>22</sup> The *mappa mundi* is integrally reproduced by Gasparrini Leporace (1956). The most important works on this subject are Falchetta (2006) and Cattaneo (2011).

<sup>23</sup> Quotations are from Falchetta (2006). See also Gasparrini Leporace (1956), table XXXII.

<sup>24</sup> Zurla (1806), 36, quoted by Hallberg (1906), 237 s.v. “Hacbaluch”. See also Hallberg (1906), 224 s.v. “Giugiu”.

<sup>25</sup> In *DM* “Acbaluc Mangi” is in F, CXII (“Acbalac / Acbalec Mangi”) = R, II 35 (“Achbaluch Mangi”); Z, 52 (“Acbaluch Mançi”); V, 54 (“Achebelach Mandi”); Fr, 112 (“Acbalet Manzi”); L, 92 (“Acbalec Mangi”); TA, 112 (“Anbalet Mangi”); VA, XCI (“Achalaie / Acbalac Mangi”); P, II 34 (“Achalech Mangy”); TB, 49 (“Acalec Mangi”); VB, LXXIX (“Abelech Mangy”). In the *mappa mundi* it corresponds to “Hachbalech de Mango” (FM \*1402; Gasparrini Leporace (1956), table XXVI; Falchetta (2006), 450, clearly confuses the two toponyms).

to R and Z respectively for “Giogiu”, the inference may be drawn that Fra Mauro knew, among others, a manuscript of Polo very close to the one which gave to Ramusio his “Achbaluch” and which is also represented, in an abridged form, by Z.<sup>26</sup>

Now, there is no doubt that “Fra Mauro used primarily, albeit perhaps not exclusively, a copy of the Z Latin version of the *Milione*, following it faithfully” (Falchetta (2006), 67);<sup>27</sup> the proof is the presence of the landmark “Provincia Iogoristan” on the map (FM \*2442). The landmark indicates the region West of the Gobi Desert, and is only attested in Z, 33 1 (“Iuguristam quedam provincia magna est et subiacet Magno Can”), in a chapter only present in the Latin version.<sup>28</sup> And there is no doubt that in the copy at his disposal Fra Mauro could read a complete text, or at least more complete than the one transmitted by the Toledan copy. Evidence of this is the cartouche located near the picture of the bridge on the Polisanchin / Pulisanghin river:

(FM \*2315) Ponte mirabile e famoso con tresento archi e siemil à imagine de lioni i qual reze tante collone con i suo capitelli a più suo ornamento, super el qual se traversa el fiume Polisanchin.

The cartouche retains a detail of Polo’s description of the bridge – the lions at the base of the pillars – that the Toledan copy omits in its abbreviation (Z, 46 2-3):

---

<sup>26</sup> Pelliot (1959-1973), 9.

<sup>27</sup> Like Falchetta (2006), Cattaneo (2011), 191-198, provides some comparative core samplings between Fra Mauro’s cartouches and the tradition of *DM*, handling the toponymy as pertinent trait.

<sup>28</sup> Hallberg (1906), 267-268, records only the toponym “Iugures”, which occurs in William of Rubruck’s *Itinerarium*. See also Pelliot (1953-1975), 753-754, nr. 261 (“Iuguristan”). The chapter of Z lacks in F between the chapters LVIII (*Ci devise de la provence de Camul*) and LIX (*Ci devise de la provence de Chinchintalas*), corresponding to V, 326 / 327; Fr, 58 / 59; L, 53 / 54; TA, 58 / 59; VA, XLV / XLVI; P, I 46 / 47; TB, 34 / 35; VB, XLI / XLII.



**Figure 3: Achbaluch in Fra Mauro's World Map**

Source: Falchetta (2016); Courtesy of Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali - Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana.

**Table 11a: The Bridge on the Polisanchin / Pulisanghin River  
(Z Version)**

<p>Supra flumen istud est quidam pons lapideus valde pulcer, et raro quod sit in mundo alius ita pulcer. Longitudo eius est trecentorum passuum, latitudo vero .viiij., ita quod large posent per eum homines unus a latere alterius equitare, etcetera.</p>	<p>Over this river there is a very beautiful stone bridge: there are few of them in all the world so beautiful. It is quite three hundred paces long and eight wide, so that one horseman can well go beside the other, and so on.</p>
--	--

but which is present in F, CIV 4 (among others),

**Table 11b: The Bridge on the Polisanchin / Pulisanghin River  
(F Version)**

<p>Et desus cest flum a u' mout biaux pont de pieres, car sachiés qe pont n'a en tout lo monde de si biaux ne son paroil, et &lt;voç mostrerai&gt; raison comant. Je voç di qu'il est lonc bien .CCC. pas et large .VIII., car bien hi puet aler .X. chevalers le un juste l'autre; il ha .XXIII. arch et .XXIII. moreles en l'eive, et est tout de marbre bis mout bien ovrés et bien asetés; il a de chascunz lés dou pont un mur de tables de marbres et de colones si fait con je voç dirai: il est fichés en chief dou pont une colone de marbre et desor la colone a un lion de marbre et desus la colone en a un autre mout biaux et grant et bien fait, et longe de cest colone un pas et mi en a un autre toute ausi fait con deus lions, et de le une colone a l'autre est clous de table de marbre bis [...]</p>	<p>And over this river is a very beautiful [...] stone bridge [...]. For you may know that there are few of them in all the world so beautiful, nor its equal. And I shall show you the reason how. I tell you that it is quite three hundred paces long and [...] eight [...] wide, for ten horsemen can well go there the one beside the other [...] it has twenty-four arches and twenty-four piers in the water [...], and it is all of grey marble very well worked and well founded. There is [...] on each side of the bridge [...] a wall of flags of marble and of pillars [...] made so as I shall tell you. [...] there is fixes at the head of the bridge a marble pillar, and below the pillar is a marble lion and above the pillar is another one, [...] very beautiful and large and well made; and a pace and a half from this pillar [...] is another [...] one made just the same [...] with two [...] lions. [...] and from one pillar to the other it is closed in with a flag of grey marble...<sup>29</sup></p>
---	--

and in R, II 27 3-9.

<sup>29</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), 255-256.

**Table 11c: The Bridge on the Polisanchin / Pulisanghin River  
(R Version)**

<p>Sopra detto fiume è un ponte di pietra molto bello, et forse in tutto il mondo non ve n'è un altro simile. La sua lunghezza è trecento passa et la larghezza otto, di modo che per quello potriano commodamente cavalcare dieci huomini l'uno a lato all'altro. Ha ventiquattro archi et venticinque pile in acqua che li sostengono, et è tutto di pietra serpentina, fatto con grande artificio. Dall'una all'altra banda del ponte è un bel poggio di tavole di marmo et di colonne maestrevolmente ordinate, et nell'ascendere è alquanto piú largo che nella fine dell'ascesa, ma, poi che s'è ascreso, trovasi uguale per lungo come se fosse tirato per linea. Et in capo dell'ascesa del ponte è una grandissima colonna et alta, posta sopra una testuggine di marmo; appresso il piè della colonna è un gran leone, et sopra la colonna ve n'è un altro. Verso l'ascesa del ponte è un'altra colonna molto bella, con un leone, discosta dalla prima per un passo et mezzo; et dall'una colonna all'altra è serrato di tavole di marmo, tutte lavorate a diverse sculture et incastrate nelle colonne da lí per lungo del ponte infino al fine. Ciascadune colonne sono distanti l'una dall'altra per un passo et mezzo, et a ciascuna è sopra-posto un leone, con tavole di marmo incastratevi dall'una all'altra.</p>	<p>Over this river there is a very handsome bridge of stone, perhaps unequalled by any other in the world. Its length is three hundred paces, and its width, eight paces; so that ten men can, without inconvenience, ride abreast. It has twenty-four arches, supported by twenty-five piers erected in the water, all of serpentine stone, and built with great skill. On each side, and from one extremity to the other, there is a handsome parapet, formed of marble slabs and pillars arranged in a masterly style. At the commencement of the ascent the bridge is something wider than at the summit, but from the part where the ascent terminates, the sides run in straight lines and parallel to each other. Upon the upper level there is a massive and lofty column, resting upon a tortoise of marble, and having near its base a large figure of a lion, with a lion also on the top. Towards the slope of the bridge there is another handsome column or pillar, with its lion, at the distance of a pace and a half from the former; and all the spaces between one pillar and another, throughout the whole length of the bridge, are filled up with slabs of marble, curiously sculptured, and mortised into the next adjoining pillars, which are, in like manner, a pace and a half asunder, and equally surmounted with lions [...]<sup>30</sup></p>
--	---

<sup>30</sup> Marsden (1818), 386-387.

It is likely that Fra Mauro and Ramusio obtained the landmark “Achbaluch / Hachbaluch” from the same text, probably the same complete copy of Z; but at present, it is more important for us to point out that, referring to Ramusio’s description, Pelliot was right when he observed that “its authenticity is beyond doubt”.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. A New “Critical Translation” of *DM*

Our analysis leads us to a discovery, which seems trivial, but which is significant for us, and which is valid whatever idea we have about the history of the text. This discovery is that neither the  $\delta$  “vulgate” nor the richest text of Z / R (and V / L) *DM* witness contains all the information we can consider authentic and original; no witness maintains the original form of the text. It is no coincidence, therefore, that scholars concerned about reconstructing *DM* content adopted the “critical translation” solution: we are talking about Luigi Foscolo Benedetto, Arthur C. Moule, and René Kappler.

In 1931, Benedetto published in London *The Travels of Marco Polo* (Routledge). It was the English version – by Aldo Ricci – of the Italian “critical translation” that was printed in Milan by Treves in 1932: *Il libro di Messer Marco Polo cittadino di Venezia detto Milione dove si raccontano le meraviglie del mondo*. The subtitle is: *critically rebuilt and, for the first time, fully translated into Italian*. Thanks to the mediation of Filippo De Filippi and Aurel Stein – whose correspondence has been studied by Nico Mastropietro –,<sup>32</sup> the volume should have been followed by a commentary by Paul Pelliot. Unfortunately, the project failed because of Pelliot’s work commitments (even if, a few years later, Pelliot was involved with Moule in an editorial enterprise very similar to Benedetto’s,

<sup>31</sup> Pelliot (1953-1975), 8-9, nr. 5 (“Achbaluch”). The identification with Chengtingfu (today Zhending, in Hebei), proposed by Yule (Yule and Cordier [1902] (1929), II, 14-15), was accepted by Pelliot, and was never questioned. See also Haw (2006), 95.

<sup>32</sup> Mastropietro (2012), 98-106, reconstructs Filippo de Filippi’s attempts to secure Benedetto and Pelliot’s collaboration through the correspondence between De Filippi and Sir Aurel Stein. See also Barbieri (2016), 38-42.



and whose results are the posthumous *Notes on Marco Polo* published by Louis Hambis, 1959-1973).

*Here is told of the great city of Jonju*

After crossing that bridge, one travels thirty miles towards the west, always finding fine hostelries and vineyards and gardens, and most fertile fields and excellent springs. Then one at last comes to a city called Jonju, which is both large and beautiful. It contains many monasteries of the idolaters. The people live by trade and handicrafts. Beautiful gold and silver cloths, and very fine sandals are made there. There are also many hostelries for travellers.

One mile out of this city, one finds two roads, one leading to the west, and the other to the south-east. The westerly road is that of Cathay, the other leads towards the great province of Manji.

And you must know that travelling across the province of Cathay, towards the west, one finds, at ten days' journey from Jonju, the city of Taiuanfu. And all the time one comes across many fine cities and towns, with much trade and industry, beautiful fields, and splendid vineyards. The wine is taken to those parts of Cathay where it is not produced. There are also many mulberry-trees, from the leaves of which the inhabitants obtain much silk. The population is everywhere very friendly on account of the many cities, which are close to one another, while the cities themselves are so thickly populated, that along the road there is always a crowd of travellers. And this is due to the large amount of merchandise that is constantly being carried between the cities, and to the fairs that are held in each of them.

There is nothing else worth mentioning. I will only add that after travelling for five of the ten days I have mentioned, there is a finer and larger city than the others, called Acbaluc, where end, in this direction, the hunting preserves of the Great Kaan, within which no one dares go hunting except the Great Kaan himself and his servants, and those who are entered upon the rolls of the Captain of the Falconers. But beyond this limit anyone may hunt, provided he be a nobleman. The Great Kaan, however, hardly ever went hunting in those parts, and for this reason the wild animals increased and multiplied to such an extent, especially the hares, as to damage the crops of the whole province. When the Great Kaan was informed of this, he went there with all his court, and the number of animals caught was incalculable.

We will now leave this subject and tell you of a kingdom called Taiuanfu.

**Figure 4a: Benedetto's English Edition (1931)**

## CVII. — CI DEVISE DE LA GRANT CITÉ DE GIONGIU.

Et quant l'en s'en part de cest pont, et il est alés troynte milles por ponent, trouvant toutes foies bieles erberges et vignes et chans<sup>2</sup>, adonc treuve une cité, qui est apelés Gio[n]giu, grant et biele. Hi a maintes abaie de ydres. Il vivent de mercandie et de ars.  
 5 Il hi si laborent dras de soie et d'ore et biaux sendal; et il hi a maintes herbergieries que erbergient les viandans.

Et quant l'en est parti ¶ de ceste ville et alés un mil, adonc treuve l'en deus voies, que le une ala a ponent et le autre a seiloc. Celle dou ponent est dou Catai et celle do siloc  
 vaît ver la grant provénce dou Mangi. Et sachiés tout voiremant que l'en chevauehe por  
 10 ponent<sup>3</sup> por la provénce dou Catai bien x jornee. Et toutes foies treuve l'en maintes belles cités, et maint biaux chastiaus de grant mercandies et de grant ars, et biaux chans, et bielles vignes<sup>4</sup>, et domescs jens<sup>4</sup>. N'i a chouses que a mentovoir face: por ce ne vos en diron rien.

Et adonc laiseron de ceste maîtiere et vos conteron de un roiaime que Taianfu est appellés.

scuz les dou pont a un mur 14 opp. eu chief 14 S coloune 15 S desor la colone 16 opp. longe  
 16 S ceste colone 18 aise ò punteggiato dal copista aze.

CVII. — 1 *Giongiu* è una nostra correzione congetturale; se si adotta, come sembra abbastanza sicuro, la lettura *giu* per la seconda sillaba (su in Z), il rubricario linuare ha *Ciugiu* (o *Cuigi* o *Ciugiu*); M' *Gigi* (S *Gigi*); ma abbiamo *Giegiu* a l. 4 (confermato da L e TA) e *Giongiu* in VA confermato da Z che ha *Zouzu* (R *Gonza*) e dallo stesso F che ha *Giungia* a l. 2 del cap. CVIII 2 S trolates 4 S *Gioqui* 5 S doré 5 S sandal  
 6 S maudaux 11-12 S biaux chans et biel les vingues.

e come ha sputato lo cuopre e salva. Hanno similmente alcuni belli bolzachini di cuoro bianco, quali portano seco, e giuati alla corte se vorranno entrar in sala, che 'l Signor li domandi, si calzano questi bolzachini bianchi, e danno gli altri alli servitori, e questo per non indrattar li belli e artificiosi tapeti di seta e d'oro e d'altri colori.

CVI. — a) R: *E nell' ascendere è alquanto più largo che nella fine dell' ascasa. Ma poi che s' è ascaso si truova uguale per lungo come se fosse tirato per linea. E in capo dell' ascasa del ponte è una grandissima colonna e alta, posto sopra una testuggine di marmo. Appresso il piede della colonna è un gran leone, e sopra la colonna ve n'è un altro. Verso l' ascasa del ponte è un' altra colonna molto bella con un Leone discosta dalla prima per un passo e mezzo. E dall' una colonna all'altra è serrato di tavole di marmo tutte lavorate a diverse scolture e incastrate nelle colonne da li per lungo del ponte infino al fine.* b) R: *Et nella discesa del ponte è come nell' ascasa.*

CVII. — a) R: *campi fertilissimi.* b) Z: *et noveritis quod a civitate Zouzu usque ad regnum Tayanfu equitatur per provinciam Cathay x dietis.* — (R uguale a Z ma invece di *regnum* va forse corretto *civitatem*, perchè Taianfu in quanto città doveva già essere nominata, probabilmente a questo punto, nel testo originario; cf. OVIII, 3-4). c) Z: *inveniendò vineas et campos ubi multum nascitur syrioum.* — R: *trovando vigne e campi lavorati; e di qui si porta il vino nella provincia del Cataio, perchè in quella non ve ne nasce. Vi sono anche molti alberi mori che con la foglia sua gli habitanti fanno di gran seta.* d) Z: *sunt omnes gentes domesticæ propter spissitudinem civitatum et frequentantur ita vie illarum civitatum quod semper inveniuntur gentes transeuntes etc.* (l' etc. è in Z, prova di ulteriori particolari nel suo modello) — (Y) *et spesega molta zente* — R: *Tutte quelle genti sono domestiche, per la moltitudine delle città poco discoste l' una dall' altra e frequentatione che fanno gli habitanti di quelle, perchè sempre vi si truovano genti, che passano per le molte mercantie che si portano continuamente d' una città all' altra, e in ciascuna di quelle si fanno le fiere. Et in capo di cinque giornate delle predette dieci, dicono esservi una città più bella e maggior dell' altre chiamata Achbaluch, fino alla quale verso quella parte confina il termine della cacciagione del Signore, dove niun aràisee d' andar alla caccia, eccettuando il Signore con la sua famiglia e chi è scritto sotto il Capitano de' Falconieri. Ma da quel termine innanzi può andarvi pur che sia nobile. Nondimeno quasi mai il gran Can andava alla caccia per quella danda. Per la qual cosa gli animali salvaticchi erano tanto cresciuti e moltiplicati, e specialmente le lepore che gustavano le biade di tutta la detta provincia. La qual cosa fatto intendere al gran Can, v' andò con tutta la corte e furono presi animali senza numero.*

## Figure 4b: Benedetto's Italian Edition (1928)

As shown in the Figure 4a, Benedetto elaborates in a homogeneous narration (i.e. the translation) both text F and those informative additions provided by other witnesses, whereas these additions had previously been put in the apparatus of his 1928 critical edition, the first critical edition of the book, and the philological basis for the 1932 translation (see Figure 4b: CVII, Ci devise de la grant cité de Giongiu). By placing text F and other additions together, the translation assumes responsibility for rebuilding the original content. In the 1928 edition this operation was up to the reader, who virtually had to combine the text with the additions in the apparatus.

The critical translation has a homogeneous layout, where text F and the additions are not typographically distinguished. There is no philological illustration explaining the criteria of the reconstruction. As a matter of fact, Benedetto's goal was to offer the average reader an accessible text, which was nonetheless based on the hypothesis presented in the 1928 edition.

Benedetto made a different choice when, in 1954, he started working on a new commented *DM* edition in modern French, commissioned by UNESCO. This new translation was meant to become an international reference text, but the project remained unfinished because of Benedetto's death in 1966. The UNESCO edition resumes the 1931-1932 project, but in this case the translation was accompanied by an impressive commentary, with the philological analysis of the sources used for the textual reconstruction (quoted as fragments), and the discussion of the Asian items described by Polo.<sup>33</sup> Ten years after Benedetto's critical edition, in 1938, Moule and Pelliot's edition followed the same path: we find text F translated into English (by Moule, we suppose), complemented by additions and variants printed in italics – in our chapter (Figure 5) they are taken from R, Z, VB, V, FB and LT, as we know from the sigla put in the margin of the page).

---

<sup>33</sup> The critical edition of this text and its commentary is being published by Edizioni Ca' Foscari. For the first volume (the critical translation) see Simion (2016).

·106·  
 VB **H**ERE HE TELLS OF THE GREAT CITY OF GIOGIU. And when one sets out from  
 this bridge *aforesaid* and he is gone thirty miles by the sunseting,  
 LT FB VA always finding beautiful *trees, villages, and inns for food & palaces* and  
 FB FB R VB FB beautiful vineyards and beautiful gardens and beautiful very fruitful cultivated fields and  
 VA beautiful springs, then at the end of thirty miles he finds a city which is called Giogiu  
 Z VB Z very great and beautiful. There are many abbeys of idolaters *priests and monks* in it,  
 LT VB and the people of that country are all idolaters. And however they live by trade and by crafts,  
 VB L as for the most part do all other people. For many cloths of silk and of gold and beautiful  
 R V V VB very fine sendals are made there. And there are very many fine inns or hostels in our  
 VB manner, where the wayfarers lodge, because of the multitude of merchants & strangers who  
 come there. And when one is departed [48a] from this town and gone one mile then  
 one finds two roads which the one goes to sunseting and the other to sirocco.  
 R That of the sunseting is the road by which one goes through the province of Catai, and  
 TA that of the sirocco goes toward the great sea to the great province of Mangi. And you  
 may know quite truly that one rides by the sunseting through the province of Catai  
 quite ten<sup>1</sup> days journeys from the city of Giogiu to the realm of Tainfu. And one always Z  
 finds many beautiful cities and many beautiful villages, people of great trade and of VB  
 great industry, and finds beautiful & well cultivated fields in which much silk is produced Z VB Z  
 and beautiful vines and many trees, and they are all settled people & comfortable. LT Z VB  
 and very affable because of the number of the cities little removed one from another; and the P R Z  
 ways of those cities are so much frequented by the inhabitants that people are always found R Z  
 passing by, because of the many goods which are continually carried from one city to the other; R  
 and in each of them fairs are held. And from here the wine is carried into the province of Catai,  
 because wine is not produced there. There are also many mulberry trees of which the inhabitants  
 make much silk with their leaves. And at the end of five days journeys of the foresaid ten they  
 say there is a city more beautiful and greater than the others, called Achbaluch, to which in  
 that direction approaches the boundary of the lord's hunting, where none dares go hunting except  
 the lord with his retinue and whoever is enrolled under the captain of the falconers. But from  
 that boundary forward one can go, provided that he is a nobleman. Nevertheless the great Kaan  
 as it were never went hunting on that side; for which reason the wild animals were so much  
 increased and multiplied, and specially the hares, that they destroyed the corn of the whole  
 of the said province. And when this thing was made known to the great Kaan he went there  
 with all the court, and animals were taken without number. There is nothing which does  
 to mention, so we shall tell you nothing about it. And then we shall leave this  
 matter and shall tell you of a kingdom which is called Tainfu.

Figure 5: Moule and Pelliot's English Edition (1938)

Moule provides no explanation for his textual choices. For instance, from LT Moule takes the reading: and the people of that country are all idolaters, which was probably added later by a scribe to recover the information which in the other versions appears earlier. Moreover, the sources used for the addition are not always clearly or completely indicated: where we read from the city of Giogiu to the realm of Tainfu, the siglum indicates Z as the source (a civitate Çonçu usque ad regnum Tayanfu), but the same information can also be found in R (dalla città di Gouza fino al regno di Tainfu). As we can see, Moule and Pelliot's edition seems to be a patchwork that tells us very little about each version, and even less about the

seminal history of the text. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand Benedetto's reasons when he called Moule's text a "polpettone" (a mish-mash).

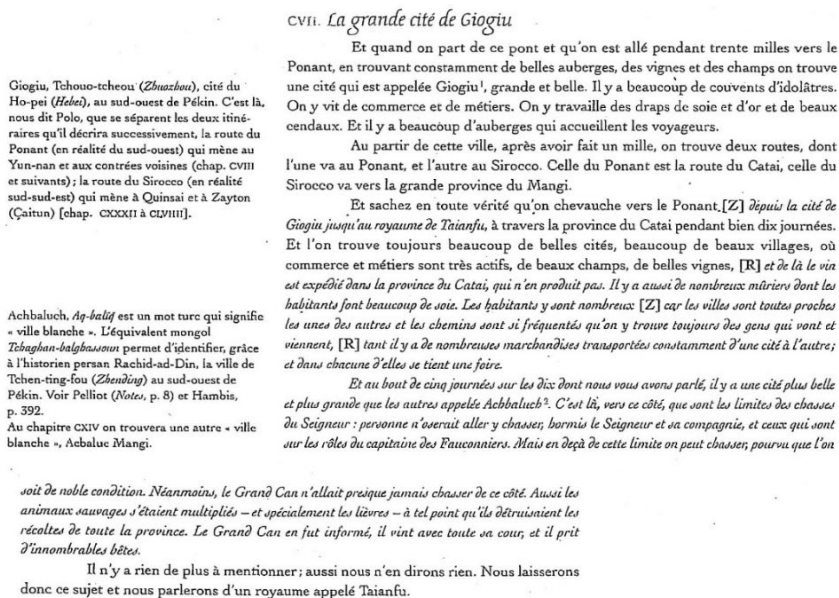


Figure 6: Kappler's French Edition (2004)

Let us talk, finally, about René Kappler's edition (2004) (Figure 6). His purpose is to make Polo's book "aussi proche que possible de son unité et de sa richesse premières". To do that, he adopts a precise textual "prophylaxis":

[...] nous avons voulu éviter la fusion qui donnerait l'illusion d'une unité sans existence avérée. Nous n'avons pas voulu "lisser" la lecture ni faire une version artificiellement intégrale qui n'aurait jamais existé sous cette forme. L'origine de chaque "ajout" sera clairement indiquée. L'italique marquera à dessein ces sutures, invitera le regard à se porter un instant "ailleurs", à changer d'angle comme dans une lecture "synoptique". [...] Nous présentons donc ici en français de notre époque

une traduction de la version la plus ancienne [...] et nous la “complétons” grâce à d’autres versions.<sup>34</sup>

Actually, the “autres versions” that complete text F are mostly Z and R: Kappler renounces in principle to present those fragments of the original text, that any witness, and not only the “bon manuscrit”, may retain.<sup>35</sup>

## 5. Diachronicity and Synchronicity

What is the price to pay for representing the “original” content of the *DM*? Kappler clearly indicates at least one thing: “l’illusion d’une unité sans existence avérée” – in other words, the sin of anachronism, which is “habituellement, [...] l’accusation portée contre les éditions qui prétendent reconstruire le texte au-delà du simple manuscrit” –<sup>36</sup> we can say, the witness itself). But there is another fact: the pitfalls hidden in the editorial form of these apparently clear and easily readable works. This second fact is implicit in the apparatus of Benedetto’s 1928 edition, whose layout does not emphasize the individuality of each version, and only ensures a mere trickle of information about the diachronic tradition. As a matter of fact, unless he has on his desk all the *codices* and editions quoted in the apparatus, the reader cannot “falsify” the editors’ hypothesis and cannot fully assess the value of each individual attestation. The paradox that troubles these editions is a lack of autonomy and individuality: their own existence is only due to the fact that they project on their pages the shadows of absent texts, which, in turn, bear the traces of a lost developmental phase.

If we adopt this point of view, we must admit that those who think that it is illusory to follow the traces of an *Ur DM*, and that it only makes sense to edit each historically existing version, are not entirely wrong. In short, it could be argued that the *DM* is a sort of ghost that gives rise to philology itself, if we understand “philology” as the intellectual practice (an *art*, said

---

<sup>34</sup> Kappler (2004), 7.

<sup>35</sup> See Avalor (2002), 147: “Quelle parcella di luce, frammenti dell’‘originale’ che a rigore qualsiasi manoscritto e non solo il *bon manuscrit* può conservare, in grado più o meno elevato».

<sup>36</sup> Leonardi (2016), 48.

Bédier) whose task is *to produce a text that can be read in the most verifiable way*,<sup>37</sup> and in particular “reproposer les textes du passé non seulement à une lecture érudite et antiquisante, mais aussi à la culture contemporaine”.<sup>38</sup>

Any hypothesis concerning the totality of the *DM* textual history has to face the impossibility of giving it a visible and readable textual form. The question is not only practical, but it also involves a theoretical stance to which, as scholars of the Italian philological school, we do not want to give up:

Se focaliser sur la synchronie d’un seul manuscrit finit par obscurcir la diachronie dont ce manuscrit est témoin; renoncer à interpréter, par des hypothèses rigoureusement établies, les données de la transmission d’un texte dans le classement de ses manuscrits, empêche de distinguer même dans chaque manuscrit ce qui est le fruit d’une innovation de ce qui est une transmission fidèle: enfin, cela empêche d’écrire l’histoire d’une tradition, avant même de reconstruire un texte.<sup>39</sup>

In the case of the *DM*, if we do not want to “renoncer à interpréter, par des hypothèses rigoureusement établies, les données de la transmission d’un texte” we must consciously accept restricting the focus of our action to contents only and to find a solution that can overcome the limits of a traditional critical translation. Only in this way will we be able to clarify our hypothesis about the contents of the *DM* and its chronology.

The experience gained with the digital edition of Ramusio’s *Dei Viaggi* confirmed the intuition that supported our project: a digital medium, and the hypertextual form, allow us to overcome the impasse produced by paper support and the traditional book form. Through the simultaneous opening of different windows in an online environment, a digital edition

---

<sup>37</sup> Leonardi (2007), 68

<sup>38</sup> Leonardi (2016), 50 (Focusing on the synchronicity of a single manuscript ends up obscuring the diachronicity to which this manuscript is a witness. Giving up interpreting textual transmission through manuscript classification, even with rigorous hypotheses, precludes distinguishing, even in a single manuscript, what is innovation from what is faithful transmission. Finally, this prevents not only from reconstructing a text, but also from writing the history of a textual tradition.)

<sup>39</sup> See Leonardi (2016), 45. For a definition of *edition-in-time* see also Buzzoni (2016), 61-64.

allows us to visualize (1) the text (the critical translation); (2) the comment apparatus (identified sources; analysis of their manipulation; informative glosses); (3) the complete version of the text from which the source extract is taken, also in parallel with the *DM* text.

The hypertextual solution, among other things, makes it possible to face the opposition between the “preservation” of each individual witness and the diachronic “reconstruction” of a textual dynamism from a different perspective.

Preparing the Ramusio edition, our choice was motivated by empirical reasons: we looked for an editorial solution that would provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of showing both the text (in this case an existing text, and not a reconstructed one) and its genetic development simultaneously. However, during the work for the digital edition, between 2011 and 2015, it was already very clear to us the paradox that troubled many Digital Philology products:

Sul piano della *constitutio textus*, la virtualità della pagina *on line*, la sua natura ontologicamente non definitiva, e forse addirittura la minore fisicità del supporto, dovrebbero – avrebbero dovuto – facilitare e ancor più legittimare la tendenza a proporre ricostruzioni, a sperimentare congetture, a realizzare in forma di testo quelle ipotesi che tradizionalmente la rigidità e la dimensione univoca della carta stampata impedisce di formulare se non in nota. Inoltre, sul piano della *recensio*, l’incomparabile aumento di capacità e funzionalità offerto dall’informatica alla registrazione e alla visualizzazione di numeri anche elevati di attestazioni manoscritte, per di più presentabili non solo in forma di trascrizione, ma anche con il corredo della riproduzione fotografica, dovrebbe – avrebbe dovuto – potenziare enormemente le ragioni e le modalità stesse della collazione, e quindi quella dimensione comparatistica e diacronica intrinseca al modello genealogico-stemmatico. In realtà, per quello che ho potuto vedere, è vero il contrario: nella maggior parte delle edizioni digitali, anche quelle che non si limitano a dar conto di un solo testimone, l’attenzione è molto più focalizzata sulla



riproduzione, diciamo pure sull'edizione, di ciascun singolo manoscritto [...] che non sulle potenzialità di un confronto approfondito sul piano testuale tra le diverse unità testimoniali.<sup>40</sup>

We only need to consult the *Sahle repertoire* mentioned above to broadly confirm Leonardi's remarks. On the other hand, the purpose of our Ramusio edition was twofold: first, to take advantage of the potential of the digital medium to "proporre ricostruzioni", "sperimentare congetture", and to display multiple testimonies; second, to provide an oriented and non-relativistic interpretation of the materials provided, which would take a position.

In doing this, we wanted to avoid the temptation of becoming a mere "digital archive", in which every witness is on the same level as the others, without any possibility of finding a hierarchy or a key to read and reconstruct the text.<sup>41</sup>

At the end of the work, we had in our hands an object that simultaneously offered the individual edition (certainly in the form of a philological, critical text) and the analysis of the genetic dynamics of the text (proposing for *each paragraph* a hypothesis about the sources used by Ramusio, and the ways he manipulated them). In this way, the reader has full freedom to use all the materials made available, and even to trust our philological hypotheses, if they really find them convincing.

---

<sup>40</sup> Leonardi (2007), 66-67 (As regards the *constitutio textus*, the virtual nature of the online page, its ontologically undefined essence, and perhaps also its immaterial support, should make – or should have made – easier and more legitimate the tendency to propose reconstructions, to test conjectures, and to write in the text the hypotheses that are traditionally put into footnotes because of the rigid and univocal dimension of the printed paper. As to the *recensio*, the incomparable increase in capacity and functionality offered by information technology in recording and displaying larger numbers of manuscripts both in transcriptions and in photographic reproductions, should – or should have – greatly enhance the potential and the modalities of the *collatio* itself, thus highlighting the comparative and diachronic dimension intrinsic to the genealogical-stemmatical model. Actually, as far as I can see, the opposite is true. Most digital editions, even when they do not limit themselves to a single witness, focus much more on the reproduction, let us even say on the edition, of every single manuscript [...] than on the potential of a thorough textual comparison of the different witnesses.)

<sup>41</sup> See Leonardi (2007), 69: "[...] ogni attestazione risulta sullo stesso piano dell'altra, senza la possibilità di istituire relazioni o tanto meno gerarchie, cioè senza una chiave di lettura possibile per la ricostruzione". See also Robinson (2005) and Sahle (2007).

## 6. The Integral Edition of *DM*

The digital project of the *DM* critical edition shares the same intellectual framework as the Ramusio edition. The assumption that justifies and supports it, is that it is possible to reconstruct Polo's text, not so much in its linguistic form as in its content, assessing, by "falsifiable" hypothesis, the contribution provided by each witness (that is, by every version coming from the translation or manipulation of the original Franco-Italian text or, in some cases, by a subsequent translation).

The new edition will have the same inquiry procedures than the Ramusio edition, but it will be based on a different technology; indeed, thanks to Marina Buzzoni, who coordinates the digital section of the project, we have developed a customised version of EVT (Edition Visualization Technology) to publish our edition. EVT is an open source software for the visualisation of digital scholarly editions and was developed by a team coordinated by Roberto Rosselli Del Turco (University of Pisa). All our data, including the website (which is under construction), are hosted by an institutional server provided by the Venice Centre for Digital and Public Humanities (VeDPH), directed by Franz Fischer.<sup>42</sup>

The demo we produced, based on a part of chapter CV, will clarify this point.

(a) The minimal unit of text is the chapter; the textual access point is a page divided into two columns: on the left hand side – the most important one – there is the critical translation, divided into paragraphs; on the right hand side, as many as two further versions may be visualised and scrolled simultaneously (Figure 7a).

---

<sup>42</sup> Elisa Cugliana and Chiara Martignano developed the intellectual frame of the edition and the software, tailoring it in such a way as to fit the requirements of the project; Giulia Fabbris, Tiziana Mancinelli, and Silvia Marsili coordinate a team of scholars and students who are working on the text encoding. The website, developed by Giacomo Cerretini, is available under <http://mizar.unive.it/dedm/>; for the digital section of the project see also: <http://mizar.unive.it/dedm/about/about-digital-edition/>.

(b) Each paragraph (including the chapter heading) is marked using the TEI (Text Encoding Initiative). Marking allows the reader to access the discussion (in English) of the different versions of that paragraph provided by the other witnesses of the text taken into consideration (Figure 7b).

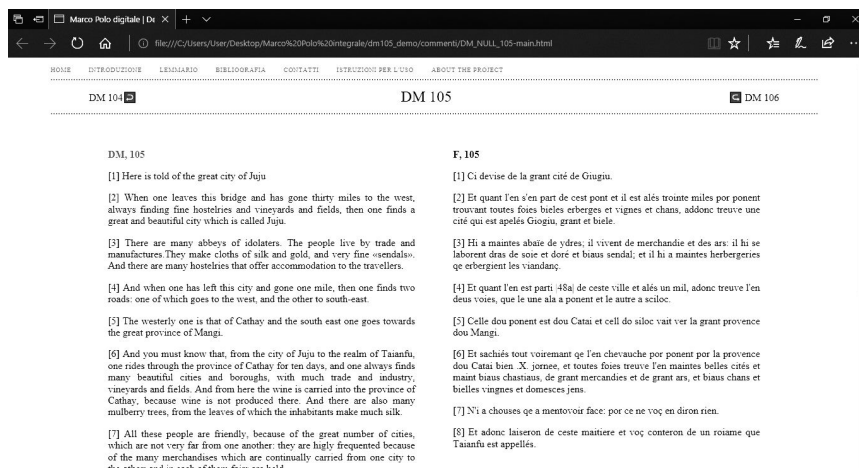


Figure 7a: Critical Translation and F Text

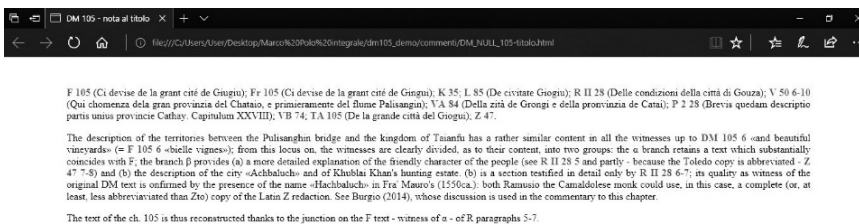
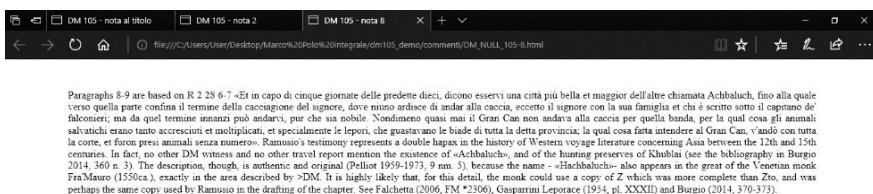


Figure 7b: Tradition of Chapter *DM*, 105: General Commentary

This corpus of witnesses, in fact, does not include all the Vernacular and Latin editions that make up the *DM* tradition. We only take into consideration the editions that literature and our reconstructive hypothesis regard as the most relevant to its history (and therefore not necessarily the most copied during the Middle Ages). These editions are: the vernacular versions Fr, K, TA, TB, V, VA, VB; the Latin versions Z and P (P often offers a better VA source than the one attested in vernacular *codices*); finally,

epitome L. For each version we will use well-established editions or new, specially prepared-editions.

(c) The edition will give full access to all the different versions. By marking the quotations contained in the commentary of each paragraph it will be possible to move to the single chapters and / or to the full text; each version will also be accessible from the home page menu. The reader can then “enter” a text directly, avoiding the “guide” of the commentary, or he can rely on this guide for access to the *DM* tradition; they can have multiple versions of the same chapter simultaneously, or just the complete text. In short, the reader will enjoy the same freedom that distinguishes “surfing” in hypertexts, and which has often been celebrated as a tool to deconstruct the text-form. On the contrary, if readers want to know the reasons for the editors’ choices in the critical translation, they can rely on the General Introduction and on the commentary of each chapter (Figure 7c).



**Figure 7c: *DM*, 105, par. 8: Commentary**

(d) In addition to the paragraphs and headings, the TEI language will also mark some particular lemmas, namely: personal names, toponyms, and lemmas referring to the most significant items in *DM* description. All these names and lemmas will have their own commentary. Again, the edition imitates the Ramusian hypertext, but with a major difference. When preparing the commentary to the lemmas of Ramusio’s text (especially to those concerning China) we could not always rely on first-hand contributions and thus not all the items are completely accurate. In this case, on the contrary, our goal is to involve scholars with direct experience of Asia’s historical cultures and languages.

The choice of English as a lingua franca for the *DM* complete commentary betrays an ambition that perhaps would not have displeased Marco

Polo: to provide scholars with a reconstructed text on a digital platform where everyone can deposit the most up-to-date results of the historical and cultural research on Marco Polo's Asia. In conclusion, we would like this paper to be a call to arms.

## References

- Amatucci, Eleonora (1982-1983). "La redazione toscana B del 'Milione' di Marco Polo: Edizione critica", Graduation thesis (Florence: Università degli Studi di Firenze).
- Andreose, Alvisè (2015a). "Marco Polo's *Devisement dou monde* and Franco-Italian Tradition", *Francigena*, 1: 261-291. Available under <https://www.francigena-unipd.com/index.php/francigena/article/view/6> (last accessed 2018/02/18).
- Andreose, Alvisè (2015b). "Il *Devisement dou monde* e il progetto editoriale di Rustichello da Pisa", in Alvaro Barbieri and Elisa Gregori, eds. *L'autorialità plurima: Scritture collettive, testi a più mani, opere a firma multipla; Atti del XLII Convegno Interuniversitario (Bressanone, 10-13 luglio 2014)* (Padua: ESE-Edra), 443-460.
- Andreose, Alvisè (2015c). "Primi sondaggi per una localizzazione del ms. BnF fr. 1116: La lingua delle rubriche", in Anna Maria Babbi and Chiara Concina, eds. *Francofonie medievali: Lingue e letterature gallo-romanze fuori di Francia (sec. XII-XV)* (Verona: Fiorini), 99-128.
- Andreose, Alvisè; Concina, Chiara (2016). "A monte di F e f: Il *Devisement dou monde* e la scripta dei manoscritti francesi di origine pisano-genovese", in Alberto Pioletti and Stefano Rapisarda, eds. *Forme letterarie del Medioevo romanzo: Testo, interpretazione e storia; Atti dell'XI Congresso Società Italiana di Filologia Romanza (Catania, 22-26 settembre 2015)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino), 15-37.
- Avale, d'Arco Silvio (2002). *La doppia verità: Fenomenologia ecdotica e lingua letteraria del Medioevo romanzo* (Florence: SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo).
- Barbieri, Alvaro (1998). *Marco Polo: Milione; Redazione latina del manoscritto Z* (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo/Ugo Guanda Editore).
- Barbieri, Alvaro (2016). "Il *Livre de messire Marco Polo*: Storia di un'impresa filologica e editoriale", in Samuela Simion, ed. *Luigi Foscolo Benedetto: Livre de messire Marco Polo citoyen de Venise, appelé Milion, où sont décrites les*

- Merveilles du monde; Traduzione critica secondo le carte inedite del lascito di Ernest Giddey* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari). Available under <http://edizioni-cafoscarì.unive.it/it/edizioni/libri/978-88-6969-102-7/> (last accessed 2018/02/18).
- Barbieri, Alvaro; Andreose, Alvise (1999). *Marco Polo: Il 'Milione' veneto, Ms. CM 211 della Biblioteca civica di Padova* (Venice: Marsilio).
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo (1928). *Marco Polo: Il Milione, Prima edizione integrale* (Firenze: Olschki).
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo (1931). *The Travels of Marco Polo*. Translated into English from the text of L.F. Benedetto by Aldo Ricci, with an introduction and index by E. Denison Ross (London: Routledge).
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo (1932). *Il libro di Messer Marco Polo Cittadino di Venezia detto Milione dove si raccontano Le Meraviglie del Mondo, Ricostruito criticamente e per la prima volta integralmente tradotto in lingua italiana* (Milan; Rome: Treves).
- Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Valeria (1975). *Marco Polo: Milione, Versione toscana del Trecento; Edizione a cura di Valeria Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Indice ragionato a cura di Giorgio Raimondo Cardona* (Milan: Adelphi).
- Burgio, Eugenio, ed. (2011). *Giovanni Battista Ramusio 'editor' del 'Milione': Trattamento del testo e manipolazione dei modelli; Atti del Seminario di ricerca (Venezia, 9-10 settembre 2010)* (Rome; Padua: Antenore).
- Burgio, Eugenio (2014). “‘Achbaluch, nella provincia del Cataio’, (Ramusio, *I Viaggi di Messer Marco Polo*, II 28, 6-7)”, in Paolo Canettieri and Arianna Punzi, eds. *Dai pochi ai molti: Studi in onore di Roberto Antonelli* (Roma: Viella), vol. 1, 359-373.
- Burgio, Eugenio (forthcoming). *L'epitome latina del "Milione" (redazione L)* (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari).
- Burgio, Eugenio; Eusebi Mario (2008). “Per una nuova edizione del *Milione*”, in Silvia Conte, ed. *I viaggi del "Milione": Itinerari testuali, vettori di trasmissione e metamorfosi del "Devisement du monde" di Marco Polo e Rustichello da Pisa nella pluralità delle attestazioni* (Rome: Tiellemedia), 17-48.
- Buzzoni, Marina (2016). “A Protocol for Scholarly Digital Editions? The Italian Point of View”, in Matthew James Driscoll and Elena Pierazzo, eds. *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers), vol. 4, 59-82. Available under <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/483> (last accessed 2018/02/18).

- Buzzoni, Marina; Burgio, Eugenio (2014). "The Italian Third Way of Editing between Globalization and Localization", in Michael Stolz and Yen-Chun Chen, eds. *Internationalität und Interdisziplinarität der Editionswissenschaft* (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter), vol. 38, 171-180.
- Cattaneo, Angelo (2011). *Fra Mauro's Mappa Mundi and Fifteenth Century Venice* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Concina, Chiara (2007). "Prime indagini su un nuovo frammento franco-veneto del *Milione* di Marco Polo", *Romania*, 145: 58-86.
- Driscoll, Matthew James; Pierazzo, Elena, eds. *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers), vol. 4. Available under <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/483> (last accessed 2018/02/18).
- Eusebi, Mario ed., *Marco Polo: Le Devisement dou monde, 1. Testo, secondo la lezione del codice fr. 1116 della Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari (Filologie medievali e moderne; 16, Serie occidentale; 13), 2018. Available under <http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/libri/978-88-6969-224-6/> (last access by 2018/11/11).
- Falchetta, Piero (2006). *Fra Mauro's World Map* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Gadrat-Ouerfelli, Christine (2015). *Marco Polo au Moyen Age: Traduction, diffusion et réception du 'Devisement du Monde'* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Gasparrini Leporace, Tullia (1956). *Il Mappamondo di Fra Mauro* (Roma: Poligrafico della Zecca dello Stato).
- Gennari, Pamela (2010). "«Milione», redazione VB: Edizione critica commentata", PhD diss. (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia).
- Gobbato, Veronica (2015). "Un caso precoce di tradizione indiretta del Milione di Marco Polo: Il Liber de introductione loquendi di Filippino da Ferrara O. P.", *Filologia Mediolatina*, 22: 319-368.
- Hallberg, Ivar (1906). *L'Extrême Orient dans la littérature et la cartographie de l'Occident des XIII<sup>e</sup>, XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Göteborg: Zachrisson).
- Haw, Stephen G. (2006). *Marco Polo's China: A Venetian in the Realm of Kubilai Khan* (New York: Routledge).
- Italia, Paola (2016). Review of Elena Pierazzo, "Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories, Models and Methods", *Ecdotica*, 13: 245-256.
- Kappler, René (2004). *Marco Polo: Le Devisement du monde* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale).

- Leonardi, Lino (2007). “Filologia elettronica tra conservazione e ricostruzione”, in Arianna Ciula and Francesco Stella, eds. *Digital Philology and Medieval Texts* (Ospedaletto: Pacini), 65-75.
- Leonardi, Lino (2016). “L’ecdotique: Histoire de la tradition, présence du texte”, in Jean-Michel Leniaud and Michel Zink, eds. *L’histoire en mutation: L’école nationale de chartes aujourd’hui et demain* (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres), 41-53.
- Leonardi, Lino; Trachsler, Richard (2015). “L’édition critique des romans en prose: Le cas de *Guiron le Courtois*”, in David Trotter, ed. *Manuel de la philologie de l’édition* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter), 44-80.
- Marsden, William (1818). *The Travels of Marco Polo* (London: Dent).
- Mascherpa, Giuseppe (2008). “San Tommaso in India: L’apporto della tradizione indiretta alla costituzione dello stemma del *Milione*”, in Alberto Cadioli and Paolo Chiesa, eds. *Prassi ecdotiche: Esperienze editoriali su testi manoscritti e testi a stampa* (Milano: Cisalpino), 171-184.
- Mascherpa, Giuseppe (2009). “Nuove indagini sulla tradizione latina Z del ‘Milione’ di Marco Polo”, PhD diss. (Siena, Università degli Studi).
- Mastropietro, Nico (2012). *Filippo De Filippi esploratore in Asia centrale: Il carteggio con Marc Aurel Stein (1911-1938)* (n.p.: n.p.).
- Ménard, Philippe, ed. (2001-2009). *Marco Polo: Le devisement du monde*, 6 vols. (Genève: Droz).
- Ménard, Philippe (2009). “Le mélange des langues dans les diverses versions du *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo”, in Claire Kappler and Suzanne Thiolier-Méjean, eds. *Le plurilinguisme au Moyen Âge: Orient-Occident de Babel à la langue une* (Paris: L’Harmattan), 233-250.
- Ménard, Philippe (2012). “Deux nouveaux folios inédits d’un fragment franco-italien du *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo”, *Medioevo Romano*, 36: 241-280.
- Moule, Christopher Arthur; Pelliot, Paul (1938). *Polo, Marco: The Description of the World* (London: Routledge).
- Pelliot, Paul (1959-73). *Notes on Marco Polo: Ouvrage posthume, publié sous les auspices de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres et avec le concours du Centre national de la Recherche scientifique* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale).
- Prášek, Justin V. (1902). *M. Pavlova z Benátek: Milion* (Prague: Ées. Akademie).
- Reginato, Irene (2015-2016). “La version K (catalane) du ‘Devisement du monde’ / ‘Milione’ de Marco Polo: Recherches et éditions”, PhD diss. (Venezia, Università Ca’ Foscari).



- Robinson, Peter (2005). "Current Issues in Making Digital Editions of Medieval Texts – Or, Do Electronic Scholarly Editions Have a Future?" Available under <https://journal.digitalmedievalist.org/article/10.16995/dm.8/> (last accessed 2018/02/28).
- Robinson, Peter (2016). "The Digital Revolution in Scholarly Editing", in Barbara Crostini, Gunilla Iversen and Brian M. Jensen, eds. *Ars Edendi Lecture Series* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press), vol. 4, 181-207.
- Sahle, Patrick (2007). "Digitales Archiv und digitale Edition: Anmerkungen zur Begriffsklärung", in Michael Stolz, Lucas Marco Gisi and Jan Loop, eds. *Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft auf dem Weg zu den neuen Medien: Eine Standortbestimmung*, Neuchâtel, 65-84. Available under [https://www.germanistik.ch/scripts/download.php?id=Digitales\\_Archiv\\_und\\_digitale\\_Edition](https://www.germanistik.ch/scripts/download.php?id=Digitales_Archiv_und_digitale_Edition) (last accessed 2018/02/28).
- Simion, Samuela, ed. (2016). *Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo: Livre de messire Marco Polo citoyen de Venise, appelé Milion, où sont décrites les Merveilles du monde, Traduzione critica secondo le carte inedite del lascito di Ernest Giddey* (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari). Available under <http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/libri/978-88-6969-102-7/> (last accessed 2018/02/28).
- Simion, Samuela (2017a). "Giovanni Battista Ramusio, Dei Viaggi di Messer Marco Polo, Edizione critica digitale progettata e coordinata da Eugenio Burgio, Marina Buzzoni, Antonella Ghersetti, a cura di Eugenio Burgio e Samuela Simion", *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, 133: 1257-1267.
- Simion, Samuela (2017b). "La vita di Buddha nel Milione veneziano V", in Paolo Divizia and Lisa Pericoli, eds. *Il viaggio del testo: Atti del Convegno internazionale di Filologia italiana e romanza (Brno, 19-21 giugno 2014)* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso), 23-38.
- Simion, Samuela (2019). *Il Devisement dou monde nella redazione veneziana V (cod. Hamilton 424 della Staatsbibliothek di Berlino)*. (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari) Available under: <https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni4/libri/978-88-6969-322-9/> (last accessed 2021/06/21).
- Simion, Samuela; Burgio, Eugenio (2015). *Ramusio, Giovanni Battista: Dei viaggi di Messer Marco Polo*, Edizione critica digitale progettata e coordinata da Eugenio Burgio, Marina Buzzoni, Antonella Ghersetti (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari). Available under <http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/libri/978-88-6969-00-06/> (last accessed 2018/02/28).
- Simion, Samuela; Burgio, Eugenio (2016). "Il progetto 'Per una nuova edizione del Milione': Otto anni dopo", in Richard Trachsler, Frédéric Duval and Lino Leonardi, eds., *Actes du XXVII<sup>e</sup> Congrès international de linguistique et de*

*philologie romanes* (Nancy, 15-20 juillet 2013), Section 13: *Philologie textuelle et éditoriale* (Strasbourg: Société de linguistique romane/ÉLiPhi), vol. 2, 1423-1433. Available under <http://www.atilf.fr/cilpr2013/actes/section-13/CILPR-2013-13-Simion-Burgio.pdf> (last accessed 2018/02/18).

Terracini, Benvenuto (1933). “Ricerche ed appunti sulla più antica redazione del *Milione*”, *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, 9: 369-428.

Trovato, Paolo (2014). *Everything you Always Wanted to Know about Lachmann’s Method: A Non-Standard Handbook of Genealogical Textual Criticism in the Age of Post-Structuralism, Cladistics, and Copy-Text* (Padua: Libreriauniversitaria.it).

Yule, Henry; Cordier, Henri [1902] (1929). *The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East* (London: Murray).

Zurla, Placido Giacinto O.S.B.Cam. *Il mappamondo di Fra Mauro camaldolese* (Venice: n.p.).



# The Description of the City of Quinsai in the Early Tradition of the *Devisement dou monde*

Giuseppe Mascherpa

## 1. Hangzhou, *très nobilissime cité*

### 1.1 Marco Polo's *laus urbis*

The ancient city of Quinsai, today's Hangzhou, sat on the mouth of Qiantang River, on the shores of the East China Sea. Marco Polo describes it in two famous chapters of the *Devisement dou monde* (F 151-152),<sup>1</sup> the first containing a long description of the city, the second an account of the tributes paid to Khubilai by the population of Quinsai. The first thing Marco says about the city is that «[Quinsai] est san faille la plus noble cité e la meilor qe soie au monde» (F 151, 5).

Maybe Marco visited Quinsai after 1276. It was during that year that the city, the capital of the Southern Song dynasty at the time,<sup>2</sup> was conquered by Khubilai's troops under the direction of general Baian, the "one hundred eyed". The bloodless conquest of Quinsai marked the end of the Southern Song empire and the beginning of the Yuan dominion in South China, the ancient Mangi.<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of his monograph Marco says that Quinsai is a «ville [...] toute en eve et [...] environ«é» de eve» (F 151, 7). In fact, Quinsai was

---

<sup>1</sup> F 151 (rubr.): «Ci devise de la noble cité de Quinsai»; F 152 (rubr.): «Ci devise de la grant rende que le Gran Kaan a de Qinsay». F is the Franco-Italian version of the *Devisement dou monde* (Eusebi (2010)) as rendered in the ms. français 1116 of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris (beginning of fourteenth century), and is probably very close to the Genoese original of the text with respect to language and structure.

<sup>2</sup> During the Song era, the city was known as Lin'an. See Moule (1957), 6-11.

<sup>3</sup> Olschki (1957), 334-336.

crossed by canals and overlooked the big and spectacular West Lake; its climate was mild and its geographical position was strategically important. Maybe this wonderful “water city”, with its canals, noble buildings, squares and its markets reminded Marco Polo of his hometown. Indeed, Quinsai seemed to be a Far Eastern Venice,<sup>4</sup> and maybe this similarity is one of the reasons of Marco Polo’s fascination and peculiar interest for the city.

Not only in Marco Polo’s book, but also in other travel records of medieval European travellers, this big and wonderful city located at the far end of the then known world is described as an extraordinary one. This is quite normal and constitutes a *topos* in the description of the exotic world: the further an object, the more marvellous it is, and so its description was often hyperbolic and exaggerated. For instance, Giovanni de’ Marignolli, in his *Chronicon*, writes that Quinsai is the most marvellous, most beautiful, richest as well as the most populous and delicious city in the world:

Et inter illas est civitas famosissima nomine Campsay, mirabilior, pulchrior, ditior et maior, cum maiori populo et pluribus divitiis et deliciis, edificiis et maxime ydolorum templis [...] quam aliqua civitas que sit in mundo, vel forte fuerit unquam. (Giovanni de’ Marignolli, *Chronicon boemorum*, 5, 14-18)<sup>5</sup>

Odorico da Pordenone highlights that if anyone wanted to describe the marvels of that city, a notebook of 16 pages wouldn’t be enough:

Si quis autem vellet dicere et enarrare huius civitatis magnitudinem illiusque magna mirabilia que sunt in ea, unus bonus quaternus stationis hec omnia tenere non posset. Unde hec est nobilior et maior civitas pro mercimoniis quam habeat totus mundus. (Odorico da Pordenone, *Relatio* [X<sub>(A)</sub> redaction], XXIII, 2 e 40-41)<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> The similarity between Quinsai and Venice has been pointed out by many scholars (e.g. Zurla (1818-1819), 1, 159; Montesano (2014), 131) and was employed in a literary way by Italo Calvino in his famous book *Le città invisibili*.

<sup>5</sup> Van den Wyngaert (1929), 536.

<sup>6</sup> Marchisio (2016), 186-191.

However, not only in Western travel records, but also in Chinese medieval literature Quinsai is described as a great, noble, refined and pleasant place. Indeed, the city is celebrated for its marvels in many Chinese works from the third decade of the thirteenth century onwards, when the Song empire was fading and Chinese independence was ending, thus typically recalling the ancient splendour in an era of crisis. These texts belonged to the Chinese literary genre of the “marvels of capital cities” and were quite similar to the contemporary Western *laudes urbium* (eulogies of cities).

The ancestor and model of such texts is the *Dongjing menghua lu* (Dreams of Splendor of the Eastern Capital) by Meng Yuanlao, written in the first half of the twelfth century. It is a nostalgic and dreamlike description of everyday life in the city of Kaifeng, the ancient capital of the Northern Song.<sup>7</sup> Stephen H. West studied extensively this and other similar texts and pointed out four of them that had been strongly inspired by Meng’s work. These are the *Ducheng jisheng* (Account of the Marvels of the Capital; 1247) by a certain Zhao, the anonymous work *Xihu laoren fansheng lu* (Account of the Various Splendors Written by the Old Man of Western Lake; c. 1250), the *Wulin jiushi* (Ancient Matters from Wulin [Hangzhou]; last quarter of the thirteenth century) by Zhou Mi, and above all the *Mengliang lu* (Account of the Millet Dream; 1334?) by Wu Zimu.<sup>8</sup> The Chinese *escripture* which Marco Polo declares to have made use of for the writing of his monograph on Quinsai appears at least to have been inspired by this literary genre. This *escripture* was an official dispatch sent by the Southern Song Empress to Khubilai in 1276, when the Mongol army commanded by Baian was preparing to conquer the city. It contained a list of the marvels of this capital, and had been written in order to persuade Khubilai to spare the city from destruction:<sup>9</sup>

Et adonc voç conteron de seç nobilité, selonc qe la roine de ceste reingne mande por escript a Baian, qe conquisté ceste provence, qele

<sup>7</sup> About this work, its sources and its influence on Chinese literature, see West (1985).

<sup>8</sup> West (1985), 100-101.

<sup>9</sup> Olschki (1957), 334-335, is of the opinion that Marco Polo may have read this official document in Mongol or Persian translation and that it must have been widely circulated. Moreover, we cannot exclude that this *escripture* was reworked into a literary text.

deus mander au Grant Kan, por ce qe il seuse le grant nobilité de ceste cité, por quoi ne la feist destruer ne gaster. Et selonc que en celle escripture se contenoit, fu verité, selonc ce qe je, Marc Pol, vit puis apertement a mes iaux. (F 151, 6)

We know for certain that Marco Polo inserted much second-hand information in the *Devisement*, as he explicitly mentions in the «Proemium», where he informs us about the sources of his travel report. There he makes the topical distinction between “things seen” and “things heard” (*de visu* and *de auditu*) which was intended to guarantee the honesty and the objectivity of the account:

... meteron les chouses veue por veue et l’entendue por entendue, por ce que notre livre soit droit et vertables sanç nulle mensonge; ... (F Prol., 2)<sup>10</sup>

It’s quite possible that he also used written sources to write parts of his book, but he never refers explicitly to them: in fact, if we exclude two brief mentions of nautical charts and *portolani* (F 172 and 191),<sup>11</sup> we can’t find other references to Eastern texts which could have been used as valuable information. This is the reason why the reference to the Empress’ letter is really extraordinary: maybe Marco did it to “authorize” (in the sense of

<sup>10</sup> In compliance with his premises, Marco Polo always quotes his oral sources along the text: for instance, in F 40, 2-4: «Mulecte est une contree la ou le Viel de la montagne soloit demorer ansienement. [...] Or vos conterai tout son afer, *selonc que je meser March oi la conter a plusors homes*»; F 107, 5: «Il fu voir, *selonc que celles jens dient*, qe ceste roi d’Or avoit ghere con le Prestre Joan et estoit en si forte leu qe le Prestre Johan ne le pooit aler sovre ne nuire»; F 160, 8: «Or sachiés que ceste mer, la ou est ceste isle, s’apelle le mer de Cin, [...] et a, *selonc que les sajes pedot dient, e le sajes mariner qe hi najent et que bien sevent la verité*, .VII<sup>m</sup>. et .IIII<sup>c</sup>. et .XLVIII. ysles, les quelz s’abitent les plusors». The oral sources seem to have been used mostly in the so-called “book of India”: F 162, 2: «... adonc vient a une grandissime isle, qe est apellé Java, qe, *selonc que les buen mariner dient, qe bien le sevent*, ceste est la greingnor isle qe soit au monde»; F 190, 13: «... mes, *selonc celz qe le ont veu content*, ce ne est pas verité que [les oisiaus grifon] soient mi oisiaus et mi lyon», etc. Here and later, highlighting of phrases and sentences by G. M.

<sup>11</sup> See F 191, 15: «E sachiés tout voirement qe en ceste mer de Inde a .XII<sup>m</sup>.VII<sup>c</sup>. ysles, que sunt abitee et ne abitee, *selonc que monstre le compas et la scriture de sajes mariner* que uçent en cel mer de Yndie»; F 172, 3: «... l’isle de Seilan [...] gire environ .II<sup>m</sup>. e .IIII<sup>c</sup>. milles; et si voç di qe ansienement estoit greignor, car elle giroit environ .III<sup>m</sup>. e .VI<sup>c</sup>. miles, *selonc que se treuve en la mapemondi des mariner de cel mer*».

medieval *auctoritas*) his description of Quinsai. Furthermore, he tells us that he has verified and integrated his written source with data and information picked up by personally visiting the city: the sum of the two factors – Chinese source and first-hand information – produces the largest and complete urban monograph in the whole book.

The two signatures placed by Marco Polo at the beginning and at the end of the monograph could be a small narratological clue of his predilection for the city of Quinsai. Indeed, the first person immediately followed by the name ('I, Marco Polo') is very rare in the whole *Devisement* (F redaction), where we normally find the first person without other specifications, or the third person 'messer March' and so on. We can notice only five occurrences of "je Marc Pol" in the whole book, and two of them are in the monograph on Quinsai.<sup>12</sup> This seems to reveal Marco Polo's need to underline his first-hand experience in Quinsai, but also his privileged relationship with the subject of the monograph.

... *je, Marc Pol*, vit puis apertemant a mes iaux (F 151, 6)

... *jeo, March Pol*, qe plusor foies hoï faire le conte de la rende de tous cestes couses, ... (F 152, 9)

As A.C. Moule has shown in three important essays on this matter published in 1926, 1937 and 1957, Marco Polo's account on Quinsai is very precise. The information the Venetian gives about the city's geography, its life and economy and its people's customs generally agrees with Chinese contemporary sources and historical and archaeological data.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The others three are: F 161, 11, «E si vos di qe a les .M.CC.LXXXV. hi fui *je, Marc Pol*, et a celui tens avoit cestui roi .CCC.XXVI. filz entre masles e femes»; F 166, 2, «... le roiaime de Samatra, qe est en ceste isle mesme, en quel *je meisme Marc Pol* hi demorai por .V. mois por le tens qe ne nos lasoit aler nostre voie»; F 125, 2, «Bangala est une provence ver midi qe, as .M.CC.XC. anz de la nativité de Crist, quant *je, March*, estoie a la cort dou Grant Kan, encore ne l'avoit pas conquisté». About the "multi-voice narration" (Marco + Rustichello) in the *Devisement* see Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1977), Barbieri (2004), 129-154, Segre (2008), and the first part of Simon Gaunt's book (Gaunt (2013), 41-77).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Moule (1957), 12: "The following pages will illustrate from contemporary books and from modern observation the general accuracy, in spite of some extraordinary exaggeration, of Polo's record."



Even the inaccurate translation of the name *Quinsai* as ‘City of Heaven’ («Quinsai, que vaut a dire en franchoit *lacité dou ciel*» F 151, 4) is not completely incorrect, as some texts contemporary to Marco Polo’s book show. For instance, the *Fengchuang xiaodu* (Petty Documents from the Maple Window), a collection of miscellaneous notes written by Yuan Jiong and Yuan Yi in the thirteenth century, affirms that during the twelfth century Quinsai was called “Heaven on earth”, and an ancient Chinese proverb says that “After the Halls of Heaven, we speak of Suzhou and Hangzhou.”<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, some of the information given by Polo are not reliable. This may have been due to an incorrect interpretation of the sources or a lack of verification of their contents, but it could also have been caused by the dynamics of textual transmission. For example, the numerical data are often incredibly exaggerated: Quinsai’s bridges were not twelve thousand, as Marco Polo says, but “only” 347; the city’s perimeter length was not 100 miles, but 35 *li*, that is about 20 miles; the West Lake’s perimeter was 6 miles, not 30, and so on. It may also be that Marco Polo had intentionally exaggerated these data to increase the sense of marvel.

As regards to the writing style, the monograph on Quinsai is characterized by words, periphrasis and syntactical constructions that are typical of the *laudes urbium* and their encomiastic style. Firstly, the description of the city shows the highest concentration in the whole *Devisement* of words belonging to the semantic area of “nobility”. A significant specimen of this is offered at the beginning of chapter F 151:

Et quant l’en est alés tres jornee, adonc treuve l’en la *tre nobilissime*<sup>15</sup> cité qui est apellé Quinsai, que vaut a dire en franchoit la cité dou ciel. Et depuis que nos sommes la venu, si voç conteron toute *sa grant nobilité*, por ce que bien fait a conter, que ce est *san faille la plus noble* cité e la meilleur que soie au monde. Et adonc voç conteron de seç *nobilité*,

<sup>14</sup> See Moule (1957), 10-11. The city of Suzhou, which is distant 100 miles northeast from Hangzhou, is likewise built on water, which is the reason why the two cities have often been considered as “sisters”.

<sup>15</sup> This is the only occurrence of the reinforced superlative in the whole book.

selonc qe la roine de ceste reingne mande por escript a Baian, qe conquisté ceste provence, qe le deus mander au Grant Kan, por ce qe il seuse *le grant nobilité de ceste cité*, ... (F 151, 4-6)

Furthermore, we can notice that Marco Polo largely takes advantage of the so called “rhetoric of the marvellous” by making use of hyperboles and accumulation of adjectives and adverbs belonging to the semantic area of “beauty”, “marvel” (a) as well as “greatness” and “abundance” (b) in order to underline the exceptional nature of Quinsai:

a) «maint *biaus* palleis et maintes *bielles* maison *si merveillosemant* faites qe ne poroient estre miaus devisee ne faites ne plus *richemant*», «mout *mervelios* palais et *riches*, fait *si bien* et *si aornees* qe bien senblent *palais d'enperaors*», «les plus *biaus* bagnie les *meior* et les greingnor qe soient au monde», etc.

b) «merchaans [...] font *si grant* mercandies qe ne est homes qe peust dir la verité, *si desmesuree couse* sunt»; «en ceste cité a *grant teçor*, et *grant rente* n'a le Grant Kan, *si grant qe qui l'oïst dira poine le poroit croire*»; «de la soie se done .X. por cent, e ce monte *desmesuré* monoie»; «ce est bien des *plus desmesuré e' no(n)bre* de rente de monoie qe se hoïst *unque conter*» etc.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, it's interesting to notice that some adjectives and adverbs belonging to the semantic area of “elegance” are *hapax legomenon* in the *Devisement*. We find them only in the monograph on Quinsai, and maybe this is no coincidence, if we consider the exceptional singularity of these chapters. I mean the words *delié*, *deliemant* ‘kind, gentle’, *angelique* ‘like an angel’, and *netemant* ‘in a clean way’, which Marco Polo uses in the description of rich artisans’ life:

... tous les chief de les estasion des ars [...] demorent ausi *deliemant* et ausi *netemant* com se il fuissent rois. Et lor dames sunt ausi mout *deliés* et *angelique* chouse. (F 151, 9)

<sup>16</sup> On the hypertrophic representation of the exotic world in the *Devisement*, see Barbieri (2004), “Marco Polo e l'Altro”, 157-175.

## 1.2 A Western Venice

The description of Quinsai, «ville [...] toute en eve et [...] environé de eve» (F 151, 7), recalls the image, the memory, we could even say the ghost of Venice particularly in its first part, the one dedicated to the city's topography, workshops, noble buildings. However, in most of the *Devisement's* versions (including F) this similarity is not explicitly expressed, but remains hidden.

But there are also some redactions of the book, and particularly versions from Northern Italy, where the copyists clearly and explicitly made the connection between Quinsai and Venice, aiming at illustrating the exotic and unknown object through its juxtaposition to a familiar and well-known subject. Take, for instance, in the VA version (“Milione veneto”):<sup>17</sup>

La chaxion per che el g'è tanti ponti si è perché la zità è tuta *in aqua de lagune, chome è Veniexia*, e se non 'de fosse ponti, el non se porave andar per la tera se non per nave. (VA 117, 5)

In the Odorico's *Relatio*, which is mainly addressed to a Venetian audience, the city of Quinsai and its hinterland are compared to Venetian and Emilian cities:

Hec XII portas habet principales, et prope quamlibet illarum portarum forte ad octo milliaria sunt civitates maiores *quam esset civitas Veneciarum et Padua* [...] Hec civitas posita est *in aquis lagunarum*, que manet et stat *ut civitas Veneciarum* [...] ista civitas est sita *sicut Ferraria iuxta Padum*. (*Relatio* [X<sub>(A)</sub> redaction], XXIII, 5, 7, 9)<sup>18</sup>

In some Venetian versions of the *Devisement*, the “twinning” between Quinsai and Venice is sometimes suggested by precise lexical choices which immediately remind readers of the Serenissima. For instance, in the F redaction the flooring of Quinsai's streets is described by the adjective *enastragé* (‘paved’): «En ceste ville toutes les voies <sunt> *enastragé* de pieres e de maton cuit» (F 151, 18). The word *enastragé* derives from the

<sup>17</sup> A critical edition of the text of the “Milione Veneto” has been published by Barbieri and Andreose (1999).

<sup>18</sup> Marchisio (2016), 186-187.

Old Italian *astraco*, ‘flooring’, which is widely used in Tuscany (particularly in Western Tuscany [Pisa, Lucca]) and in Southern Italy.<sup>19</sup> It may be no coincidence that in the Venetian versions of the text (Z, V and VA), *enastraqé* is translated with *salizade* / *saleçate*, a word still used today to designate Venice’s typical paved streets:

Et in questa zitade sono tute le strade *salizade* de pietra de laste (V 76, 15)

Le strade de questa zità sono *salizade* de piere (VA 117, 21)

Item per totam civitatem istam solubrice, id est *saleçate*, sunt omnes vie et strate de lapidibus et lateribus (Z 85, 32)<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Quinsai in Z and R: Textual Problems and Possible Solutions

### 2.1 Preliminaries

In most of the *Devisement*’s witnesses, the two chapters about Quinsai more or less repeat the text of F redaction without significant differences both in the order of arguments and in the contents. The situation is quite different in the Latin Z version and especially in the Ramusio’s Italian translation R, where the text of the monograph is much richer and longer.

The Latin version Z is transmitted by a single manuscript (Z<sup>1</sup>) kept in Toledo at the Archivo y Biblioteca Capitulares (ms. 49-20). This manuscript, transcribed perhaps in Venice in the middle of fifteenth century, is late and unfortunately incomplete, as it omits about sixty chapters and radically reduces others.<sup>21</sup> The indirect tradition of Z assures, however, that the Latin version is older than the manuscript by which it is transmitted. Indeed, there are traces of it already in the middle of the fourteenth century in two didactic works written by Dominican friars in the Southern Veneto: the *Legendarium*, an hagiographic collection composed by Pietro Calò da

<sup>19</sup> See TLIO under the item *astraco*.

<sup>20</sup> The texts of the V and R versions are quoted from the critical edition prepared by Samuela Simion for the digital edition of the Ramusio’s *Milione*, i.e. Simion-Burgio (2015), *Testimoni / La redazione V* and *Testimoni / La redazione R*. For the text of the Z redaction, see Barbieri (1998).

<sup>21</sup> Benedetto (1928), CLXIII-CLXIV; Barbieri (1998), 576-578; Mascherpa (2007-2008), 78-99.

Chioggia, and the *Liber de introductione loquendi*, a conversation handbook written by Filippino da Ferrara.<sup>22</sup>

The main characteristic of Z compared to F and to the tradition lies in a big number of textual additions of different size, ranging from short integrations to complete rewritings of the text and completely new paragraphs and chapters. These additions, missing in most of the other versions of the book,<sup>23</sup> are very precious because in most cases they increase our knowledge about Asian history, geography and society in the age of Marco Polo. Even if it is possible that Z contains information not ascribable to Marco Polo, there is no reason to doubt that in their great majority Z additions are due to Marco or to someone of his family. After all, one can well imagine that Marco had an eye on the redaction, revision and enrichment of his book, once he had returned to Venice.

An almost complete but unfortunately lost witness of the Z version (the famous “Codice Ghisi” called Z<sup>1</sup>) was the main source of the Ramusio’s *Viaggi di Messer Marco Polo* (1559), compiled by mixing different redactions of the *Devisement*, above all the Latin versions Z and P and the Venetian rewriting VB, to a lesser extent L and V.<sup>24</sup>

## 2.2 Quinsai in Z

While in Z<sup>1</sup> the chapters about Quinsai (85 and 86) are very close to F with regard to the disposition of arguments and syntax of the text,<sup>25</sup> in matters of contents Z<sup>1</sup> shows both the usual cuts and abbreviations (the *et cetera* closing the chapter 85 is meaningful) as well as a substantial number of textual additions of different size missing in the other versions of the *Devisement*, with the partial exception of R which includes some of them. These additions – given here in italic – are of two types: *addenda* which

<sup>22</sup> Gobbato (2015); Devos (1948); Mascherpa (2008); Mascherpa (2007-2008), 164-171.

<sup>23</sup> A few of them are contained in the Venetian version V and the Latin compendium L. See Benedetto (1928), CLXXIII-CLXXXII; Simion (2011); Burgio and Mascherpa (2007).

<sup>24</sup> Benedetto (1928), CLVIII-CLXII; Burgio (2011); Simion and Burgio (2015), *Introduzione*.

<sup>25</sup> In other words, despite the difference of language, the syntax and the lexicon in Z and F are the same and hence the conclusion that Z is the very literal translation of a Franco-Italian text very close to F. Cf. Benedetto (1928), CLXIII-CLXVII; Terracini (1933), 383 ff.; Mascherpa (2007-2008), 31-42.

specify or rectify a part of the known text (example a); *addenda* of an ethnographic or historical nature, totally new and completely independent from the known text (b).

*a) Material used for the Bridges*

F 151, 7	Z' 85, 7
Il se contenoit tuit primermant <que> la cité de Quinsai gir' environ .C. miles et ha .XII <sup>m</sup> . pont de pieres, ...	Primo quidem continebatur in eis quod civitas Qinsay in circuitu suo girat miliaria centum tere, et habet duodecim milia pontium, <i>pro maiori parte</i> de lapidibus, <i>quia aliqui de legnamine sunt constructi</i> ; ...

*Khubilai's Policy to Modify Quinsai Artisans' Craft Inheritance Customs*

F 151, 9	Z' 85, 16-18
Et si voç di qu'il estoit establi por lor roi qe cascun doie faire les ars de son pere; et, se il avesse .C <sup>m</sup> . besanç, ne poroit fair autre ars qe sun pere avoit fait.	Sanccitum erat itaque per <i>Factur, regem dicte civitatis et provincie, tempore quo regnabat</i> , quod quilibet deberet exercere artem sui patris; et si quis haberet centum milia bysantiorum, oportebat ipsum artem patris exercere. <i>Non equidem credatis quod ipsos oporteret propriis manibus laborare, sed homines retinere, ut dictum est superius, ad dictam artem exercendam. Sed ad hoc per Magnum Dominum minime compelluntur: nam, si homo artifex in tantas creverit divicias quod artem suam derelinquere possit et vellit, per nullum ad artis exercitium amplius coartatur ...</i>

Good examples of special additions of *Z*<sup>1</sup> are, for instance, the paragraphs dedicated to a particular kind of social revenge (ethnographical *addendum*)<sup>26</sup> and to a marvelous event occurring during the Tatar siege of the city (historical-autobiographical *addendum*).

*b) Revenge by Suicide*

*Z*<sup>1</sup> 85, 43-46

Sunt itaque homines provincie Mançi pre alijs gentibus iracundi, et pre ira et dolore ipsimet quam plures aliqui se occidunt. Nam si accidit quod ex ipsis aliquis alteri alicui i<m>primat alapam vel ipsum decapillet aut aliquam sibi inferat iniuriam et gravamen, et iniuriator sit tan potens et magnus quod ille sit impotens ad vindictam, pre nimio dolore passus iniuriam se de nocte ad portam iniuriatoris suspendet et morietur, ...

*General Baian and the Qiantang Dragon*

*Z*<sup>1</sup> 85, 62-66

Dicimus de quodam miro quod accidit cum Bayan erat in obsidione civitatis istius, videlicet quod cum rex Facfur a facie eius fugit, multitudo gentium ipsius civitatis in navigio fugiebat per quoddam maximum flumen latum et profundum quod transit ab uno latere civitatis. Et dum sic per flumen istud fugerent ipso instanti fuit aqua totaliter desiccata, ita quod Bayan hoc intellegens adivit partem illam, et omnes fugientes ad civitatem redire coegit. Et inventus fuit piscis unus iacens in sicco per transversum alveum fluminis qui erat quid mirabile ad videndum. Nam longitudinis erat bene pasuum centum, grossitudo vero minime longitudini respondebat, pilosus quidem erat totus. Et multi del ipso comederunt et multi ex ipsis perierunt, et dominus Marcus, ut dicit, capud illius piscis propriis oculis vidit in templo quoddam ydolorum, etcetera.

## 2.3 Quinsai in R

*Z*<sup>1</sup> is the main source used by Ramusio for the monograph on Quinsai (R II 68-69) as well as for the whole text of his version. This is clearly evidenced by many textual correspondences between R and *Z*<sup>1</sup>, both in the *addenda* (example a) and in parts shared with F and the tradition (b), but also by the significant conformity of R to F where *Z*<sup>1</sup> lacks (c).

<sup>26</sup> Barbieri (1998), 214-215.

a) *Khubilai's Policy to Modify Quinsai Artisans' Craft Inheritance Customs*

Z <sup>1</sup> 85, 16-17	R II 68, 35
Sanccitum erat itaque per Factor regem dicte civitatis et provincie, tempore quo regnabat, quod quilibet deberet exercere artem sui patris, et si quis haberet centum milia bysantiorum, oportebat ipsum artem patris exercere. <i>Non equidem credatis quod ipsos propriis manibus laborare, sed homines retinere, ut dictum est superius, ad dictam exercendum.</i>	Et anchor che per li re antichi fosse ordinato per legge che ciascun abitante fosse obligato ad esercitare l'arte del padre, nondimeno, come diventino ricchi, <i>gli è permesso di non lavorar più con le proprie mani, ma ben erano obligati di tenere la bottega, e uomini che v'esercitassino l'arte paterna.</i>

b) *The Streets of Quinsai*

Z <sup>1</sup> 85, 32	R II 68, 49
Item per totam civitatem istam solubrice, idest saleçate, sunt omnes vie et strate de lapidibus et lateribus, et similiter saleçate sunt omnes vie et strate provincie Mançi.	Et prima è da sapere che tutte le strade di Quinsai sono saleggiate di pietre e di mattoni, e similmente sono saleggiate tutte le vie e strade che corrono per ogni canto della provincia di Mangi, ...

c) *The Wonderful Palaces on the West Lake Islands*

R II 68, 43	F 151, 12
... et quando alcuno vuol celebrar nozze, o vero far qualche solenne convito, va ad uno di questi palazzi, dove gli vien dato tutto quello che per questo effetto gli è necessario, cioè vasellami, tovaglie, mantili et cadauna altra cosa, ...	Et quant l'en vult faire noses ou convit, il vunt a ceste palais et la font lor noses et lor feste, et iluec treuvent toutes les aparoillement qe beçongne au convive, ce est de vaicellemant et de tailleor et d'escueles.

Nevertheless, while R faithfully reproduces the Z text in chapter 69, the situation of chapter 68 is more difficult to interpret. First of all, in this chapter the order of contents is very different from the tradition's one (Z<sup>1</sup> included); secondly, the chapter is full of extensive additions concerning topography, buildings, and city life, which are totally missing in the whole *Devisement's* tradition (again, Z<sup>1</sup> included). These increments of R give information generally congruent with Quinsai's history, geography and



society in the late thirteenth century.<sup>27</sup> In two cases – the descriptions of bridge structures (R II 68, 8) and of coaches running along the streets (R II 68, 52) – the additions are even close to some descriptions contained in the Wu Zimu’s *Mengliang lu*.<sup>28</sup> Of course, we can’t exclude the possibility that the “codice Ghisi” had these additions, while, as usual, the Toledan version cut them out. But two problems remain:

1) The peculiar order of contents which we notice in R (while  $Z^1 = F$ ) cannot be ascribed to Ramusio’s action, because Ramusio is generally loyal to his sources’ structure, and so also in this case the order of R probably reproduced his source;

2) R is more accurate and richer than  $Z^1$  even in those parts of the chapter where  $Z^1$  is complete and uncut. In these cases, the Toledan rendering is very close to F as regards the disposition of arguments, contents and style, while R goes on its own with its characteristic and long additions. Here are three examples:<sup>29</sup>

*a) The Description of Bridges*

F 151, 7	$Z^1$ 85	R II 68
... <u>la cité de Quinsai gir’environ .C. miles et ha .XII<sup>m</sup>. pont de pieres, et por chascun de cesti pont, ou por la greingnor partie, poroit bien passer <u>une</u> &lt;grant&gt; <u>nes por desout sun arche</u>, et por les autres porroient passer me&lt;n&gt;dre nes. Et nulz se face mervoille se il ha</u>	... civitas Qinsay in circuitu suo girat miliaria <u>centum tere, et habet duodecim milia pontium</u> , pro maiori parte de lapidibus, quia aliqui de leg-namine sunt constructi; sub singulis quorum, vel pro maiori parte, <u>trans-iret navis una, sub arcu</u> , grandis et magna, per alios	<u>Questa città, per comune opinione, ha di circuito cento miglia, perché le strade et canali di quella sono molto larghi et ampli; poi vi sono piazze dove fanno mercato [...]</u> <u>Et è fama che vi siano dodicimila ponti, fra grandi et piccioli: ma quelli che sono fatti sopra</u>

<sup>27</sup> For instance, in spite of what has often been written by scholars, the exclusive information Ramusio gives about Quinsai’s public baths are totally reliable. In particular, the R text report on the Quinsai citizens’ habit to wash themselves with cold water, while the other versions of the *Devisement* tell only of warm baths (unfortunately in  $Z^1$  this passage is missing). The information about cold baths, believed false by Henri Yule (“This is in contradiction with the notorious Chinese horror of cold water for any purpose” (Yule and Cordier (1903), vol. 2, 246), is actually proved by historical data (Schafer (1956), 70-71; Gernet (1959), 135-136).

<sup>28</sup> Moule (1957), 27-28; Moule (1925-1926), 68-69.

<sup>29</sup> *Addenda* of R in italic, textual parts in common to  $Z^1$ , R, F underlined.

<p>tant de pont, por ce qe je vos di qe ceste ville est toute en eve et est environ&lt;é&gt; de eve, et por ce <u>convient qe maint pont hi aie por aler por toute la ville.</u></p>	<p>vero possent trans-ire minores. Et nullus miratur si tot sunt ibi pontes: nam civitas tota est sita in aquis, et circumdata aquis; et ideo <u>necesse est ut sint ibi tot pontes ad hoc ut gentes possint per civitatem quacumque pertransire.</u></p>	<p><i>i canali maestri et la strada principale sono stà voltati tanto alti e con tanto magisterio [&lt; VB?] <u>che una nave vi puol passare di sotto senza albero</u> [&lt; P]; <i>et nondimeno vi passano sopra carrette et cavalli, talmente sono accomodate piane le strade con l'altezza. Et se non vi fussero in tanto numero non si potria andar da un luogo all'altro</i> [&lt; P] <i>Dall'altro canto della città v'è una fossa ...</i></i></p>
--	---	--

*b) Meat Consumption in Quinsai*

<p>F 151, 14</p> <p>Et si vos di qe les jens sunt ydres et sunt au Grant Kan, et ont monoie de carte. <u>Il menjuent tutes cars, et de chiens e de toutes autres brutes bestes et autres animaues que por ren dou monde nul cristienç de sa ne menjuerént.</u></p>	<p>Z' 85, 28-29</p> <p>Gentes adorant ydolla, monetam habent de cartis et sunt sub dominio Magni Can. <u>Comedunt omnes carnes, canum et generaliter omnium animalium.</u></p>	<p>R II 68, 14-15</p> <p><i>... sempre v'è copia grande d'ogni sorte di vittuarie, di salvaticine, cioè caprioli, cervi, daini, lepri, conigli, e d'uccelli, pernici, fagiani, francolini, coturnici, galline, capponi, e tante anitre e oche [...] Vi sono poi le beccarie, dove ammazzano gli animali grossi, come vitelli, buoi, capretti e agnelli, le qual carni mangiano gli uomini ricchi e gran maestri; ma gli altri che sono di bassa condizione <u>non s'astengono da tutte l'altre sorti di carni immonde, senza avervi alcun rispetto.</u></i></p>
--	--	---

c) *The Song Emperor's Palace*

F 151 28-31	Z' 85 49-57
<p><u>Et en ceste cité est le palais dou roi que se fuï, qe seingnor estoit ou Mangi, qui est le plus biaus e le plus noble qe soit au monde; e vos en diviserai aucune cousse. Or sachiés qe le palais gire environ .X. miles et est murés cun autes mures, toutes as querriaus, et dedens as mures sunt maint biaus jardis con tuit les buens fruit qe home seust deviser. Il hi a maintes fontaines et plusors lac, la o il «a» maint buen peison. Et, eu mileu, est le palais mout grandissime et biaus. Il a une si gran sale et si belle, qe grandisme quantité des jens hi poroient demorer et menjuere a table. La sale est toute portraite et pointe a peinture d'or, et hi a maintes estoires et maintes bestes et hosiaus et chevalers et dames, et a maintes mervoilles. Il est mout bielle viste a garder, car en toutes les murs et en toutes covreoure ne poroit l'en veoir che pintures a or. Et que voç en diroie? Sachiés qe je ne vos poroie deviser la gran nobelité de cesti palais, mes je voç en dirai brefmant et sommeemant tout la verité. «Sachiés» de voir qe cest palais a .XX. sales, toutes d'une grant et d'un paroïl; et sunt bien si grant qe .X<sup>m</sup>. homes hi poroient menuier a table aaisemant; et sunt toute pointe a ouvre d'or mout noblemant. Et si voç di qe ceste palais ha bien .M. cambres, ce sunt maison bielles et grant, e de dormir et de mengier. Les frut et les pesciere vos ai contés.</u></p>	<p><u>In ista quidem civitate Qinsay est regale palatium, quod fuerat regis Facfur, domini provincie Mancii, quod est pulcrius et nobilius aliquo quod reperitur in mundo; de cuius facturis dicemus. Circuit enim palatium istud bene miliaria sex de terra. Est itaque altis muris valatum, et intra muros sunt multa pulcra viridaria omnimodos producentia bonos fructus. Sunt et ibi pulcri fontes et lacus quam plures, in quibus inveniuntur in habundantia boni pisces. Et in medio istius muri est palatium, valde pulcrum et magnum. In eo est quedam magna salla magistra, in qua simul discumberent multe gentes. Sala ista depicta est tota aureis picturis, ubi sunt ystorie diverse, bestie, aves, milites et domine cum multis mirabilibus; quod est pulcer intuitus ad videndum, quoniam in toto muro et omnibus coperturis, non posunt videri nisi solummodo ystorie colorate auro et aliis coloribus delectabilibus et pulcris. Palatium istud multas habet salas omnes spatiosas et pulcras, depictas ad aurum et subtiliter laboratas. Habet insuper cameras bene mille; et est mirabile quid esse istius palatii.</u></p>

R II 68 75-85

Or parleremo d'un bellissimo palagio dove abitava il re Fanfur, li predecessori del quale fecero serrare un spazio di paese che circondava da dieci miglia con muri altissimi, e lo divisero in tre parti. In quella di mezo s'entrava per una grandissima porta, dove si trovava da un canto e dall'altro loggie a piè piano grandissime e larghissime, col coperchio sustentato da colonne, le quali erano dipinte e lavorate con oro e azzurri finissimi; in testa poi si vedeva la principale e maggior di tutte l'altre, similmente dipinta con le colonne dorate, e il solaro con bellissimi ornamenti d'oro, e d'intorno alle pareti erano dipinte le istorie de' re passati, con grand'artificio. Quivi ogn'anno, in alcuni giorni dedicati alli suoi idoli, il re Fanfur soleva tener corte e dar da mangiare a' principali signori, gran maestri e ricchi artefici della città di Quinsai: e ad un tratto vi sentavano a tavola commodamente sotto tutte dette loggie diecimila persone. E questa corte durava dieci o dodici giorni, ed era cosa stupenda e fuor d'ogni credenza [...] ciascun claustro ovvero corte avea cinquanta camere con li suoi giardini, e in tutte queste camere vi stanzavano mille donzelle che 'l re teneva a' suoi servizii; qual andava alcune fiate, con la regina e con alcune delle dette, a solazzo per il lago, sopra barche tutte coperte di seta, e anco a visitar li tempii degl'idoli. L'altre due parti del detto serraglio erano partite in boschi, laghi e giardini bellissimi, piantati d'arbori fruttiferi, dove erano serrati ogni sorte d'animali, cioè caprioli, daini, cervi, lepori, conigli: e quivi il re andava a piacere con le sue damigelle, parte in carretta e parte a cavallo [...] Tutta questa narrazione mi fu detta da un ricchissimo mercante di Quinsai, trovandomi in quella città, qual era molto vecchio e stato intrinseco familiar del re Fanfur, e sapeva tutta la vita sua e avea veduto detto palagio in essere, nel quale lui volse condurmi.

### 3. Conclusions

A first, spontaneous explanation of this textual dynamics ( $Z^1$  versus  $Z^1 = F$ ) is that Ramusio did not take the long, characteristic *addenda* of his text from  $Z^1$ , but from an unknown source different from the *Devisement* and full of reliable information about Quinsai. This would, however, be really strange, since Ramusio never contaminated his so far ascertained sources, i.e. Z, P, VB, L, and V, with other texts. Furthermore, this would contradict his methodical statement made in the preface to his Italian version: «... cosa ragionevole ho giudicato di far venir in luce il suo [*of Marco Polo*] libro, col mezo di diversi esemplari scritti già più di dugento anni, a mio giudicio perfettamente corretto e di gran lunga molto più fidele di quello che fin

ora si è letto.»<sup>30</sup> And it is equally unlikely that Ramusio would have used here a fourth, not identified *Devisement* version, which did not leave traces in the other chapters of R.

So, there seems to be only one solution, namely, that one of the *Devisement*'s manuscripts used by Ramusio had, in the chapter about Quinsai, a text largely different from the one we know and that was richer in the contents and radically modified in its structure. The hierarchy of Ramusio's sources and their own textual peculiarities suggest that this manuscript is exactly Z<sup>1</sup>.

But if that is the case, how can we explain the wide differences inside the Z branch between Z<sup>t</sup> (= F) and Z<sup>1</sup>? The solution is at hand if we take into consideration that the Z branch was more subject than other branches to textual alterations and, in particular, enlargements, starting from the Z manuscript read by the Dominicans Pietro Calò and Filippino da Ferrara, not so different from F but with some more details, via the common source of Z<sup>t</sup>/Z<sup>1</sup> (designated as β'), deeply re-elaborated and full of additions, until the lowest stages of the *stemma*, where Z<sup>1</sup> and Z<sup>t</sup> each contain some paragraphs *singularia*, perhaps inserted into Z downstream of β'.<sup>31</sup>

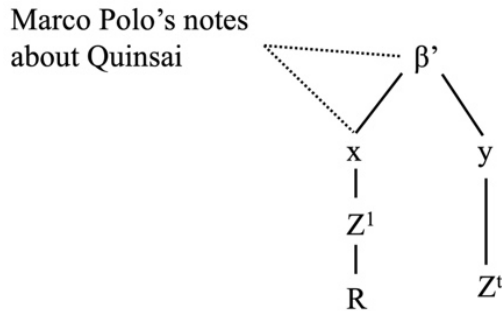
We know that the Z version circulated (and probably was written) in the Dominican *milieu* of Venice, with whom Marco Polo's family had a strong relationship.<sup>32</sup> It may be that the unruly textual *mouvance* of the Z branch is due to its proximity to the *Devisement*'s author. Concerning the description of Quinsai in particular, we can't exclude the possibility that Marco Polo – perhaps fascinated by the similarity between Quinsai and Venice – had conserved a large amount of information about that city in

<sup>30</sup> Dedicatory preface to Fracastoro, § 10, in Simion and Burgio (2015). In English this would read as follows: "... I have judged it reasonable to bring out his [Marco Polo's] book, with the help of several copies written more than two hundred years ago, in my judgement perfectly correct and far more trustworthy than what has been read so far."

<sup>31</sup> Among the *unica* of Z<sup>1</sup> are the chapter about Uiguristan (33), the short tale about the psychotropic power of Kirman soil (12, 4-11), and the one about the bizarre divinatory customs of Mangi's seamen (91, 30-40). Only R (< Z<sup>1</sup>) has the chapter about the Persian monasteries devoted to Barsauma, the description of the destructive effects of Hormuz's hot wind (I, 15, 8-10), and the short *excursus* about tattoos in the Yunnan (I, 18, 4).

<sup>32</sup> On the relationship between the Polo family and the friars of the SS. Giovanni e Paolo convent, see Gobbato (2015), 357-360. In his will Marco left money to the convent and to two friars in particular (friar Benvenutus Venetus and friar Rainerius. Cf. Moule and Pelliot (1938), 2, 513).

form of notes or memories. These data may have been only partially utilized in the first redaction of the book, but then inserted into the Z version at different times, with or without the author's supervision. Here is a graphical representation of this hypothetical textual dynamic:



Another explanation may be that there circulated – perhaps in the form of travel reports – other first-hand information on Quinsai in Venice between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and that these descriptions of the “City of Heaven” may have been inserted into Z to enrich Marco Polo’s account. That we cannot totally exclude this hypothesis becomes clear when we read the following statement in a Venetian version of Odorico’s *Relatio* included in Ramusio’s travel collection: «[Frate Odorico ha] ben trovate in Vinetia assai persone che vi [*that is, in Quinsai*] sono state». <sup>33</sup>

## References

- Barbieri, Alvaro, ed. (1998). *Milione: Redazione latina del manoscritto Z* (Parma: Guanda).
- Barbieri, Alvaro (2004). *Dal viaggio al libro: Studi sul Milione* (Verona: Fiorini).
- Barbieri, Alvaro; Andreose, Alvisè, eds. (1999). *Il Milione veneto: Ms. CM 211 della Biblioteca civica di Padova* (Venezia: Marsilio).
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo, ed. (1928). *Il Milione: Prima edizione integrale* (Firenze: Olschki).

<sup>33</sup> Milanese (1978-1988), 4, 311. In English: “[Friar Odorico has] well found in Venice many people who have been there [*that is, in Quinsai*].”

- Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Valeria (1977). “Enunciazione e produzione del testo nel Milione”, *Studi Mediolatini e Volgari*, 25: 5-43.
- Burgio, Eugenio, ed. (2011). *Giovanni Battista Ramusio “editor” del Milione: Trattamento del testo e manipolazione dei modelli* (Roma-Padova: Antenore).
- Burgio, Eugenio; Mascherpa, Giuseppe (2007). “Milione latino: Note linguistiche e appunti di storia della tradizione sulle redazioni Z e L”, in Renato Oniga and Sergio Vatteroni, eds. *Plurilinguismo letterario: Atti del convegno internazionale del Centro Internazionale sul Plurilinguismo* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino), 117-156.
- Devos, Paul (1948). “Le miracle posthume de saint Thomas l’apôtre”, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 66: 231-275.
- Eusebi, Mario (2010). *Il Manoscritto della Bibliothèque Nationale de France Fr. 1116. I: Testo* (Roma-Padova: Antenore).
- Gadrat-Ouerfelli, Christine (2015). *Lire Marco Polo au Moyen-Âge: Traduction, diffusion et réception du Devisement du monde* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Gaunt, Simon (2013). *Marco Polo’s Le Devisement du monde: Narrative Voice, Language and Diversity* (Cambridge: Brewer).
- Gernet, Jacques (1959). *La vie quotidienne en Chine à la veille de l’invasion mongole (1250-1276)* (Paris: Hachette).
- Gobbato, Veronica (2015). “Un caso precoce di tradizione indiretta del Milione di Marco Polo: Il Liber de introductione loquendi di Filippino da Ferrara O. P.”, *Filologia mediolatina*, 22: 310-367.
- Marchisio, Annalia (2016). *Odorico da Pordenone: Relatio de mirabilibus orientalium Tatarorum* (Firenze: SISMELE-Edizioni del Galluzzo).
- Mascherpa, Giuseppe (2008). “San Tommaso in India: L’apporto della tradizione indiretta alla costituzione dello stemma del Milione”, in Alberto Cadioli and Paolo Chiesa, eds. *Prassi ecdotiche: Esperienze editoriali su testi manoscritti e testi a stampa* (Milano: Cisalpino), 171-184.
- Mascherpa, Giuseppe (2007-2008). “Nuove indagini sulla tradizione latina Z del Milione di Marco Polo”, PhD diss. (Siena, Università degli Studi).
- Milanesi, Marica, ed. (1978-1988). *Navigazioni e viaggi* (Torino: Einaudi).
- Montesano, Marina (2014). *Marco Polo* (Roma: Salerno).
- Moule, Arthur C. (1925-1926). “Carriages in Marco Polo’s Quinsai”, *T’oung Pao*, 24.1: 66-69.
- Moule, Arthur C. (1957). *Quinsai: With Other Notes on Marco Polo* (Cambridge: University Press).

- Moule, Arthur C.; Pelliot, Paul, eds. (1938). *The Description of the World* (London: Routledge).
- Olschki, Leonardo (1957). *L'Asia di Marco Polo: Introduzione alla lettura e allo studio del Milione* (Firenze: Sansoni).
- Schafer, Edward H. (1956). "The Development of Bathing Customs in Ancient and Medieval China and the History of the Floriate Clear Palace", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 76.2: 57-82.
- Segre, Cesare (2008). "Chi ha scritto il Milione di Marco Polo?", in Silvia Conte, ed. *I viaggi del Milione: Itinerari testuali, vettori di trasmissione e metamorfosi del Devisement du monde di Marco Polo e Rustichello da Pisa nella pluralità delle attestazioni* (Roma: Tiellemedia), 5-16.
- Simion, Samuela (2011). "Struttura e fonti di V", in Eugenio Burgio, ed. *Giovanni Battista Ramusio "editor" del Milione: Trattamento del testo e manipolazione dei modelli* (Roma-Padova: Antenore), 27-44.
- Simion, Samuela; Burgio, Eugenio, eds. (2015). *Dei viaggi di Messer Marco Polo* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari).
- Terracini, Benvenuto (1933). "Ricerche ed appunti sulla più antica redazione del Milione", *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, 9: 369-428.
- Van den Wyngaert, Anastasius (1929). *Sinica franciscana; I. Itinera et relationes fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV* (Firenze-Quaracchi: Apud Collegium S. Bonaventurae), 524-560.
- West, Stephen H. (1985). "The Interpretation of a Dream: The Sources, Evaluation, and Influence of the Dongjing Meng Hua Lu", *T'oung Pao*, 71: 63-108.
- Yule, Henry; Cordier, Henri, eds. (1903). *The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East* (London: Murray).
- Zurla, Placido, ed. (1818-1819). *Di Marco Polo e degli altri viaggiatori veneziani più illustri* (Venezia: Fuchs).





# Le Tibet dans les principales versions du *Devisement du monde*

Michel Quereuil

Déjà brièvement évoqué par les prédécesseurs de Marco Polo, Plan Carpin et Guillaume de Rubrouck, le Tibet fait sa véritable entrée dans la littérature occidentale avec les deux chapitres que lui consacre le *Devisement du monde* dans la plupart des rédactions. Certes le Tibet de Marco Polo a de quoi décevoir quelque peu le lecteur d'aujourd'hui, surtout si son imaginaire s'est nourri de publications modernes plutôt hétéroclites allant des récits d'Alexandra David-Néel,<sup>1</sup> de Fosco Maraini,<sup>2</sup> d'Heinrich Harrer,<sup>3</sup> aux poèmes de Victor Segalen,<sup>4</sup> en passant par le *Tintin au Tibet* d'Hergé, qui a pu dès notre enfance éveiller cette véritable fascination pour le « Pays des Neiges ». La lecture de nos deux chapitres peut donc susciter un sentiment de frustration : on n'y trouve notamment aucune mention de la capitale Lhasa, pourtant fondée au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle. C'est que le voyageur, venant de Chengdu dans sa progression vers le sud-sud-ouest, ne s'est probablement jamais aventuré au cœur du Tibet, se contentant d'en effleurer la lisière orientale, « cette zone frontière (je cite Alexandra David-Néel) où la Chine cesse d'être purement chinoise, le Tibet d'être purement tibétain et où, ajoutant encore à l'attrait piquant de l'ambiance chaotique, Lolos et autres aborigènes apportent constamment leur contribution d'étrangeté ».<sup>5</sup>

Voyons à présent si une pareille impression d'étrangeté se dégage de la présentation de Marco Polo. Je prendrai pour référence la rédaction franco-

---

<sup>1</sup> Le plus célèbre étant *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhasa*, David-Néel (1927).

<sup>2</sup> Maraini (1954).

<sup>3</sup> Harrer (1983).

<sup>4</sup> Segalen and Bouillier (1995), vol. 2.

<sup>5</sup> David-Néel (1947), 7.

italienne, F, autrement dit le texte du manuscrit 1116 de la BNF, réputé généralement, à tort ou à raison, le plus proche de l'original. Chacun des deux chapitres consacrés au Tibet peut se diviser en plusieurs sections (voir document en annexe). La première nous place devant un véritable champ de ruines, villes et châteaux mis à terre à la suite de la guerre de conquête dévastatrice menée par les armées tartares de Möngke Khan. Puis, sans transition, on nous expose la méthode employée par les marchands et autres voyageurs pour se garantir au bivouac des attaques des bêtes sauvages dont la région est infestée : on cueille des brassées de bambous géants encore verts, on en dresse un grand bûcher où les bambous se tordent et éclatent au feu, en produisant des crépitements épouvantables qui découragent de toute approche ours, tigres, panthères et autres bêtes féroces. Pour éviter que leurs chevaux ne soient eux-mêmes victimes de ce vacarme et ne prennent la fuite, les voyageurs auront pris soin de leur bander les yeux, de les lier et entraver. Ce long passage permet accessoirement de situer les lieux. Les forêts de bambous géants ne peuvent se développer qu'à la faveur d'un climat très humide, tel que celui du versant oriental des montagnes du Sichuan, qui culminent à plus de 7000 m. d'altitude, et sur lesquelles viennent buter les perturbations venues du pacifique. C'est là du reste que l'on trouve les dernières populations de Pandas, qui se nourrissent exclusivement, on le sait, de pousses de bambous. Le Tibet central se caractérise au contraire par un climat plutôt aride, du fait de la protection assurée, au sud, par la chaîne himalayenne, à l'est, par les chaînes du Sichuan.

Au terme de vingt journées de voyage dans un environnement inhospitalier, dépourvu de toute possibilité de ravitaillement, les voyageurs rejoignent des régions habitées ; c'est pour y voir des hordes de vieilles femmes sortir de leurs maisons pour leur proposer les services sexuels de leurs filles ou de leurs jeunes parentes. C'est que, dans ces régions, un homme n'épouserait pour rien au monde une jeune fille vierge. Aussi, pour prétendre au mariage, la femme doit-elle se prévaloir d'une solide expérience sexuelle, acquise dans les bras du plus grand nombre possible d'amants. Pour preuve de son savoir-faire, elle devra exhiber devant son futur époux les petits bijoux que lui auront offerts les hommes qui se seront

succédé dans sa couche. Plus ces sortes de trophées seront nombreux, mieux elle sera considérée par l'homme et plus elle aura de chances d'obtenir le mariage. En revanche, une fois celui-ci conclu, le respect du mari vis-à-vis de son épouse est total, et aucun autre homme ne se permettrait de la toucher ; ce qui, soit dit en passant, entre en contradiction avec la coutume matrimoniale la mieux attestée au Tibet, à savoir la polyandrie, et surtout le mariage d'une même femme avec une fratrie. Enfin, le passage se conclut par un plaisant trait d'humour, ce qui est plutôt rare dans notre texte : il est conseillé aux jeunes européens en mal de sexe de se rendre dans ce pays, où ils n'auraient que l'embarras du choix pour se trouver une compagne. Cet épisode ressemble étrangement à une évocation similaire que l'on relève dans un texte de plusieurs siècles antérieur, les *Histoires* d'Hérodote, au livre IV, à propos d'une tribu libyenne, les Gindanes, « dont les femmes portent aux chevilles nombre d'anneaux de cuir, chacune d'après cette règle, à ce qu'on dit : pour chaque homme avec qui elle a commerce, elle se met un anneau : celle qui en a le plus, celle-là est considérée comme la plus méritante, puisqu'elle a été aimée par le plus d'hommes ». <sup>6</sup>

La fin de ce premier chapitre retrouve la structure énumérative qui caractérise l'évocation de la plupart des provinces : ces idolâtres de Tibétains y sont présentés comme dénués de tout scrupule moral, ce qui se manifeste par une intense activité de brigandage : ils sont, est-il dit, « les greignor escaran et les greignors robeor dou monde » (« les plus grands brigands et voleurs du monde »), une réputation qui est ou du moins était encore du temps d'Alexandra David-Néel, celle des ethnies orientales, que Marco précisément a pu trouver sur sa route : parvenant au pays des Khampas, la voyageuse ne s'exclame-t-elle pas, non sans enthousiasme : « Nous sommes revenus au pays où le brigandage est sport et chevalerie. » <sup>7</sup> Ensuite viennent les moyens de subsistance, chasse, élevage et récoltes, prélèvement en abondance du musc sur des bêtes que leurs excellents chiens capturent en grand nombre. Quant à leur monnaie, comme dans la plupart des provinces reculées de ce Far West chinois, c'est le sel et non la

---

<sup>6</sup> Hérodote (1951), livre IV, 176.

<sup>7</sup> David-Néel (1933), 172.

monnaie de papier, réservée aux régions plus civilisées. Leur vêtement est à l'avenant, peaux de bêtes ou étoffes grossières. Ils ont leur propre langage. Enfin le chapitre souligne l'étendue de cette *grandissime* province.

Le chapitre 116 vient compléter le précédent, avec lequel il entre parfois en redondance. Ainsi insiste-t-il d'abord de nouveau sur les dimensions de la province, tout en précisant qu'elle se compose de pas moins de huit royaumes. On revient aussi sur l'activité de brigandage, puis l'on ajoute quelques informations complémentaires sur les productions ou autres activités locales : orpaillage dans les rivières et lacs nombreux dans les montagnes du pays, production de cannelle en abondance, commerce très lucratif du corail dont on fabrique des bijoux que l'on passe au cou des femmes et des idoles, confection de brocards et de camelins, enfin récolte de nombreuses épices inconnues en Europe. Ensuite vient un développement sur les enchanteurs et astrologues qui surpassent, est-il dit, ceux des provinces voisines. Mais le texte se garde de préciser les effets de leur art diabolique, parce que *trop se merveillèrent les gens* ; on peut s'interroger sur le sens du verbe *soi merveillier* « être stupéfait », « effrayé », voire « choqué » ou bien « être fasciné », voire « admiratif », ce qui constituerait une sorte de péché pour un lecteur chrétien. L'art diabolique des enchanteurs tibétains était déjà souligné au chapitre 75, consacré au palais d'été de Khoubilaï, à Ciandu ; l'auteur se montrait alors moins réticent, puisqu'il précisait l'un des tours de ces enchanteurs (tibétains mais aussi cachmiris) : tour de magie leur permettant d'éloigner nuées et pluie du palais de Khoubilaï. Cependant, la réprobation vis-à-vis de ces pratiques était la même, je cite en traduction : « leurs prodiges, ils les réalisent par des pratiques diaboliques, tout en faisant croire aux autres qu'ils agissent pour le plus grand bien et par inspiration divine ». Le texte revient ensuite sur la nature foncièrement mauvaise des Tibétains, sur leurs chiens, grands comme des ânes, ajoutant qu'ils disposent aussi d'excellents faucons laniers. Enfin vient un développement qui fait transition avec le chapitre suivant, consacré à la province de Gaïndu. Ce dernier développement insiste sur le fait que le Tibet est sous la dépendance du Grand Khan. Et en effet, d'après certaines sources tibétaines, le Tibet aurait été soumis par Gengis Khan lui-même, dès le début du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Je vais à présent tenter de mettre en évidence les points d'accord ou au contraire de divergence qui peuvent se relever dans les autres rédactions, accords ou divergences vis-à-vis du texte de référence, celui donné par la rédaction F. Je m'en tiendrai aux quatre passages qui m'ont paru les plus significatifs : les feux de bambous, le mariage, la récolte du musc, les enchanteurs et astrologues.

## 1. Les feux de bambous

Ce long passage donne lieu à quelques divergences.

TA. La version toscane suit fidèlement la structure du passage, telle qu'elle apparaît dans F, mais, comme à son habitude, elle abrège, d'une façon du reste le plus souvent fort habile. Deux exemples suffiront à le montrer :

l. 6-8 F. Et cest tiel feu font les homes por garentir lor bestes dé fieres bestes sauvajes qe asez hi n'i a por cele contree et por celz païs.

l. 4-5 TA. E questo si fa per paura di quelle bestie, che ve n'a assai.

l. 17-19 F. Et encore, si con je voç ai dit les homes escanpent la noit, et il et lor bestes, des lions et des lonces et d'autres mauvaises bestes, qe hi n'i a en grant habondance.

l. 11-12 TA. E cosi campano gli uomini la notte, loro e lle loro bestie.

Fr. La rédaction française se démarque de F sur deux points : d'abord, et cela va de soi, une francisation du texte, notamment par l'élimination des italianismes lexicaux : ainsi, à propos des cannes (les bambous), afin de distinguer leur grosseur de leur longueur, F (l.2) utilise la forme verbale *volvent*, issue de l'italien, pour traduire une idée de circonférence *volvent environ bien trois paumes* (l'adverbe *environ* signifiant ici non pas « à peu près », mais « tout autour », confirmant ainsi le sens de la forme verbale) ; la version française (l. 1-2) dit simplement *elles sont grosses bien III. paumes*. À la phrase suivante, F (l. 2) utilise la forme *nod* (*nodo* dans TA) pour désigner le « nœud » divisant le bambou en plusieurs segments ; le mot n'a probablement pas été compris par le rédacteur de Fr, puisqu'il lui substitue le mot *bout* (l. 2) qui, il est vrai, dans d'autres manuscrits que le manuscrit B1, cède la place à la forme française *neu* ou à la forme *ron*. À

la phrase suivante est employé dans F (l. 3) le mot *viandanz que vont por tel contree* (*viandanti* dans TA) ; dans Fr (l. 3), on relève *autre gent qui cheminent par celle contree* : le mot a cédé la place au terme le plus générique ; une partie de son signifié est toutefois prise en charge par le verbe de la subordonnée relative *qui cheminent* ; du reste, dans d'autres passages, on relève la forme substantivée *cheminant* comme équivalent de *viandant*. La seconde tendance qui ressort de ce passage, tendance inverse de celle relevée dans TA, c'est une tendance à l'amplification : Fr se montre plus bavard que F : il insiste de façon redondante sur le nombre des bêtes sauvages et sur le danger qu'elles représentent pour les voyageurs ; il expose les raisons de l'omniprésence de ces fauves : (l. 6-7) *et ce est pour ce que il n'y demeure nulle gent en esté, pour ce sont tant montepliees ces bestes*. Cette explication ne figure pas dans F. Avant de préciser les modalités de la méthode utilisée, Fr rappelle de façon insistante que sans ces feux de bambous, personne ne pourrait s'aventurer dans ces contrées (l. 11-12). Cette phrase ne figure ni dans F, ni dans TA. De même encore, Fr insiste, au contraire de F, sur la nécessité de se boucher les oreilles par tous les moyens, lorsqu'on n'est pas encore habitué aux terribles crépitements des bambous : l. 18-20 *Et ceulz qui ne l'ont usé, si leur convient prendre au commencement du coton et farsir bien lors oreilles et estouper, et puis bien lier sa teste et sa chiere et couvrir le de toute sa robe que l'en a ...* Enfin Fr ajoute à la fin du passage (l. 27-28) qu'en dépit de toutes ces précautions, les fauves s'approchent parfois, causant des dommages aux voyageurs.

VA. À l'instar de la version toscane, VA se montre plutôt synthétique par rapport à F et, à plus forte raison par rapport à Fr. Il suffit pour mettre ce caractère en évidence, d'examiner le tout début du passage, soit les trois premières lignes de F et les deux premières de VA :

F. (l. 1-3) Il hi a channe groses et grant merveliosemant, et voç devise-rai comant elles sont groses, qe volvent environ bien trois paumes et sunt louinges bien .XV. pas. Elles ont de le un nod a l'autre bien trois paumes.

VA. (l. 1-2) El ge n'è chane molto meravigliosxe, e grosse atorno ben tre spane, et da uno nodo al'altro altratanto, et sono longe quindexe a passa.

On remarquera notamment l'absence d'équivalent de la forme verbale *volvent*, l'idée de circonférence étant simplement prise en charge par l'adverbe *atorno* correspondant à *environ* de F ; on relève aussi l'habile emploi de l'adverbe *altratanto* (« autant »), qui évite la répétition de *tre spane*, ou *trois paumes* de F. VA expose également de façon plus synthétique et rationnelle la procédure suivie pour mettre le feu aux bambous : les diverses étapes sont concentrées en une seule phrase :

(l. 2-4) Li viandanti ... fano grandi fuogi de legnie, e puo tuoleno de quelle chane verde in gran quantita e si le meteno suxo el fuogo.

On remarquera l'enchaînement logique des étapes, avec la précision importante *fuogi de legnie* : il faut commencer par faire de grands feux de bois, avant d'y placer les bambous, qui, cueillis encore verts, ne s'enflammeraient que difficilement sans un feu préalable. On relèvera enfin la dernière phrase du passage, qui n'a pas son équivalent dans les trois rédactions précédemment examinées.

(l. 14-15) Et è grando perichollo a pasar per quelle parte per chaxion de quelle bestie salvadege.

P. On pourra d'abord relever la phrase des lignes 2-à-4 :

(l. 2-4) insuper et quia habitatoribus caret, silvestres supramodum multiplicatae sunt ibi, propter quod periculosum valde est transitum inde facere et maxime nocte.

Dans sa première partie, jusqu'à *multiplicatee sunt ibi*, on retrouve l'information placée entre parenthèses aux lignes 6-7 de Fr, la version française. Dans sa seconde partie, P rappelle la dernière phrase de VA, mettant de la même façon le voyageur en garde contre le grand danger qu'il y a à traverser cette région où pullulent les bêtes féroces. On peut relever par ailleurs, dans tout le passage, comme sans doute dans l'ensemble de la rédaction P, un travail de réécriture : Pipino ne se contente pas de traduire *fideliter*,



comme il l'affirme dans son prologue, il développe, clarifie, explicite ; ce travail apparaît nettement par exemple dans la description des bambous :

(l. 5-7) regio illa maximas habet arundines, quarum una communiter habet longitudinis .XV. passus, grossicies vero eius est tribus palmis mansuratis in giro, inter duos collaterales nodos arundinis trium palmorum distancia est.

Même travail dans la dernière phrase portant sur les précautions à prendre pour éviter la fuite des chevaux :

(l. 18-20) oportet igitur ut equi prius per pedes singulos caute diligenterque comedibus alligentur, quoniam multi vincula rumpunt et fugiunt, audito fragore arundinum, nisi fuerint prius cum magna diligentia alligati.

R. On remarque notamment l'équivalent de la parenthèse relevée dans Fr, sur les raisons de la prolifération des bêtes sauvages :

(l. 1-2) Et perché vi mancano gli habitatori, pero le fiere salvatiche, et massime i leoni sono multiplicati in tanto numero che e grandissimo pericolo a passarvi la notte.

Il y a aussi ce qui apparaît comme des innovations. Par exemple :

(l. 2-4) et li mercatanti et viandanti, oltre il portar seco le vettovaglie, bisogna che allogino la sera con grande ordine et rispetto, per causa che non li siano devorati i cavalli.

## 2. Le mariage

Le passage le plus spectaculaire et le plus intéressant est sans doute celui que Marco Polo consacre au mariage « tibétain ». Ce n'est cependant qu'au terme de vingt journées d'un voyage périlleux en des lieux dépourvus de toute vie humaine que l'on parvient à des contrées habitées. Ces vingt journées sont, du reste, dans certaines versions, mentionnées avant le développement sur les feux de bambous : c'est le cas dans VA, dans P et dans Z, cette dernière rédaction précisant que l'on peut toutefois trouver de

quoi se ravitailler tous les trois ou quatre jours. Cette même précision se retrouve chez Ramusio, qui place toutefois l'information juste avant le développement sur le mariage et non au début du chapitre.

Voyons à présent comment est introduite la fameuse coutume matrimoniale, le mode de présentation pouvant être en l'occurrence révélateur de la mentalité du rédacteur comme du lectorat ciblé. F, TA, Fr et Z se montrent parfaitement neutres et objectifs :

F. (l. 4-5) et hi a un tiel costumes de marier femes con je voç dirai.

TA. (l. 4) à uno cotale costume di maritare femine com'io vi diro.

Fr. (l. 4-5) Et ont celle gent unne telle coustume de marier comme je vous diray.

Z. (l. 5) Habent itaque gentes ille talem consuetudinem in nubendo ...

Cette neutralité cède la place à une franche réprobation dans les autres rédactions. Une réprobation qui s'exprime par un adjectif dans VA :

VA. (l. 2) *Et è-ne una molto soza uxanza* (« honteuse », « dégoûtante », « perverse »). Il est à noter que les autres versions vénitiennes ne semblent pas partager ce point de vue, puisque V<sup>8</sup> reste neutre (pas de qualification), tandis que VB<sup>9</sup> se montre indulgent, voire souriant, en employant l'adjectif *piacevole*, *piacevole chostume*.

Comme on peut s'y attendre, c'est frère Pipino qui se montre le plus radical face à cette coutume bien peu catholique, qu'il attribue à l'aveuglement de la religion idolâtre. Il place d'ailleurs le passage dans un second chapitre, dont le titre annonce d'emblée la couleur :

P. De regione alia provincie Thebeth et de quadam turpi consuetudine eius.

La phrase d'introduction est ensuite une condamnation sans appel, servie par l'emploi de termes fortement péjoratifs :

(l. 2) *est absurda et valde detestabilis quedam abusio proveniens ex ydolatrie cecitate.*

---

<sup>8</sup> Voir l'édition de Simion (2007-2008).

<sup>9</sup> Voir l'édition de Gennari (2008-2009).

Enfin, Ramusio reproduit fidèlement cette condamnation qu'il impute également à l'idolâtrie et à son aveuglement :

R. (l. 3-4) Gli abitanti di quei luoghi hanno una vergognosa consuetudine, messagli nel capo dalla cecità della idolatria ...

On remarque du reste que ces trois larrons, VA, P et R, se retrouvent unis dans la même condamnation d'une coutume évoquée au chapitre suivant à propos de la province de Gaindu. VA utilise le même syntagme que précédemment, *una soza uxanza*, R va un peu plus loin dans la péjoration en employant deux adjectifs, *un costume vergognoso et vituperoso*. Quant à P, il se déchaîne, imputant à nouveau cette détestable coutume à la religion locale : *sunt autem viri a suis ydolis taliter dementati ut se credant eorum gratiam promereri si uxores proprias et filias viatoribus tradant* (« les hommes sont à ce point rendus fous furieux par leurs idoles qu'ils croient pouvoir mériter leur faveur en livrant leurs propres femmes et filles aux voyageurs »). Et, plus loin, il désigne ainsi la coutume : *ceca et detestanda abusio*, reprenant ainsi le lexique employé dans notre chapitre, avec l'adjectif *ceca* et le substantif *abusio*.

Je reviens au mariage à la tibétaine. Quelques divergences se relèvent également dans le reste du passage.

TA. Comme à son habitude, la version toscane abrège. Il n'est pas fait mention de l'interdiction faite aux voyageurs d'emmener les jeunes filles avec eux lorsqu'ils se remettent en route : (l. 11-12 dans F : *mes avant ne arieres ne les puent moiner*). Toute la fin du passage est omise (l. 18-20 dans F) : d'abord le respect du mari vis-à-vis de son épouse, qu'aucun autre homme ne s'autorisera à toucher. Ensuite l'étonnante invitation lancée aux jeunes européens à se rendre dans ce pays pour y bénéficier à leur tour des largesses sexuelles des jeunes filles.

Fr. La version française, plus conforme à F, ne comporte pas ces omissions ; elle développe même un peu plus les passages concernés : sur l'interdiction de repartir avec les jeunes filles (l. 10-12) *et puis les rendent aus vielles qui la les admainnent, car il ne les laissent pas aller aveuques la gent*. Sur le respect de la femme d'autrui (l. 23-24) *et se gardent trestuit*

*de ceste honte depuis que il sont marié aveques si faites fames. C'est exprimé de façon plus synthétique dans F (l. 19-20) et se gardent tuit de ceste cose mout. Enfin, dans la dernière phrase du passage, le rédacteur se montre encore plus malicieux que F : (l. 24-26) car bien i avroient a aller les joins bachelers pour avoir de ces pucelles a leur voloir tant comme il en demanderoient, et seroient prié sanz nul coust (« ... ils seraient sollicités sans qu'il leur en coûte quoi que ce soit »). On remarque la présence de la conjonction *car*, suggérant que ce long développement avait pour but principal d'éveiller l'intérêt de ces jeunes *bachelers*.*

VA. La version vénitienne comporte quelque menus éléments dont on ne trouve pas mention dans les textes précédents : la nécessité pour les voyageurs de dresser leurs tentes à l'extérieur des bourgades, car ils n'y seraient pas les bienvenus ; le nombre des filles proposées égal à celui des voyageurs, afin que chacun puisse avoir la sienne. Les bijoux portés non seulement lorsque la jeune fille veut se marier, mais aussi simplement lorsqu'elle désire se parer. Sinon, deux des passages omis par TA figurent ici (nécessité de rendre les jeunes filles après consommation, respect du mari) ; en revanche, le trait d'humour final a disparu, comme dans TA.

P. Ce n'est certes pas Pipino qui encouragera les jeunes gens de son pays à venir profiter de cette forme de prostitution gratuite. Il ne peut donc y avoir trace de la dernière phrase dans sa rédaction, ce n'est pas le genre de la maison ! On y relève en revanche des éléments jusque là propres à VA, le nombre de filles égal à celui des voyageurs, les bijoux portés lorsque la jeune fille veut se montrer *in ornato habitu* (l. 36). Comme le plus souvent, l'effort de réécriture est évident : ainsi de l'un des passages omis par TA : (l. 10-11) *Cum vero discedunt nullam earum secum discedere permittunt sed oportet ut parentibus suis eas restituant*, ce qui est tout de même un peu plus clair que le texte laconique de F *mes avant ne arieres ne les puent moiner*. Frère Pipino est un redoutable pédagogue.

Z. La version Z ajoute un élément nouveau, faisant intervenir la religion : si les hommes refusent d'épouser une jeune vierge, c'est qu'en restant vierge, elle déplaît aux dieux : (l. 6-7) *Nam mulier sive domicella, que non fuerit ab aliquo viro cognita, dicitur apud eos diis fore ingrata*. Le

rédacteur ajoute que pour cette raison, ils détestent les vierges et se détournent d'elles. En revanche, dès lors que, dépuclées par des étrangers de passage, elles gagnent la faveur des dieux, ils se mettent à les désirer et à rechercher leur compagnie. Sinon, le texte est globalement conforme à F ; il mentionne la nécessité de rendre les jeunes filles et le respect de l'épousée, mais bien sûr omet le trait d'humour final.

R. On retrouve dans le texte de Ramusio cette idée que les jeunes filles nubiles, pour plaire aux dieux, et par conséquent aux hommes de leur village, doivent renoncer à leur virginité en partageant la couche d'étrangers de passage. On a vu dans VA et P les vieilles femmes proposer les jeunes filles en un nombre égal à celui des étrangers. R innove en suggérant un possible déséquilibre en faveur des voyageurs, qui, ayant fait leur choix, laissent repartir, tête basse, les laissées pour compte : (l. 10 *e le altre tornano a casa dolenti.*). Le reste est sensiblement conforme à F, moins bien sûr la saillie finale, que l'on ne trouve que dans F et Fr.

### 3. Le musc

Dans le paragraphe final du chapitre, les principales divergences portent sur la production du musc.

F lui consacre deux phrases :

(l. 1-3) Et voç di tout voiremant qe en celle contree a maintes bestes qe font le moustre et s'apellent en lor langajes « gudderi ». Et cesti mavesi homes ont maint buen chiens qe en prenent en grant abundance ; et por ce ont dou mostre en grant quantité.

TA (l. 1-2) reprend ces deux phrases, mais ne mentionne pas le nom de l'animal, « gudderi », dans la langue locale. La dernière proposition, probablement jugée à bon droit redondante, n'a pas non plus son équivalent.

Fr (l. 1-4) présente sensiblement, en plus long, le même texte que F. Cependant, le nom « guderu » est attribué au musc et non à l'animal qui le produit ; on remarque, une fois de plus, que c'est la version qui se montre la plus bavarde.

VA (l. 1-2) est très proche de F, omettant simplement le qualificatif péjoratif attribué aux habitants dans les versions précédentes.

P (l. 1-3) reste de même très proche de F, ajoutant cependant, dans son souci habituel de précision, certains adjectifs : les gazelles sont désignées par le syntagme *animalia silvestria*, les chiens qui les prennent par *canes venaticos*.

C'est Z (l. 1-8) suivi par Ramusio, qui s'éloigne le plus du texte de référence, en précisant ce qui a du reste été déjà dit dans un chapitre antérieur, la façon dont la gazelle gudderi produit le musc : celui-ci provient d'une poche de sang que la bête porte au niveau du nombril ; or une fois par lunaison, cette poche, *nimia repletione* (« par suite d'un remplissage excessif ») explose, et comme ces charmantes petites bêtes sont très nombreuses, tout le pays se trouve embaumé du parfum du musc. Le passage est donc beaucoup plus long que dans les rédactions précédentes (plus de 7 lignes au lieu de 2 ou 3) :

R (l. 1-7) reprend presque mot pour mot le texte de Z : On remarque simplement que la dernière phrase (à propos des chiens) est légèrement abrégée.

### 3. Astrologues et enchanteurs

Par rapport à la rédaction F, on relève dans les rédactions TA et Fr les mêmes tendances que précédemment :

TA abrège, faisant notamment l'économie du syntagme *selonc lor usanç* et adoptant une formulation plus économique de la supériorité des enchanteurs et astrologues tibétains : F (l. 1) *les plus sajes et les meior astronique ... qe soient en toutes celles provences qe entor euç sunt*. TA (l. 1-2) *li piu savi incantatori e astrologi che siano in quello paese*. On passe ainsi de 4 lignes à 3.

Fr amplifie, en ajoutant notamment, dans la phrase finale (l. 5), *et n'en seroit pas l'uevre meilleur*, après l'affirmation, comme dans F et TA, du danger qu'il y aurait à décrire dans le livre les pouvoirs de ces enchanteurs et astrologues.

VA est on ne peut plus concis, mais n'oublie pas une précision présente dans les autres rédactions : l'art de ces enchanteurs et astrologues est d'essence diabolique : *de demonii*.

C'est peut-être du reste ce qui a poussé P à faire l'économie complète de l'information : s'il n'est pas édifiant pour un public chrétien de découvrir ces pouvoirs diaboliques, autant ne pas parler de ceux qui en sont dotés. P les mentionne cependant ailleurs, à propos du palais d'été de Khoubilaï.

Z se montre assez proche de F en ce qui concerne les quatre premières lignes ; on retrouve par exemple l'équivalent de *selon lor usanç* dans le syntagme *secundum eorum consuetudines*. On notera cependant que les enchanteurs et astrologues sont réunis dans la formule *perfectiores homines in arte magica*. Enfin et surtout, la dernière phrase (l. 4-6) vient donner des précisions sur l'art diabolique de ces magiciens, ce qui contredit l'exigence de réticence, affirmée précédemment, comme dans F, TA et Fr : (l. 4) *quod non est in libro dicendum*.

R enfin présente une version synthétique du texte de Z : il précise comme Z la nature des pouvoirs de ceux qu'il nomme *grandissimi negromanti*, mais évite la contradiction relevée précédemment, puisque la nécessaire réticence vis-à-vis de ces pouvoirs n'apparaît pas ici, qui était affirmée dans Z, comme dans la plupart des autres rédactions.

Même s'il peut paraître abusif de tirer des conclusions de l'examen de quelques extraits, il semble qu'on puisse en dégager quelques tendances. Des liens se tissent entre les différentes rédactions, sans qu'il soit toujours facile de les démêler, d'autant qu'il nous manque sans doute nombre de maillons intermédiaires. Ce qui semble établi, comme cela a du reste été déjà souvent montré, c'est une parenté entre F, TA et Fr, parenté mise en lumière, pour ce qui concerne F et Fr, par la saillie finale du passage sur le mariage, propre à ces deux rédactions. On a vu aussi que si ces trois versions ont bien des points communs, TA abrège tandis que Fr amplifie. Par ailleurs, il semble établi que Fr ne s'appuie pas sur le manuscrit 1116, mais sur un autre témoin de F, puisque certaines précisions, absentes de 1116, se retrouvent dans d'autres rédactions. VA se montre souvent tout aussi concis que TA, mais comporte parfois des informations ignorées de F, TA et Fr, comme cette impossibilité pour les marchands d'être hébergés à l'intérieur des agglomérations, ou l'emploi d'un adjectif péjoratif pour qualifier le mariage à la tibétaine. La plupart de ces éléments se retrouvent dans P, dont le modèle semble avoir en effet été une version vénitienne. P,

dont la tendance à réécrire le texte qu'il traduit apparaît de façon évidente et qui affirme fortement son indignation face au mariage tel que décrit par Marco. Z occupe une place à part, se démarquant notamment des autres rédactions par le long développement sur le musc. Enfin R semble avoir combiné plusieurs sources et notamment les deux rédactions latines, se permettant toutefois certaines innovations, comme cette image des jeunes filles délaissées regagnant tristement leur logis. Mais surtout, cette étude comparative aura montré l'étonnante plasticité d'un texte en constante évolution, qui s'alimente sans cesse de versions antérieures. Et cette évolution se poursuit aujourd'hui, avec notamment la traduction composite proposée par René Kappler,<sup>10</sup> Ramusio des temps modernes, qui construit sa propre rédaction, fondée sur F, mais nourrie en outre d'extraits empruntés à la plupart des autres versions (notamment Z) et opportunément présentés en italique.

## Annexes

### I - Composition (F)

#### CXV.

1. Une province ravagée par la guerre
2. Feux de bambous pour éloigner les bêtes sauvages
3. Le mariage tibétain
4. Les Tibétains, des idolâtres dénués de tout scrupule moral, les plus grands brigands du monde. Leurs moyens de subsistance. La récolte du musc. Leur monnaie. Leurs vêtements. L'étendue de la province.

#### CXVI.

1. Complète le 4 du précédent chapitre. Etendue de la province (huit royaumes). De grands voleurs. L'or en paillettes. La cannelle. Le commerce du corail. Les étoffes précieuses. Les épices.

---

<sup>10</sup> Kappler & Kappler (2004).



2. Les enchanteurs et astrologues. Nouvelle mention de mœurs détestables. Les chiens, grands comme des ânes. Les faucons laniers.
3. Transition avec le chapitre suivant. Insistance sur le fait que la province dépend du Grand Khan.

## II - Textes

### 1. *Les feux de bambous*

Rédaction franco-italienne F (édition J. Blanchard et M. Quereuil, Genève, Droz, 2018)

Il hi a channe groses et grant merveliosemant, et voç deviserai comant elles sunt groses, qe volvent environ bien trois paumes et sunt louinges bien .XV. pas. Elle ont de le un nod a l'autre bien trois paumes. Et si voç di qe les merchanz et autres viandanz qe vont por tel contree la nuit prenent de celes chanes et en font feu, por ce qe quant elle sont en feu, elle font si grant es[c]rear et si grant escopier qe les lion et les orses et les autres fieres bestes en ont si grant paür qu'il fuient tant con il plus puent et ne s'acosterent au feu por rien do monde. Et cest tiel feu font les homes por garenti[r] lor bestes dé fieres bestes sauvajes qe asez hi n'i a por cele contree et por celz [51a] païs. Et si voç dirai, por ce qe bien fait a oïr, comant l'escopier de ceste canne sonent a lonc et comant font grant temance et qe n'avint. Or sachiés qe l'en prenne de ceste channes toutes vers et les metent en feu des buces, et ce sunt plusors. Et quant cestes channes sunt demorés auques en ceste grant feu, adonc se tort et se fent por mi, et adonc fait un si grant es[c]opié qe bien se hoie .X. miles lunc de noit. Et sachiés qe celui qe ne est costumé hoïr, il en devient tout exbaïes, si orible chouse est a oïr. Et voç di qe les chavaus qui ce ne ont onques hoï, quant il l'oïe, il s'espaventent si durement qu'il ronpent cavestres e toutes cordes de coi il sunt liees et s'en fuient. Et ce avint a plosors. Mes quant il ont chavaus qe sevent qe ce n'avoient onques hoï, il li fait bender les iaus et li fait encavestrer toit les quatre piés, en tel mainere qe quant il hoi le grant escopier dé chanes, puis qu'il vuoille [fuir], ne puet. Et encore, si con je voç ai dit,

les homes escanpent la noit, et il et lor bestes, des lions et des lonces et d'autres mauvaises bestes, qe hi n'i a en grant habundance.

Rédaction toscane TA (éd. G. Ronchi, Milano, 1982)

Quivi àe canne grosse bene .iiij. spanne, lunghe bene .xv. passi, e aè dall'uno nodo a l'altro bene .iiij. palmi. E.ssi vi dico che li mercatanti e' viandanti prendono di quelle canne la notte, e fanno ardere nel fuoco, perché fanno sì grande scoppiata, che tutti li leoni e orsi e altre bestie fiere àno paura e fuggono, e non s'acostarebbero al fuoco per cosa del mondo. E questo si fa per paura di quelle bestie, che ve n' à assai. Le canne scoppiano perché si metteno verdi nel fuoco, e quelle si torcono e fendono per mezzo ; e per questo fendere fanno tanto romore che s'odono da la lunga bene presso a .v. miglie, di notte, e più ; e.ssi è terribile cosa a udire, che chi non fosse d'udirlo usato, ogni uomo n'avrebbe grande paura. E.lli cavagli che non ne sono usi si spaventano sì forte, che rompono capestri e ogni cosa e fuggono ; e quest[o] aviene spesse volte. E agli cavagli che non ne sono usi, egli li fanno incapestrare tutti e quattro li piedi e fasciare gli occhi e turare gli orecchi, sì che non può fugire quando ode questo scoppio. E così campano gli uomini la notte, loro e. lle loro bestie.

Rédaction française Fr (éd. J. Blanchard et M. Quereuil, *Le devisement du monde*, dir. P. Ménard, vol. 4, Genève, Droz, 2005)

Et si treuve l'en canes moult grosses et moult merueilleusement grandes : elles sont grosses bien .III. paumes et longues [bien] .XV. pas, et ont, de l'un bout juques a [98v°b] l'autre, plus de .III. paumes. Et si vous di que li marchant et autre gent qui cheminent par celle contree la nuit, il prennent de ces canes et en font feu, pour ce que, quant elles sont ou feu, elles font si grant escrois que les lyons et les ours et les autres bestes sauvages que tant en y a par celle province gaste (et ce est pour ce que il n'y demeure nulle gent en esté, pour ce sont tant montepliees ces sauvages bestes) [en ont] si grant pour que elles s'en [fuient] tant comme elles pueent, si tost que elles oient ces escrois. Et sachiez pour certain que elles ne s'aproucheroient jamais prez de ce

feu, et pour ce font il ce feu, pour eulz et leurs bestes garantir des fieres bestes sauvages, des quelles il y a tant en ceste prouvince que ce est unne grant merveille. Et sachiez que, se ce ne fussent ces canes qui font si grant escrois a l'ardoir, par quoy ces bestes sauvages s'en fuient pour le grant paour qu'elles ont des escroiz, nulz ne porroit passer de la. Si vous conteray comment ces canes font si grant escrois. Il prennent de ces canes vers, car il y en a moult, et les meitent plusieurs au feu ; et, quant il ont bien demouré une grant piece, si se tornent et f[e]ndent parmi et font si grant esclat qu'il semble que il s'oient, de nuit, bien .X. milles. Et sachiez que se aucun ne fust acoustumez d'oïr ces escrois et il les oïst, il porroit de legier perdre le sens ou mourir. Mais ceulz qui l'ont acoustumé d'oïr [n'y font force, pour ce qu'il ont acoustumé d'oïr] les. Et ceulz qui ne l'ont usé, si leur convient [prendre] au commencement du coton et farsir bien lors [99r°a] oreilles et estouper, et puis bien lier sa teste et sa chiere et couvrir le de toute sa robe que l'en a ; et ainsi eschappe l'en au commencement, juques a tant que il ont usé. Et aussi vous di des chevax. Les bestes qui de ce ne seront acoustumees d'oïr, quant il oient ces escrois, si rompent cheveitres et toutes autres cordes, et s'en vont fuiant. Et en ceste maniere en ont il maint perdu. Mais je vous di que quant il veulent sauver leur bestes, si les font bien lier et bien enchevestrer les .IIII. piez, et puis bien bender la teste et les oreilles et les ieux. En tel manière les sauvent. Mais les chevaux, quant il ont usé plusieurs fois, si n'en font pas grant force. Car je vous di que ce est la plus horrible chose a oïr du monde, au commencement. Et avec tout ce, aucune fois en vient des lions ou des ours ou des autres bestes sauvages, qui leur font dommage, car moult en y a grant foison.

Rédaction vénitienne VA (éd. A. Barbieri et A. Andreose, Venezia, Marsilio, 1999)

El ge n'è chane molto meraveglioxe, e grosse atorno ben tre spane, et da uno nodo al'altro altratanto, et sono longe quindexe a passa. Li viandanti e li merchadanti che pasano de note per quella chontrà fano grandi fuogi de legnie, e puo' tuoleno de quelle chane verde in gran quantità

e sì le meteno suxo el fuogo. E quando ele «è» stade uno puocho, elle se torzeno e se de(s)fendeno, e sclopano sì forte ch'el se può aldir piuxor meglià. E questo rumor fa li merchadanti e lli viandanti a chaxion ch'è le bestie salvadege, delle qual è sì gran moltitudine in quelle chontrà che de note non porave schanpar la zente chon le suo' bestie da quelle bestie salvadege. E quando le chane fano quel rumor chusì smexurato, tuti li lioni, orsi e altre bestie fere àno gran smarimento, e 'le fuzeno e non se tentano de vixinare a quel fuogo. E a questo modo schanpa de note li viandanti chon le suo' biestie dalle bestie salvadege. [10] Quelli che non èno uxi d'aldir quello rumor n'àno gran paura. E li chavali che non èno uxi d'aldir, àno sì gran paura che i ronpeno i chavestri e fuzeno, e per questo modo n'è zìa persi asai ; ma l'omo, quando è 'l chavalò che non sia uxo a questo rumor, i abinda i ochi e l'inchavestra da tuti i pie', sì ch'el non pò fuzir. Et è grandò perichollo a pasar per quelle parte per chaxion de quelle bestie salvadege.

Rédaction P (éd. J. V. Prášek, Prague, 1902)

Protenditur autem in longum provincia per dietas .XX. et quia sic in solitudine est redacta oportet ut per .XX. dietas viatores omnes victualia secum ferant ; insuper et quia habitatoribus caret, silvestres fere supramodum multiplicatae sunt ibi, propter quod periculosum valde est transitum inde facere et maxime nocte. Habent tamen viatores et mercatores ceteri tale remedium : regio illa maximas habet arundines, quarum una communiter habet longitudinis |51c| .XV. passus, grossicies vero eius est tribus palmis mansuratis in giro, inter duos collaterales nodos arundinis trium palmorum distancia est. Cum igitur nocte volunt quiescere, viatores de arundinibus illis viridibus fascas magnos componunt quibus, ut ardeant tota nocte, ignem subitiunt, et cum aliquantulum fuerint calefacte huc illucque torquentur atque scinduntur, et sic fortissime crepitant ut earum fragor et strepitus eminus ad plura miliaria audiatur ; cum autem silvestres fere audiunt illum terribilem sonitum tanto stupore ac tremore pavescunt quod confestim

fugam arripiunt quousque ad locum perveniant ubi sonitus ille terribilis audiri non possit. Sic igitur nocte evadunt mercatores a bestiis ; nisi enim sibi de tali remedio providissent nullus ibi posset evadere noctibus pre multitudine bestiarum silvestrium. Homines [51d] autem quando primo huiusmodi strepitum audiunt magno concutiuntur horrore ; equi vero et animalia cetera viatorum antequam ad hunc strepitum assuescant sic vehementissime timent quod statim fugam arripiunt et per hunc modum multi mercatores minus providi multa iam animalia perdidit : oportet igitur ut equi prius per pedes singulos caute diligenterque compedibus alligentur, quoniam multi vincula rumpunt et fugiunt, audito fragore arundinum, nisi fuerint prius cum magna diligentia alligati.

Rédaction Z (passage absent ; éd. A. Barbieri, Parma, 1998)

Rédaction R (éd. M. Milanese, vol. III, Torino, 1980)

Et perché vi mancano gli habitatori, però le fiere salvatiche, et massime i leoni sono multiplicati in tanto numero che è grandissimo pericolo a passarvi la notte : et li mercatanti et viandanti, oltra il portar seco le vettovaglie, bisogna che alloggino la sera con grande ordine et rispetto, per causa che non li siano devorati i cavalli. Et fanno in questo modo, che, trovandosi in quella regione, et massime appresso i fiumi, canne di lunghezza di passa dieci et grosse tre palmi, et da un nodo all'altro vi sono tre palmi, i viandanti fanno la sera fassi grandi di quelle che sono verdi, mettendole alquanto lontane dall'alloggiamento, et vi appizzano il fuoco ; le quali sentendo il caldo si scorzano et sfendono schioppando terribilmente, et è tanto horribil il schioppo che 'l rumor si sente per duoi miglia, et le fiere udendolo fuggono et allontanansi. Et li mercatanti portano seco pasture di ferro, con le quali inchivano tutti quattro i piedi alli cavalli, perché altramente, spaventati dal rumore, romperiano le corde et fuggiriano via : et è accaduto che molti per negligenza gli hanno perduti.

## 2. *Le mariage*

### Rédaction F

Et quant l'en a alés por ceste contree bien .XX. jornee, ne treuve l'en erbergies ne vi(i)andes, mes convient [51b] que il porte viandes por lui et por seç bestes toutes cestes .XX. jornee, toutes foies trovant mout fieres et pesmes bestes sauvajes, qe sunt mout periluise et da doter. Adonc treuve l'en chastiaus et casaus asseç, et hi a un tiel costumes de marier femes con je voç dirai. Il est voir qe nul homes prenneroit une pucelle a feme por rien dou monde, et dient q'ele ne i vaillent rien se elle ne sunt usés et costumés co[n] maint homes. Et por ce s'en esp[r]oi[t]ent in tiel mainere : car je voç di que quant les jens d'autres estranges païs passent por cele contree et il ont tandu lor tendes por herbergiés, adonc les vieilles femes des chastiaus et des casaus menent lor files jusque a cestes tendes, et ce sunt a .XX. et a .XL., et a plus et a moïn, et lé donent a les homes por ce qu'il en faicent lor voluntés et qu'il gigent con elles. Adonc les homes lé prenent, et si gaudent cun elles et lé tienent tant con il velent iluec ; mes avant ne arieres ne les puent moïner. Et puis, quant les homes ont fait a lor volonté d'eles et il se velent partir, adonc convient que done a celle femes con cui il a jeü aucune joie ou aucun seïgn por ce(lle) que le puisse moustrer, quant ille se vient a marier, q'ele a eü amant. Et en tel mainere cascune pucelle convent que aie plus des .XX. signaus a son cuel, por mostrer [51c] que aseç amant et aseç homes sunt jeü cun li. Et celle qe plus ont signaus et plus puent mostrer qe ont eü amant e qe plus homes sunt jeü cun elle, celle est tenue meior, et la prenent plus voluntier et dient q'ele est plus grasieuse que les autres. Et quant il ont prises ceste tel femes, il lé tienent chieres et ont por trop grant maus se le un tochast la feme a l'autre ; et se gardent tuit de ceste couse mout. Or voç ai contés de ceste mariajes, qe bien fait a dir. Et en celle contree avront bien aler les jeune de (de) .XVI. anz en .XXIII. !

### Rédaction TA

E quando l'uomo vae per queste contrade bene .xx. giornate, non truova né alberghi né vivande, ma conviene che porti vivande per se e per sue bestie tutte queste .xx. giornate, tuttavia trovando fere pessime e bestie salvatiche, che sono molte pericolose. Poscia truova castelle e case assai, ove à uno cotale costume di maritare femine com'io vi dirò. Egli è vero che niuno uomo piglierebbe neuna pulcella per moglie per tutto 'l mondo, e dicono che non vagliano nulla s'ella no è costumata co molti uomini. E quando li mercatanti passano per le contrade, le vecchie tengono loro figliuole sulle strade e per li alberghi e per loro tende, e stanno a .x., a .xx. e a .xxx. ; e fannole giacere con questi mercatanti, e poscia le maritano. E quando il mercatante àe fatto suo volere, conviene che 'l mercatante le doni qualche gioia, acciò che possa mostrare come altri àe avuto a. ffare seco ; e quella ch' àe più gioe, è segno che più uomini sono giacuiti con essa, e più tosto si marita. E conviene che ciascuna, anzi che.ssi possa maritare, conviene ch' abbia più di .xx. segnali al collo, per mostare che molti uomini abbiano avuti a fare seco; e quella che.nn' à più, è tenuta migliore, e dicono ch' è più grazios[a] che.ll' altre.

### Rédaction Fr

Et en chevauchant ces .XX. journées, on ne treuve nulle habitation, si que il couvient porter tout ce que mestier leur est aveques eulz ; et treuvent toute fois grant planté de ces bestes sauvages, qui sont moult perilleuses et pesmes, qui moult font a doubter. Et quant on a chevauchié ces .XX. journées, l'en treuve citez et chastiaux assez. Et ont celle gent unne telle coustume de marier comme je vous diray. Nulz homs de celle contree pour nulle rienz du monde ne prendroit a fame unne grace pucele, et dient que elles ne valent rienz s'elles ne sont usees a couchier aveques hommes. Et font en [99r<sup>o</sup>b] tel manière que quant li cheminant passent, si sont appareilliees les vielles fames atout leurs filles ou leurs parentes ou leurs amies, et vont aveques ces graces pucelles et les mainnent as cheminans qui par la passent, et les donnent a

chascun qui les veullent prendre, pour faire leur volenté. Et les hommes les prennent et en font ce que il veullent, et puis les rendent aus vielles qui la les admainnent, car il ne les laissent pas aller aveques la gent. Et en ceste manière treuvent les cheminans quant il vont par la voie a .XX. et a .XXX., tant comme il veulent, c'est quant il passent par un casal ou par un chastel, ou autre habitation. Et quant il herbergent aveques ceste gent [en] leurs casaus ou en leurs chastiaux, si en ont aussi tant comme il veulent, qui les viennent prier. Bien est voirs que aveques celle que vous avrez geü, vous li donrez aucune choseite ou aucun jouelet ou aucun seignal, qu'elles puissent moustrer quant elles se doivent marier que [elles] ont eü plusieurs hommes. Et ne le font pour autre chose. En telle maniere couvient a chascune pucelle porchascier plus de .XX. si fais seigniaux avant que elles se puissent marier, par la voie que je vous ai dit. Et celle qui plus avra de seigniaux et qui plus avra esté touchiee, si est pour la meilleur tenue, et plus volentiers l'espousent, por ce que elles en sont plus gracieuses. Mais quant il sont marié, il les tiennent plus chieres, et ont pour trop grant mal se l'un touche la fame a l'autre, et se gardent trestuit de ceste honte depuis [99v<sup>a</sup>] que il sont marié aveques si faites fames. Or vous ay conté de cest mariage, car bien fait a conter et a dire la manière, car bien i avroient a aller les joines bachelers pour avoir de ces pucelles a leur voloir tant comme il en demanderoient, et seroient prié sanz nul coust.

#### Rédaction VA

In chavo de quelle vinti zornade se truova una provinzia ch'à nome Teber, in la qual se truova chastelle asai e ville. Et ène una molto soza uxanza : che in quela chontrà nesuno homo torave mogier che fosse donzella per cossa del mondo. E dixeno che la femena non è de matrimonio s'ella nonn è stata chon pluxor homeni. Quando i merchadanti o altri forestieri pasano per quella chontrà, e' i chovien chonzar le sue tende per albergar presso della zità, chastelle o ville, o dove i vuoleno albergar, e non oseraveno albergar dentro de quelle tere, perché 'l non



piaxe ala zente de quelle chontrade. Et quando i sono albergadi, le femene de quella zità, chastelle o ville, che àno le figliolle grande e donzelle in chaxa, le menano a quelli forestieri, a vinti o a trenta al trato sechondo che èno i forestieri, sì che zaschuno à la soa ; e sì li priegano che i lle debiano tegnir chon sì quelle donzelle per infina i starano lì. E gli forestieri tien quelle che i voleno, ma non le oserave menar via in altro luogo né in altra chontrà. E quando i forestieri se vuol partir, chonvien che i dona alchuna zoia a quella che i àno tenuta, aziò ch'ella possa mostrar argumento e insegna che l'eba avuto amator. [20] E quando quelle donzelle se vuol ornare, o quando i parenti sì le vuol maritar, elle se mete quelle zoie al chollo ; e quella che n' à più zioie sì mostra eser la mior e lla plui grazioxa, e trova plui tosto marito. E quando elle è maritate, li mariti le tenono sì chare che tropo avereve per malle se alchuno altro atendesse a so moier.

#### Rédaction P

De regione alia provincie Thebeth et de quadam turpi consuetudine eius. Capitulum XXXVII.

Post terminum .XX. diatarum provincie Thebeth inveniuntur castra multa et ville, ubi est absurda et valde detestabilis quedam abusio proveniens ex ydolatrie cecitate : in illa regione nullus vir uxorem vult accipere virginem nisi prius sit a viris pluribus cognita ; dicunt enim [52a] mulierem aliter non esse aptam coniugio. Cum igitur mercatores vel quicumque alii viatores per regionem transitum facientes iuxta oppida predicta aut villas sua tabernacula composuerunt, mulieres loci illius que filias habent matrimonio copulandas, ducunt eas ad illos numero .XX., .XXX. aut .XL., iuxta paucitatem vel multitudinem mercatorum rogantes, ut quilibet eorum unam sibi de illis accipiat et in suo consortio teneant quamdiu ibi habuerint immorari ; illi autem quas volunt eligunt, et secum continue retinent quousque ibi mansuri sunt. Cum vero discedunt nullam earum secum discedere permittunt sed oportet ut parentibus suis eas restituant. Quilibet autem puelle quam tenuit iocale aliquod donare tenetur, ut habeat puella per huiusmodi iocalia evidens argumentum quod viris pluribus grata extiterit, ut sic

possit facilius et nobilius maritari ; cum autem puella predictae in ornato habitu ap[52b] parere volunt, omnia huiusmodi iocalia sibi a viatoribus data ad collum deferunt, ut ostendant quomodo viatoribus servierint gratiose ; et quae plura huiusmodi signa ad collum habet iudicatur melior et facilius maritatur. Igitur cum nupte fuerint viris suis grate sunt valde, nec permittunt ulterius viris aliis forensibus seu domesticis adherere : multumque cavent viri regionis illius ne in hac re alterutrum se offendant.

### Rédaction Z

Per istam contratam .XX. diebus equitatur, continue inveniendū huiusmodi silvestria multa, scilicet leones, ursi et alia. Nec inveniuntur hospitia et victualia, nisi forte in omni tertia vel quarta die, in quibus de victualibus fulciuntur. In capite vero .XX. dietarum, inveniuntur casamenta et castra multa et burgi per dirupta montium firmata. Habent itaque gentes ille talem consuetudinem in nubendo, videlicet quod nullus homo aliquam virginem modo aliquo acciperet [25r] in uxorem. Nam mulier sive domicella, quae non fuerit ab aliquo viro cognita, dicitur apud eos diis fore ingrata. Quare propter hoc homines abhorrent eas et de ipsis non curant. Quia si eorum ydolis essent grate, eas homines concupiscerent et affectarent. Et ideo taliter fatiunt domicelle. Quia quando extraneae gentes per illam patriam transeuntes tendas suas causa hospitandi tetenderint, dicte domicelle, quae quandoque in una comitiva erunt .XX. et .XL., accedunt quousque ad tendas et se hominibus illis consentient. Homines vero cum eis solaciabuntur ad libitum et ibi de eis facient suum velle, sed ad alium locum ipsas secum ducere non valent. Et quando cum eis solatium habuerint velle suo et discedere velint eorum viam ituri, oportet ut quilibet mulieri cum qua cubuerit aliquam coiam vel signum largiatur, quod ostendere valeat, quando nubit, videlicet quod dilecta fuerit et habuerit amatores. Et sic quamlibet domicellam oportet quam plura ex istis signis ad pectus habere appensa, si volet accipi in uxorem. Et domicella, statim cum est aliquod signum lucrata, ipsum appendit ad pectus, in testimonium quod eam carnaliter cognoverint multi viri. Et quae plura huiusmodi habet signa, libentius

accipitur in uxorem. Nam apud deos magis dicitur gratiosa. Et ex quo per hunc modum sunt mulieres huiusmodi maritate, mariti multum retineant eas caras. Et ex tunc non [25v] est aliquis qui ausus sit alterius tangere uxorem, et valde sibi cavent.

### Rédaction R

In capo delle qual giornate si comincia pur a veder qualche castello et borghi, che sono fabricati sopra dirupi et sommità de' monti, et se intra in paese habitato et coltivato, dove non vi è piú pericolo di animali salvatichi. Gli habitanti di quei luoghi hanno una vergognosa consuetudine, messagli nel capo dalla cecità della idolatria, che niuno vuol pigliar moglie che sia vergine, ma vogliono che prima sia stata cognosciuta da qualche huomo, dicendo che questo piace alli loro idoli. Et però, come passa qualche carovana di mercadanti, et che mettono le tende per alloggiare, le madri c'hanno le figliuole da maritare le conducono subito fino alle tende, pregando i mercadanti, a regatta una dell'altra, che vogliano pigliar la sua figliuola et tenirsela a suo buon piacere fino che stanno ivi : et così le giovani che piú gli aggrada vengono elette dalli mercadanti, et le altre tornano a casa dolenti. Queste dimorano con li detti fino al suo partire et poi le consegnano alle lor madri, né mai per cosa al mondo le menarebbono via, ma sono obligati a farli qualche presente di gioie, annelletto o vero qualche altro segnale, qual portano [34v] a casa : et quando si maritano portano al collo o vero adosso tutti li detti presenti, et quella che ne ha piú viene riputata esser stata piú apprezzata dalle persone. Et per questo sono richieste piú volentieri dalli giovani per moglie, né piú degna dote ponno dare alli mariti che li molti presenti ricevuti, riputandosi quelli per gran gloria a laude : et nelle solennità delle sue nozze li mostrano a tutti, et li mariti le tengono piú care, dicendo che li loro idoli le hanno fatte piú gratiose appresso gli huomini. Et da indi innanzi non è alcuno che havesse ardire di toccare la moglie d'un altro, et di tal cosa si guardano grandemente.

### 3. *Le musc*

#### Rédaction F

Et voç di tout voiremant qe en celle contree a maintes bestes qe font le moustre et s'apellent en lor langajes « gudderi ». Et cesti mavesi homes ont maint buen chie[n]s qe en prenent en grant abundance ; et por ce ont dou mostre en grant quantité.

#### Rédaction TA

E dicovi che in quella contrada àe molte bestie che fanno il moscao; e questa mala gente àe molti buoni cani, e prendonne assai.

#### Rédaction Fr

Et si vous di que en ceste contree ont moult grant plenté de bestes dont l'en fait le mugliac, et l'appellent en leur langage « guderis ». Et ont celle male gent moult de granz chiens et bons qui prennent moult de ces bestioles, si que pour ce il ont moult de ce mugliat en grant habondance.

#### Rédaction VA

In quella chontrà è molte de quelle bestie che fano el muschio, et sono apellati guderis. La zente de quella contrà à molti chani che lle prendeno, sì che i àno molto muschio.

#### Rédaction P

in hac regione multa sunt animalia silvestria que muscatum faciunt et dicuntur "gudderi", habent autem incole loci canes venaticos multos qui ipsa animalia capiunt, propter quod de muscato copiam habent.

#### Rédaction Z

Sunt etiam in illa contrata quam plures bestie que generant muscatum, et in tanta quantitate quod per totam contratam percipitur ille odor. Quia omni luna semel bestie ille de muscato effundunt. Nam, sicut alias

est dictum, iuxta umbilicum istius bestie unum apostema, in modum cuiusdam tuberis, plenum sanguine concreatur. Et sanguis ille est muscatum. Sed apostema illud, nimia repletione, omni luna de sanguine illo sperargit. Et sic, quia multa huiusmodi animalia partibus illis sunt, ideo in multis locis sperargunt, quare redollet ex eo provincia tota. Et iste tales bestie vocantur in eorum lingua “gudderi”.

#### Rédaction R

Qui si trovano di quelle bestie che fanno il muschio, et in tanta quantità che per tutta quella contrada si sente l'odore, perché ogni luna una volta spandono il muschio. Nasce a questa bestia, come altre volte s'è detto, presso all'umbilico una apostema in modo d'un bognone pieno di sangue, et quella apostema ogni luna per troppa repletione sparge di quel sangue, qual è muschio. Et perché vi sono molti di simili animali in quelle parti, però in molti luoghi si sente l'odore di quello. Et queste tal bestie si chiamano in loro lingua “gudderi”, et se ne prendono molte con cani.

#### 4. *Enchanteurs et astrologues*

##### Rédaction F

Et encore voç di qu'il ont les plus sajes encanteor et les meior astronique, selonc lor usanç, qe soient en toutes celles provences qe entor euç sunt : car il font les plus fere encantemant et les greingnor mervoiles a oïr et a veoir, por ars de diables, qe ne est pas buen a contere en nostre livre, por ce qe trop se mervelieront les jens.

##### Rédaction TA

E àno li più savi incantatori e astorlogi che siano in quello paese, ch'egli fanno tali cose per opere di diavoli che non si vuole contare in questo libro, però che troppo se ne maraviglierebbero le persone.

##### Rédaction Fr

Encore sachiez que il ont les plus sages enchanteurs et les meilleurs astronomiens qui soient en celles contrees qui leur sont entour, car il

font les plus fiers enchantemens et les greigneurs merveilles et tout [par] art dyabolique que ce est moult grant merveille a oïr ne a veoir. Et pour ce ne le vous conteray je pas en nostre livre, car moult s'en esmerveilleroient la gent et n'en seroit pas l'ueuvre meilleur.

#### Rédaction VA

E sì n'è molti astrologi e inchantatori de demonii.

#### Rédaction P (développement absent)

#### Rédaction Z

Sunt in provincia illa perfectiores homines in arte magica, secundum eorum consuetudines, qui in omnibus illis circumstantibus provinciis valeant reperiri. Nam maiora faciunt veneficia et magis fera, per artem diabolicam, quam unquam visa vel audita fuissent ; quod non est in libro dicendum : nam non posset fides adhyberi. Inducunt enim tempestates et fulgura quandocumque volunt, et quandocumque cessare compellunt ; et mira faciunt infinita.

#### Rédaction R

Et quivi gli huomini sono grandissimi negromanti, imperoché fanno per arte diabolica i maggior veneficii et ribalderie che mai fussero viste o vero uditi : fanno venir tempesta et fulguri, con saette, et molte altre cose mirabili.

## Références

- David-Néel, Alexandra (1927). *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhasa* (Paris : Plon).
- David-Néel, Alexandra (1933). *Au pays des brigands-gentilshommes* (Paris : Plon).
- David-Néel, Alexandra (1947). *À l'Ouest barbare de la vaste Chine* (Paris : Plon).
- Gennari, Pamela (2008-2009). « 'Milione,' redazione VB : Edizione critica commentata », PhD diss. (Venezia, Università Ca' Foscari).
- Harrer, Heinrich (1983). *Sept ans d'aventures au Tibet* (Paris : Arthaud).

- Hérodote (1951). *Histoires, livre IV, traduction de Philippe-Ernest Legrand* (Paris : les Belles Lettres).
- Kappler, René ; Kappler Claire (2004). *Marco Polo : Le Devisement du monde* (Paris : Imprimerie nationale).
- Maraini, Fosco (1954). *Tibet secret* (Paris : Arthaud).
- Segalen, Victor ; Bouillier, Henry (1995). *Œuvres complètes* (Paris : R. Laffont).
- Simion, Samuela (2007-2008). « Il 'Milione' secondo il manoscritto Hamilton 244 della Staatsbibliothek di Berlino : Edizione critica », PhD diss. (Venezia, Università Ca' Foscari).

# **Reception and Styles of the Book, and the Literary Field**





# The Illuminated Manuscripts of the *Devisement*: Words and Images in Establishing a Late Medieval Pattern of Perception for the Topic of Travelling to the Far East

Marcello Ciccuto

A starting point for my paper may be identified in the gift that Marco Polo himself made in 1307 of a manuscript copy of his text, of course on behalf of Venice, to Thibaut de Chepoy, emissary of Charles of Valois, who, especially after the fall of Acre in 1291, desired to be distinguished in oriental enterprises. This event – together with several others – took place in the wake of the agreement between Venice and the French Crown, to the end of financing a crusade (which was proclaimed by Clement V at Poitiers) that very few liked to support or to fight.<sup>1</sup> What I want to say is that, since the beginning of the story I will try to draw here, the French text of the *Devisement* is going the right way: it goes into the wide debate about crusades and the role of the French kingdom as a new Constantinian empire – as Pierre Dubois wrote just in 1305-07 in his *De recuperatione terrae sanctae*<sup>2</sup> – in the sense that the role of the French version of the Polian text had to convey something useful for arguments of large political and economic valence. This French version can thus inform us about the background of historic and cultural events linked to the power games of the papacy and French royalty.

Energy and actions by the popes Clement V and John XXII were grounded on the previous engagements of royal characters of the kind of

---

<sup>1</sup> Alphanféry-Dupront (1974), 389-450; Cardini (1993), 317-375.

<sup>2</sup> Airdi (2006), 216-217.

Louis IX and Philip the Fair, in a period which saw a remarkable production of propaganda texts relevant to the crusader destiny of the *Devisement du monde*.<sup>3</sup> Let's recall here the *Vie de saint Louis* by Jean de Joinville, an authentic reference text for authors dealing with oriental matters; or the *Fleur des histoires de la terre d'Orient* written by the Armenian prince Hayton for Clement V;<sup>4</sup> but also more technical treatises and proposals just like the *Vegetius*, a kind of military art tract fitting to the intended recovery of the Holy Places.<sup>5</sup> But it was especially the execution of several manuscripts of texts of the so-called Cycle of the First Crusade where the epic dimension and perspective for crusading was transformed into dynastic romance or historiography.<sup>6</sup> There was a consistent tendency by the writers of romances or travelogues to use the numerous data that escaped any control of ideology or war perspective as propaganda. History, legend and *chevalerie* began to blend as in the *Liber* of Sanudo, moving away from a spiritual/moralistic narration to a description of exotic escape. It was a para-historic point of view, filtered through the *Pantheon* of Goffredo da Viterbo, the *Historia in partibus transmarinis* by William of Tyre and the *Descriptio terrae sanctae* by Burchard of Mount Sion<sup>7</sup> – and we may also recall how in Avignon a Latin *Libro del Gran Caan* from the library of Robert d'Anjou would become in the hands of Jean Le Long d'Ypres the *Livre de l'estat du grant Caan* from which the Franco-Flemish nobles would have received a considerable amount of 'wonderful' news and insights.<sup>8</sup>

To confirm the specific orientation of this cultural (and political) taste we may think for a moment of Mahaut d'Artois, the wife of Philip VI, a strong character interested in producing books of crusading.<sup>9</sup> She had for

---

<sup>3</sup> Weiss and Mahoney (2004); Tyerman (1985); Ciccuto (2014).

<sup>4</sup> Moodey (2012), 92-95, and Dörper (1998).

<sup>5</sup> Rouse and Rouse (2006).

<sup>6</sup> This was one of the effects of linking the overseas deeds of Godfrey de Bouillon with the contemporary history of Flanders and Picardy, so that already in the *Chevalier au Cygne*, *Godfrey de Bouillon* or *Le Batard de Bouillon*, in *Baudouin de Sebourc* or in *Saladin* we can discover a penchant for combining the idea of travelling *in partibus infidelium* with a chivalric imaginary. See De Mandach (1974) and Mickel-Nelson (1971).

<sup>7</sup> See Curzi (1997); Rossi (1999). For more recent research cf. Ciccuto (2014), 196, n. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Gadrat (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Rouse and Rouse (2000), 110 ff., 203-206; Blondeau (2009).

example illuminated another medieval biography, the *Romans de la vie du grant Kaan*, moreover a *Romans des fais d'outremer* (Odoric or William of Tyre), and the *Voeux du Paon* of Alexandrian tradition, where we see at work two artists, Thomas de Maubeuge and Richard de Montbaston, whose engagement for this kind of texts opens up to possibilities of new interpretations related to noble readers' preferred themes in Marco Polo's book. These works were written in a vernacular style blending ancient narratives and parts of the Arthurian legend, while at the same time pushing into the foreground an orientalising Jean de Vignay, or a *Repertorium ad pas-sagium faciendum ad terram sanctam* by Guillaume Adam that became an important source for consolidating a crusader perspective in the texts of oriental travel experience.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, we need to deal also with Philip VI of Valois. With him, between 1331 and 1336, the old Capetian dream of conquering back the Holy Land in agreement to the will of the Avignonese papacy resulted in real actions, as for example, the use of Jean de Chepoy for some military or diplomatic interventions. Nevertheless it was in the form of texts from which support of the crusader ideology was derived – texts in which epic narration attempted to conceal military defeat by disguising it by strange dominion phantasies.<sup>11</sup> It is well known that the Valois propaganda apparatus knew well how to place various texts within an elusive and parahistorical perspective such as the one welded to the exotic and antiquarian vision of the *Manuel* of Philippe de Valois, where the *Histoire ancienne jusq' à Cesar*, the *Livre du tresor des histoires* and the *Roman d'Alexandre* coexisted in illustrated manuscripts that would have founded an important combination of models of historical, chivalrous and crusading culture.<sup>12</sup>

In the twin manuscripts, Bodleian 264 and the British Library, Royal 19 D I,<sup>13</sup> we are looking at a production of important relics from the past: again a *Vie de saint Louis* by Joinville together with the *Grandes Chronique de France* and *Romans des fais d'outremer*.<sup>14</sup> The structure of

<sup>10</sup> Brun-Cavagna (2006); Raynaud (1999); Trotter (1989).

<sup>11</sup> Ciccuto (2014), 199 and notes.

<sup>12</sup> Ciccuto (2014), 200; Pérez-Simon (2011), 146-166.

<sup>13</sup> Dutschke (1998), 280-286.

<sup>14</sup> Quigley (2009); Chung-Apley (1998); Hedeman (1991).

the Bodleian 264 combines texts of proved cultural affinity with a perspective that is supporting – while also responding to a popular interest in the planned crusade – an idea of crusade where the character and the stories of Alexander the Great offer a background of legendary glorification. In other words, we can find a combination of a practical crusade planner and similar texts with romantic travel legends like the story of Alexander and the narration of Marco Polo. This liaison of textual genres results in a nebulous constellation where the intellectual and scientific knowledge of the Holy Land meets the medieval desire to romanticise and categorise that distant and unfamiliar universe.<sup>15</sup>

The compilers of Royal 19 D I further underscored this confluence of science and romance through their visual program. By displaying narrative actions abroad rather than the locations there, the romances and travel chronicles could be read in quasi scientific terms, just as in a guide providing advice. The reverse is also true: the advice guide could be romanticised so that its ‘real’ location – the so far known Holy Land – could become instead a less easily identifiable and ‘experienced’ geography.<sup>16</sup> In the vernacular style of the Montbaston miniaturists an itinerary section is set up in a descriptive that appears to fade away, in order to build a strong idealisation of eastern places. Some patterns are depicted in an operational way, as for example in a superficial representation of Baghdad as a fortified tower by a river, while in the Odorician *Merveilles de la terre d’outremer* in the Royal manuscript all the travel experiences of the friars are shown in a synthetic view, that is, a boat with some people on board, but also leaving space to ritual scenes comprising the granting of privileges, papal audiences, and acts of official writing of the text.<sup>17</sup> Even more, writers introduce conventional images with the aim of accustoming readers to the Other, such as Indian monsters, Mongols represented as Tibetans in large furs or black Saracens at the siege of Saianfu. Our theme can be located here geographically, namely, Tournai. It was the place where Jehan de Grise and Pierart du Tielt were responsible for compiling the first and

---

<sup>15</sup> Quigley (2009), 57-59.

<sup>16</sup> Ciccuto (2014), 201.

<sup>17</sup> Ciccuto (2014), 202, n. 43.

French part of the Bodleian 264, just trying to create for the French king an organic whole which would provide dynastic legitimation and credit by linking it with legendary extolling of royal values, exotic marvels and *re-conquista* ideology of the Holy Land.<sup>18</sup> It is in Tournai that we can clearly see the combination of the ancient and Alexandrian matter with the crusade cycles:

*Le roman d'Alexandre*, like the Crusade cycle, seems to be presented in manuscripts as one whole narrative rather than as a collection of separate texts. To some degree this is due to the underlying structure of the romance being the life cycle of a single figure and works rather like the basic chronicle form of the Crusade cycle.<sup>19</sup>

The most illustrated episodes in manuscript 786 of BnF (*Roman d'Alexandre, chansons de geste*, First crusade cycle) are the fantastic ones we find again in the Polo compilation, in the forms of Gog and Magog, the youth fountain, Amazons, the trees of the Sun and the Moon, the flight by gryphons and a submarine adventure.<sup>20</sup> The same pattern can be observed in the Bodleian manuscript, with an ideal king, a fusion of *clergie et chevalerie*, the hero of a historical and fantastic biography, a ruler fitting with the condition of being the tool of the divine will, and the figure of a man who embodies the ideal revenge of the courtly world over the hostile contemporary universe. The imperial aura of the conqueror corresponds to the aristocratic desire of repeating, even literally, a conquest of the world, thus of bringing the unknown under jurisdiction of a duke, a king, an emperor.<sup>21</sup> The courtly conquest of the real world takes the form also of a *translatio imperii*, and the tale related to itineraries fits the knowledge of itineraries leading to the Far East, as we can see in that kind of new encyclopaedia that was *Le roman de toute chevalerie* by Thomas of Kent. Alexander is transformed into a crusader and a knight embedded in the logic and dynamics of an epic tale and in the assimilation of the myths of the Holy Land

---

<sup>18</sup> Cruse (2011), 181-198.

<sup>19</sup> Busby (2002), 256-283.

<sup>20</sup> Cicuto (2014), 204.

<sup>21</sup> Warren (2002).

and the Far East into an idea of space, a real and an imaginary one. And this first section of Bodleian 264, a spectacular knight/crusader idealisation of the oriental deeds of Alexander, enjoyed a certain degree of circulation just in France.

What I call a first example of an illustrated textualisation of an ideological perspective, we see gaining more substance in the complementary section of the Bodleian manuscript, in a text related to the Alexandrian topic of *Alexander and Dindimus*, and immediately thereafter in *Livres du graunt Caam* with their focus on the khan as the main character of the whole narration. Here, I cannot go into details on how the Royal 19 D I came into English hands after the battle of Poitiers. (I imagine, however, that it is not unlikely that the early fifteenth-century owner of the Bodleian 264 came across at some point of time with the book that is now Royal 19 D I, recognised the quasi natural link between Alexander the Great's travels to the East with those of Marco Polo, obtained the Royal manuscript to serve as example, and thus extended his own Alexander book.) In fact, the two texts added by an English scribe to the Bodleian – *Alexander and Dindimus* in English verse, and Marco Polo – were copied as extensions to the book's earlier *Vengeance d'Alexandre*. This work of extension was in the hands of the English artists John Hun, John Sifer and Hermann Scheerre: it meant a structural integration of the *Roman d'Alexandre* with *Alexander and Dindimus* with its the episode of the Brahmans and the *Livre du Caam*. In addition, it established a coherence and parallelism in the exaltation of Alexander and Khubilai where Alexander and Dindimus were used as a key episode to steer the character of Alexander towards a confrontation with Islam and engage the Macedonian with the history of Christian monotheism, who thus became depicted as a leader who is no more a figure of irrational disproportion, but is part of a providential intention to support a pre-Christian religion, and a religion of power.<sup>22</sup>

This result of this epic transformation of Alexander's image reshaped the merchant treatise *Devisement du monde* into a legendary and para-historical report, with a legendary king at its core. Marco and Rustichello

---

<sup>22</sup> Blondeau (2006); Ciccuto (2014), 211-214.

contributed to this on their own by, for example, structuring the *Deviement*'s prologue around most current historical events of the Holy Land or some delusive enterprises taking place in that region. Moreover, the recalling a historical actor like William of Tripoli, an expert *de partibus infidelium*, can be considered a signpost for the user to read the text in a crusader key. In that travel account of Marco one can find many references to the legend of a noble *Bildung* of the conqueror of the East, on which is built an assimilating 'reading scheme' linking the eastern patterns of the Alexandrian myth with Polo's text.<sup>23</sup> Chapters in the latter work, where common mythographies were shared with the *Roman d'Alexandre*, are a cameo for Prester John, an excursus on the legend of the Three Kings – with details unknown in the West but consistent with some Persian legends about Alexander – and then also a series of marvels with the vision of an Eastern world closer to the knightly image of Western lords.<sup>24</sup>

As Warren has highlighted, when Alexander conquers land beyond Macedonia, the narrator provides historical knowledge to the reader by identifying both the names of places and peoples, and when he enters India, the narrator reports names of places as well as dates of arrivals and departures, thereby taking possession of space (for both Alexander and the reader) through an intensive colonial pedagogy of naming and narration. In the romance, Alexander thus displays his full imperial power, but only as a memory, preserved in narration and recoverable through the reading of his story.<sup>25</sup>

With similar effects, the prose of the *Divisement* can confer to us the world, as "the prose-literate reader thus occupies a succession of disconnected positions, whose cumulative effects purvey the possessive ethos of colonialist expansion."<sup>26</sup> Before presenting the westernised portrait of the khan within a real *Book of the Grand Khan*, it is possible to link the topic of the Silk Road and Wine Road to Polian references and to bad people,

---

<sup>23</sup> Ciccuto (2014), 215-216.

<sup>24</sup> Ciccuto (2014), 217, n. 99; Ciccuto (2008).

<sup>25</sup> Warren (2002), 145-146.

<sup>26</sup> Warren (2002), 154-156.



addicted to wine and other matters and thus related to the mythical beverage of *soma* in the Fergana Valley of Tajikistan. These are elements which immediately drove readers to an Alexandrian interpretation of that Eastern adventure. Other analogical *myths moteurs* in Alexander's conquests and the travel experience of the *Devisement* can be recognised in the notation about the presence of horses in Badakshan (one thousand years after the passage of the Macedonian army, one author still boasted of a descentance of those horses from Bucephalus ...), and the presence of elephants used as sacred animals of the priest-warrior Alexander.<sup>27</sup> The topic of the cosmic mountain finds its reflection in the tale of the Eden-like garden in the fortress of the Old Man of the Mountain, and the double nature, human and divine, of the conqueror Iskander in the halting place close to the Sun and Moon Trees – equivalents to the double colour of the eyes of the Cosmic Man. Some other “model patterns” can be detected in the Venetian traveller's description of the figure of Khubilai, his court, and the world he ruled. We have also to mention the relevance of the falling of Baghdad into Hülegü's hands, thus underlining the administrative and military incompetence of the Muslim world, followed by the victory of the Christian creed over the caliph's arrogance as displayed in the parable of the moving mountain, and the representation of the Great Khan annihilating the traitor Nayan.

The illustrative repertoire of the Oxonian manuscript extols a world of Khubilai in terms of a Western-Alexandrian sovereignty. Examples of this are the gift of *tavole di signoria* to Polo and the barons as well; the birthday banquet of the khan, with the golden fountain dispensing wine that comes straight from the *Roman d'Alexandre*; the royal hunt, falcons and their presentation in the ritual of the White Feast; the loyalty of the courtiers; the *dolce vita* and splendid buildings in Quinsai; the golden and silver towers in the province of Mien; remembering a specific *merveille* at the covered and historiated bridge of Sindifu; traffic and commercial fever in harbours; show of military power during the siege of Saianfu, etc.<sup>28</sup> In order to present to the Western readers an image of a perfect court and a wide

---

<sup>27</sup> Ciccuto (2014), 219-220.

<sup>28</sup> Ciccuto (2014), 220-221.

and strict control of public life as well as the vision of an ideal world, the painter depicted the brother kings in Maabar close to the example of the regulated life of Brahmins, thus corresponding to diplomatic concord and longing for peace.

As is well known, in the first half of the fifteenth century courtly ideals permeated Burgundian promotion of books that were destined for the libraries of the dukes, but it was also characterised by an elusive dimension that encouraged an imaginary perspective on historic thought and geographical descriptions. Thus, the courtly quest was blended with the fluid register of the travel account, while for political engagement it contained 'humanist' tracts of archaic, even rhetorical reflections, associated, for instance, to the military control of Colchis of Jason and the Argonauts, or of the site of Troy. In other words, Burgundian officials attempted to establish facts about the past that were prone to influence positively the legitimacy of their place in the present and the near future. The nascent Burgundian identity, so abruptly aborted by the events of the first week of January 1477, tried to find the beginnings of a common history in the past in order to strengthen its position in the Christian world.<sup>29</sup>

The *Livre des merveilles* is then a text which shares in this aristocratic attitude towards history and the past. Notwithstanding the prosperity in Flanders of merchant-travellers, texts of factual reference were rare, still grounded on *Li fet des Romains*. And when a traveller like Bertrandon de la Broquière was really in Greece and Holy Land, he did find nothing better than to lean on the old report of Giovanni Torcello. Historiography meanwhile had its own masterpieces in the *Romuleon* by Roberto della Porta and the *Histoires romaines* by Jean Mansel, whereas Jason and the Golden Fleece as embodied in the *Ordre de la Toison d'Or* were reference points for the ducal machinery – to say nothing of Guillaume Fillastre who built his own geo-political text by touching on these argonautic legends with the help of the Alexander of Jean de Wauquelin and the Neuf Preux considered to be still alive in history.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> For the whole bibliographical setting see Ciccuto (1997) and Ciccuto (2014), 222 ff.

<sup>30</sup> Ciccuto (2014), 226-228.

The Gothic orientation of ducal *imagerie* is strongly reinforced in the *Livre des merveilles*, a masterpiece in the ducal library. When consulting it, the noble fifteenth-century readers didn't distinguish the geo-commercial tract of the Venetian traveller from any written report in the crusader-Alexandrian manner or from phantasy geography (such as the *Voyage d'outremer* of the impostor Mandeville), not to speak of historical documents, like the letters of the khan to pope Benedict XII or the letter of that pope to the Christian people of Cambaluc. All these genres were part and parcel of the design of the *Livre*. It promotes a 'reading' process based not on a detailed look at the text but works through a schematisation of narrative materials according to formulaic signals, captions, and extra-textual indicators. For instance, merchant activities in Layas are depicted in such a way as not to visualise a distant land in its mundane aspects, but rather for the purpose of summarising *mercatura* data, while in the Pierpont Morgan ms. 723 we find in the same chapter an illustration of two praying idolators with no reference at all to the text. In such cases the *Livre* lacked the possibility of increasing the informative potential of the work and ended up demanding only an in-depth familiarisation with the descriptive situations of the subject matters of the Orient. Moreover, this type of non-philological reading was often linked to an exclusive attention to the text of the captions.<sup>31</sup> As Rudolf Wittkower revealed, no medieval artist aimed at a descriptive illustration of the text, but with the *Livre des merveilles* we are confronted with a giant process of Western re-codification in a civilised, cultural and often classicistic tune, accompanied by a passage from the narrative to the ritual.

It was only with the rise of a more pragmatic and political perception of the East that more rational and historical cognitions became stronger. The pattern of the crusader interpretation of history ceded to the lay perspectives of the states' great knights. For instance, we see in *La Boucquechardière* by Jean de Couchy that a mixing of heroes of ancient and modern history was leading to a superimposition of the destinies of Paris and Jerusalem, in the sense that for the contemporaries the centrality

---

<sup>31</sup> For further elucidations on this see Ciccuto (2014), 232-234.

of a dominion was not decided by reality, but passed through cultural cognition. Thus, Alexander's eastern adventures are *de facto* assimilated to the political reality of the actual rulers, accompanied by the certainty that every control over eastern countries was forlorn. The residual marvels we still can come across in manuscripts such as BnF fr. 5631 or the Hunterian of Glasgow 458, but especially in the Morgan 461 (a *livre des merveilles* of 1460-1470 illustrated in Angers by the atelier of Master Jouvenel des Ursins maybe for the circle of René d'Anjou) are only a jumble of exotic curiosities, such as Bactrian camels and volcanoes of the Aeolian islands, Irish monsters and petrified lakes in Norway as well as legends of the Poitou and Tartar habits.<sup>32</sup>

Last but not least, the Morgan manuscript 723, by the Master of the Berry Apocalypse, allows us to revert to the starting point of our small intellectual travel.<sup>33</sup> Now completely on a road to phantasy and schematic simplification of oriental matters and fully dedicated to the contemporaneous courtly perception of a world opened and enlarged by modern explorations, in some of the illustrations of the *Fleur des histoires* by Hayton and the *Deiseiment* we can discern preconceived settings from which there can be derived the image of a disciplined Asia under the universal power of a king-hero, the Great Khan of the Tartars, who is present himself in each event, from idolatrous rites to battles. A fully conventional exotism becomes deeply rooted in the middle of the fifteenth century, by presenting a vision of the oriental cosmos that for at least two centuries would rule among the members of an aristocratic public. It was still bound to the old idea of a crusader conquest of an area, but seems to have been incrementally dominated by images or through the imaginary of a written tradition, and thus totally contrary to Marco Polo's aim to transform the East from an imaginative entity into a topic for a more modern approach to geography and history.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Thorp (1987), 101-102; Plummer (1982), 32-33.

<sup>33</sup> Kosta-Théfaine (2006a); Kosta-Théfaine (2006b).

<sup>34</sup> Campbell (1988), 47-86.

## References

- Airaldi, Gabriella (2006). "Autobiografia di Marco", in Federico Masini, Franco Salvatori and Sandro Schipani, eds. *Marco Polo 750 anni: Il viaggio, il libro, il diritto* (Roma: Tiellemedia), 209-219.
- Alphandéry, Paul; Dupront, Alphonse (1974). *La cristianità e l'idea di crociata* (Bologna: il Mulino).
- Blondeau, Chrysthèle (2006). "A Very Burgundian Hero: The Figure of Alexander the Great under the Rule of Philip the Good", in Elizabeth Morrison and Thomas Kren, eds. *Flemish Manuscript Painting in Context: Recent Research* (Malibu: The J. Paul Getty Museum of Art), 35-38.
- Blondeau, Chrystèle (2009). *Un conquérant pour quatre ducs: Alexander le Grand à la cour de Bourgogne* (Paris: Éditions du CTHS).
- Brun, Laurent; Cavagna, Mattia (2006). "Pour une édition du Miroir historial de Jean de Vignay", *Romania*, 124: 378-428.
- Busby, Keith (2002). *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript, I* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi).
- Campbell, Mary B. (1988). *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing 400-1600* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press), 47-86.
- Cardini, Franco (1993). *Studi sulla storia e sull'idea di crociata* (Roma: Jouvence).
- Chung-Apley, Jane Geein (1998). *The Illustrated «Vie et miracles de Saint Louis» of Guillaume de Saint-Pathus (Paris, B.N. Ms. Fr. 5716)* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press).
- Ciccuto, Marcello (1997). "Le meraviglie di Marco: Il «Milione» alla corte di Borgogna", *Rara Volumina*, 1: 5-34.
- Ciccuto, Marcello (2008). "Codici culturali a confronto nell'enciclopedia di Marco Polo: Il 'caso India'", in Silvia Conte, ed. *I viaggi del Milione: Itinerari testuali, vettori di trasmissione e metamorfosi del «Devisement du monde» di Marco Polo e Rustichello da Pisa nella pluralità delle attestazioni* (Roma: Tiellemedia), 205-218.
- Ciccuto, Marcello (2014). "Marco Polo alle Crociate: I viaggi del Milione tra Francia e Gran Bretagna", in Loreta Lucchetti and Maria Isabella Pesce, eds. *Il manoscritto Bodley 264: Il Romanzo di Alessandro, I viaggi di Marco Polo – Saggi e commenti* (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana), 191: 191-255.
- Cruse, Mark (2001). *Illuminating the «Roman d'Alexandre», Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264: The Manuscript as Monument* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer).

- Curzi, Gaetano (1997). "Allegoria dell'embargo e propaganda per la crociata nelle opere di Marin Sanudo il Vecchio", *Storia dell'arte*, 89: 5-26.
- De Mandach, André (1974). "L'anthologie chevaleresque de Marguerite d'Anjou (B.M. Royal 15 E VI) et les officines Saint-Augustin de Canterbury, Jean Wauquelin de Mons et David Aubert de Hesdin", in *Société Rencesvals: Actes du VI Congrès International (Aix-en-Provence 1973)* (Aix-en-Provence: Cuerma), 315-350.
- Dörper, Sven (1998). *Die Geschichte der Mongolen des Hetum von Korykos (1307) in der Rückübersetzung durch Jean Le Long, «Traitez des estaset des conditions de quatorze royaumes de Asie» (1351)* (Frankfurt am Main/Bern: Lang).
- Dutschke, Consuelo Wager (1998). "The Truth in the Book: The Marco Polo Texts in Royal 19 D I and Bodley 264", *Scriptorium*, 52/2: 278-300.
- Gadrat, Christine (2007). "De statu, conditione ac regimine Magni Canis: L'original latin du 'Livre de l'Estat du Grant Caan' et la question de l'auteur", *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes*, 165: 355-371.
- Hedeman, Anne D. (1991). *The Royal Image: Illustrations of the «Grandes Chroniques de France», 1274-1422* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press).
- Kosta-Théfaine, Jean-François (2006a). "Du récit de voyage et de sa mise en image: L'exemple du manuscrit de New York (Pierpont Morgan Library M. 723) du «Devisement du monde» de Marco Polo", in Jean-Loup Korzilius, ed. *Art et littérature: Le voyage entre texte et image* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi), 31-60.
- Kosta-Théfaine, Jean-François (2006b). "The Pierpont Morgan Library Manuscript M. 723: Illustrations of Hayton's «La Fleur des histoires d'Orient»", in Jean-François Kosta-Théfaine, ed. *Travels and Travelogues in the Middle Ages* (New York: AMS Press), 112-131.
- Mickel, Emanuel J.; Nelson, Jan A. (1971). "B.M. Royal 15 E VI and the Epic Cycle of the First Crusade", *Romania*, 92: 532-556.
- Moodey, Elizabeth J. (2012). *Illuminated Crusader Histories for Philip the Good of Burgundy* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Pérez-Simon, Maud (2011). *Mise en roman et mise en image: Les manuscrits du «Roman d'Alexandre en prose» – Pour une stylistique de la traduction* (Paris: Champion).
- Plummer, John (1982). *The Last Flowering: French Painting in Manuscripts 1420-1530 from American Collections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 32-33.

- Quigley, Maureen (2009). "Romantic Geography and the Crusades: British Library Royal ms. 19 D I", *Peregrinations*, 2: 50-58.
- Raynaud, Christine (1999). "Alexandre dans les bibliothèques bourguignonnes", in Laurence Harf-Lancner, Claude Kappler and François Suard, eds. *Alexandre le Grand dans les littératures occidentales et proche-orientales* (Nanterre: Université de Paris X).
- Rossi, Aldo (1999). "Lo scrittoio di Sanudo il Vecchio (e quello di Paolino Veneto)", in idem, *Da Dante a Leonardo: Un percorso di originali* (Firenze: Sismel), 286-294.
- Rouse, Richard H.; Rouse, Mary A. (2000). "The Commercial Production of Manuscript Book in Late-Thirteenth-century and Early-Fourteenth-century Paris", in idem, *Manuscripts and their Makers: Commercial Book Producers in Medieval Paris 1200-1500* (Turnhout: Brepols), 110-119.
- Rouse, Richard H.; Rouse, Mary A. (2006). "The Crusade as Context: The Manuscripts of Athiset Prophylias", in Keith Busby and Christopher Kleinhenz, eds. *Courtly Arts and the Art of Courtliness: Selected Papers from the Eleventh Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer), 49-102.
- Thorp, Nigel (1987). *The Glory of the Page: Medieval and Renaissance Illuminated Manuscripts from Glasgow University Library* (London: Harvey Miller).
- Trotter, David A. (1989). "'En ensivant la pure vérité de la letre': Jean de Vignay's Translation of Odoric of Pordenone", in David A. Trotter, ed. *Littera et Sensus: Essays on Form and Meaning in Medieval French Literature Presented to John Fox* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press), 31-47.
- Tyerman, Christopher J. (1985). "Philip VI and the Recovery of the Holy Land", *The English Historical Review*, C: 25-52.
- Warren, Michelle R. (2002). "Take the World by Prose: Modes of Possession in the «Roman d'Alexandre»", in Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox, eds. *The Medieval French Alexander* (Albany: Suny Press), 143-160.
- Weiss, Daniel H.; Mahoney, Lisa (2004). *France and the Holy Lands: Frankish Culture at the End of the Crusades* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press).

# Who Read Marco Polo's Book and Why?

Christine Gadrat-Ouerfelli

## Introduction

When we start studying Marco Polo, we often read that the Venetian traveler was not taken seriously, that his book was considered to consist of fairytales or, worse, of lies. We are informed that on his deathbed he was asked to deny what he had told; others claim that it was his uncle to whom this was addressed. And that is given as a proof that nobody believed him, as much as the fact that he or his book was called "Milion". Even great scholars spread these sorts of opinions:

The dissemination of Marco Polo's book is the result of a misunderstanding: the *Devisement* was taken for a fantastic tale.<sup>1</sup>

That's particularly the case within the field of history of geography or cartography:

Marco Polo contributed such a vast amount of new facts to the knowledge of the Earth's surface, that one might have expected his book to have had a sudden effect upon the Science of Geography: but no such result occurred speedily, nor was its beneficial effect of any long duration.<sup>2</sup>

We can read quite the same opinion in a more recent paper of David Woodward on "Medieval mappaemundi":

Apart from its influence on the Catalan atlas, it appears that the narrative of Marco Polo had very little effect on world cartography of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Zumthor (1994), 810.

<sup>2</sup> Yule (1992), 129.



time – certainly much less than the novelty of its geographical information would lead us to expect.<sup>3</sup>

According to them (and some others as well), Marco Polo was not believed when he told the story of his travels, his book had no influence and has not been read, except by a few people, who considered it only as a book of marvels and fantasy. Even in our days some people do not believe Marco Polo that he was in China ...

When I began working on Marco Polo, I became rapidly skeptical about these opinions. I was particularly interested by the translations which had been made of his book. From the end of the thirteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth century, twenty-six versions (translations and/or adaptations) have been made, in thirteen languages.<sup>4</sup> Would it have been worth translating it so many times, in so many languages, if nobody had read it? The number of these translations is proof that the book was read and that people were interested in it. They also show the geographical diffusion of the book.

I will begin by asking the question of the readership of Marco Polo's book. We can answer this question following two ways, by using social categories, or geographical denominations. Then I will give examples of the reception of the book and of its use in other works.

## **Who Read Marco Polo's Book during the Middle Ages?**

We could answer quite everybody, or, at least, almost every sort of people. As for social categories, we can find readers in diverse milieus and social positions. The book was read by kings. For example, King Charles V of France owned five copies of it in his "librairie" at the Louvre, of which only one is preserved.<sup>5</sup> At the court of Aragon, we have several mentions of orders and exchanges during the time of the Kings Peter IV and his son

---

<sup>3</sup> Woodward (1987), 315.

<sup>4</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 6, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Delisle (1907), 142.

John I. For example, between 1372 and 1374, Peter IV bought three copies.<sup>6</sup> His son offered one copy to Gaston Febus, count of Foix, and another to Jean de Berry.<sup>7</sup> We cannot know if some of these copies were the same or not.

Of course, we cannot be sure that these kings actually read the book. That is a problem for many manuscripts or inventory entries, as the presence of the book in a collection does not necessarily mean that it was read, with a lack of marginal notes, as is often the case with royal copies – and it is the same with copies owned by merchants, as we will see.

Similarly, the book was present in the papal library. We have hints that there were copies at the papal court in Avignon and that the book circulated in papal milieus there,<sup>8</sup> but more surely the book was in their library in the fifteenth century, at least in the case of Eugenius IV, as recorded in an inventory in 1443.<sup>9</sup> But the book is also mentioned in the close entourage of the popes. For example, cardinal Domenico Capranica ordered a copy in 1458, in one manuscript, written in Rome, which includes other travel narratives and works related to Oriental questions.<sup>10</sup> At the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris is preserved a curious manuscript made for an acquaintance of four popes, Jacquet Finaris, who wrote personal notes about his service to these popes and about his family.<sup>11</sup>

Other powerful or prestigious princes owned the book such as the Duke Jean de Berry, known to be a book-lover, who had three copies, including the famous *Livre des merveilles*, now at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris.<sup>12</sup> At the court of the Este family in Ferrara, we can find at least two copies, probably one in Latin and one in Italian.<sup>13</sup> The Latin copy appears in several inventories, from 1436 to 1495. For this copy, we can suppose that at least Duke Ercole I read it, or wanted to read it, because he asked

---

<sup>6</sup> Rubió i Lluch (2000), 165-166, 171.

<sup>7</sup> Rubió i Lluch (2000), 165-166.

<sup>8</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2014), 304.

<sup>9</sup> Fohlen (2008), 59, 357-358.

<sup>10</sup> Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 7317.

<sup>11</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 6244A; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 234-235.

<sup>12</sup> Delisle (1868), I 56-68; Delisle (1881), III, 170-194; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 136.

<sup>13</sup> Capelli (1889), 16 and 23; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 138.

for having this copy brought to his study.<sup>14</sup> The Visconti, dukes of Milano, also had a copy of the book in their collection in the second half of the fifteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

We can even name several princesses: I have to begin with Mahaut d'Artois, who gives us the first testimony of the presence of the book in France, that is in 1312, when she orders not only a copy, but also the decoration and binding of a "Romant du grand Kam".<sup>16</sup> At the Este court in Ferrara, not only princes were interested in the book, but also princesses: in 1457, Contessa Strozzi borrows a "Marcopollo" at the ducal library.<sup>17</sup> Marie, daughter of Jean de Berry, inherited one copy from her father.<sup>18</sup>

The book was in the hands of scholars too, professors at the greatest universities in Europe then. The oldest example, which is well known, is that of Pietro d'Abano, professor of philosophy and medicine at Padova.<sup>19</sup> But we find the book also in Oxford as early as the 1330s, and these are the first mentions in England. The Franciscan John Ridewall and the Dominican Thomas Waleys, both lecturers of theology in Oxford, used it in their theological and mythological works at the beginning of the 1330s.<sup>20</sup> At quite the same time, maybe only a few years later, Thomas Bradwardine, theologian and mathematician in Oxford († 1349), mentioned Marco Polo in his theological treatise *De causa Dei*.<sup>21</sup>

Humanists too were interested in Marco Polo's experiences. It is important to note and to discuss this. It has often been said that humanists rejected Medieval authors and despised their Latin. This is not completely true as at least they showed an ambivalent attitude.<sup>22</sup> Some of them, for example Eneas Silvius Piccolomini, neither mentioned nor used Marco

---

<sup>14</sup> Bertoni (1903), 19 and 262.

<sup>15</sup> Pellegrin (1955), 324.

<sup>16</sup> Richard (1887), 101.

<sup>17</sup> Bertoni (1903), 56.

<sup>18</sup> Beaune and Lequain (2007), 51.

<sup>19</sup> Benedetto (1962), ccxii-ccxiv.

<sup>20</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2016), 610-611.

<sup>21</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2016), 608; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 120-121; Dutschke (1993), 1173-1183.

<sup>22</sup> Bouloux (2017), 54.

Polo in his *De Asia*.<sup>23</sup> But some others made extensive use of it, like Domenico Silvestri and also Domenico Bandini, whom I suspect to be the translator into Latin of the LA version.<sup>24</sup> I would like to add that we have manuscripts of the book written by humanists, showing that it was diffused in this milieu too.<sup>25</sup>

Merchants constitute a rather well represented category among the possessors of copies of Marco Polo's book. We find them principally in Tuscany and in Catalonia, and they owned mostly copies in Tuscan and Catalan languages. In Catalonia, we find the book, among other examples, in two inventories of merchants, Pere Girgos, in 1389, and Guillem de Cabanelles, in 1424, who had commercial activities with the Eastern part of the Mediterranean.<sup>26</sup> In Florence, we can give the examples of Filippo di Piero Rinieri, whose inventory was made in 1414, and of copies of the TB version, which were in the hands of members of the Peruzzi and the Bardi, famous merchant families.<sup>27</sup> Most of the Tuscan copies are written in mercantesca script, that is the script used in the milieu of merchants.<sup>28</sup>

Religious men also possessed this widely diffused book, and we find men and places belonging to different orders among the owners of the book. Most of the time, we know that the book was in the shelves of a convent or an abbey, but not in one particular monk's or friar's hands – except in cases of monks acting as scribes of one of the manuscripts, like Oswald Nott in Tegernsee, who copied it twice, in two different versions.<sup>29</sup> The number of manuscripts owned by religious institutions and of relevant entries in their inventories are so important, that neither giving a list nor mentioning only a few examples would seem appropriate and efficient. Therefore, I would just like to highlight two contexts of the diffusion of the book in religious orders. The first one is the Dominican order. I am convinced that this order played an important role in the diffusion of the

---

<sup>23</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 268-269.

<sup>24</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 55-57; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2013), 141.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Vatican, BAV, Barb. Lat. 2687, Vat. Lat. 2035, Vat. Lat. 3153, Vat. Lat. 5260.

<sup>26</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 127-128.

<sup>27</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 143.

<sup>28</sup> Bertoluccio Pizzorusso (1975), 327-333.

<sup>29</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 92.

book, not only in Italy, but also across Europe. As I have shown in my book, Italian Dominicans, of the province of Lombardia, were soon attracted by the book and used it intensely.<sup>30</sup> It is no surprise that one of the Latin translations, the most wide-spread one, was made by a Dominican, Francesco Pipino, who was a member of the Lombardian province. I suspect that the Z version may be of a Dominican origin too, as a few hints lead me to think so, such as some additions – in contrast to other versions – and some marginal annotations, which may date back to the original manuscript.<sup>31</sup> I am quite sure that a Dominican, probably Thomas Waleys, whom I mentioned earlier, is the man who brought the book to England.<sup>32</sup> This interest that the Dominicans showed for Marco Polo's book can be explained by a certain proximity between the traveler and the Venetian Dominican friars as it appears in the former's last will,<sup>33</sup> but also by the curiosity of the Dominicans for geographical knowledge and especially for information about Oriental lands.<sup>34</sup>

The second context is the fifteenth century, in German lands.<sup>35</sup> We can trace copies of the book in several German monasteries or religious centers such as bishoprics. Many monasteries had undergone reforms there and then, and I have noticed that new copies of the book were made in that context, some of which can directly be linked to this movement of Reformation, as in the case of the abridged version of Pipino's translation.<sup>36</sup>

## Where Has Marco Polo's Book Been Read?

If we turn to the geographical point of view, we can say that the book has reached quite every part of Western Europe and even Central Europe. According to the analysis of manuscripts and of the many notes we can find

---

<sup>30</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 165-184.

<sup>31</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 100-101.

<sup>32</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2016), 611-613.

<sup>33</sup> Plebani (2017).

<sup>34</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2023).

<sup>35</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 280-284.

<sup>36</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 91-93.

in them, the book was present in Italy, France, Spain, Germany, England, Ireland, Poland, Bohemia, as well as the Netherlands and Portugal.<sup>37</sup>

It may be interesting to link geographical locations to the different versions of the text, that is, to ask which version(s) was read in which part of Europe. Doing so will give an idea of the diffusion of some versions. Therefore, we will not only ask the question where did people read Marco Polo's book, but also how and in which version(s)?

The place where people had access to the most numerous versions is, of course, Italy. First of all, the great majority of the different redactions had been produced in Italy, so many versions were available here. But depending on the different parts of Italy, people did not have access to all the same versions. For example, the Tuscan redactions were primarily available in Tuscany, even though they could have reached a bigger audience, and the Venetian versions were mainly read in the Venetia. The Latin translations could *a priori* have been present everywhere, but some of them had a local diffusion, such as the Z version, which could be found only in the area around Venice, as it seems that it did not spread outside. Similarly, another Latin version translated in Italy, the LB version, appears to have stayed in Lombardia and more precisely around Milano.<sup>38</sup>

On the contrary, the Latin version translated by Francesco Pipino was widely diffused through Europe as we can trace copies of it in almost every country which I had enumerated previously. This redaction assumed what we can expect from a Latin version: some sort of standardization and the possibility of diffusion to every place, notwithstanding the vernacular languages used there. Hence, this version was very widespread in England and was the main rendering in which English people could read the book.<sup>39</sup> In addition, they could have access to the French or the Anglo-Norman versions, although the number of manuscripts in these versions was certainly smaller. There was no English translation until 1573.

---

<sup>37</sup> I use modern names here for convenience.

<sup>38</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 43-45.

<sup>39</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 120-124.

German and Flemish speaking lands were certainly only secondary in importance to Italy as regions where people could find several versions.<sup>40</sup> Several Latin versions found their way to these places: the Pipino translation, the abridged version of it, the LA and L versions, along with two German translations. This part of Europe is also a place to where an important number of other manuscripts can be linked. Most of this diffusion can be ascribed to the fifteenth century, yet it is nonetheless clear that there was an overall interest for Marco Polo's book in Germany and Flanders.

## Why Has Marco Polo's Book Been Read?

After we have answered, although quickly, the question of who read Marco Polo's book, we should now ask why. This is not an easy question to be answered. If it is difficult to ascertain whether someone who owned the book actually read it, it is even more difficult to determine what may have interested him in it. Strangely, this question seems easy to many – or rather, they do not think of it as a question. It may appear obvious to them that merchants read Marco Polo because they could find information about spices, precious stones and trade roads in it and that they could use it as a merchant's guide. So, according to this opinion, merchants – all the merchants – would have read it as merchants.<sup>41</sup> But what about physicians? Did they read the book for medical reasons, as a help for their practice of medicine? Among people who owned the book, we indeed find many physicians, some of them are quite famous, as Pietro d'Abano, whom I already mentioned, or Amplonius Ratinck, or Hartmann Schedel.<sup>42</sup> Two physicians, Pietro d'Abano and the Venetian Giovanni Fontana have used Marco Polo's book in their own works, and this may help us to determine why or how physicians could have been interested in it. The answer is that they used it for its cosmographical and geographical information.<sup>43</sup> Hartmann Schedel is well known for his *Liber chronicarum* and his participation in the enterprise of the Behaim Globus, on which Marco Polo is widely

---

<sup>40</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 280-282.

<sup>41</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2019), 82-84.

<sup>42</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 144-146.

<sup>43</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 225-226 and 264-268.

cited.<sup>44</sup> In fact, most of the physicians who owned the book were not only physicians, but also astronomers, geographers, humanists, etc. So we have to be careful when we try to characterize the reception of the book by one category of readers.

To turn our attention back to merchants, their manuscripts are not annotated and we do not possess a work written by a merchant in which Marco Polo is cited or paraphrased. So, we have no evidence assuring us that they had read it for commercial purposes.<sup>45</sup>

To answer the question of why, that is, in which way the book was used, it is helpful to take a look at the works in which the book is cited. I have tried to group them in categories, starting from the most evident to the most surprising.

In the first group, we find maps and geographical works. Contrary to what several scholars have written, Marco Polo's account has been used in many maps and geographical treatises.<sup>46</sup> Among the first ones, we can mention the Catalan Atlas made in 1375, Fra Mauro's mappamundi, made in the middle of the fifteenth century, or the Behaim Globe, made in 1492; these are the most famous, but not the only ones. Citations of Marco Polo's book are also numerous in geographical treatises or in geographical parts of other works. Pietro d'Abano has already been mentioned; I could add the *De insulis et earum proprietatibus* of Domenico Silvestri, the *Liber de figura mundi* of Luis de Angulo, or the works written by a monk of Sankt-Emmeran.<sup>47</sup> The translation of Ptolemy's *Geography* into Latin did not put an end to the interest for Medieval travel narratives, like Marco Polo's one, but, on the contrary, there was a fruitful confrontation of both works.<sup>48</sup> Marco Polo's book has played an important role in the context of the debates around the new geographical discoveries too.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Crone (1961), 123-124; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 317.

<sup>45</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2019), 82-84.

<sup>46</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 243-349.

<sup>47</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 253-257, 258-263 and 285-286.

<sup>48</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 268-277.

<sup>49</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 319-348.



The influence of Marco Polo on epic literature has long been recognized and this may have led some people to think of the book as romance.<sup>50</sup> We have rather to speak of influence, as in this sort of works we do not find exact and long quotations, but rather place names, motifs or anecdotes.<sup>51</sup> Heroes of such stories as the *Entree d'Espagne* or *Orlando innamorato*, have adventures in Oriental lands, that may have been inspired by Marco Polo's own adventures.<sup>52</sup> The role of this literature is not only to entertain readers, but it may have also played a role in making Oriental place names and topics more familiar to a broad public.

The third category is that of chronicles and histories. Many historians, such as Giovanni Villani, John of Tynemouth, Jacopo d'Acqui, or Jean le Long, have used the book to write the history of the Mongols and of the relations between Christianity and the East.<sup>53</sup> In some cases, the travels of the Polo family and the fact that Marco wrote (or dictated) accounts of his travels became historical events in themselves. That's partly the case in Jacopo d'Acqui and Jean le Long, but the most striking example is in the chronicle of Melsa abbey, written at the end of fourteenth century in Yorkshire, where the only words related to Marco Polo are about his writing of the book, after having spent 26 years in other parts of the world.<sup>54</sup> Marco Polo and his book are now both a historical character and a historical fact respectively. He is also included by Domenico Bandini in his list of famous men.<sup>55</sup>

The fourth and last category is that of religious works. Inside this category, we can find theological treatises, such as the ones written by Thomas Waleys and Thomas Bradwardine, sermons and collections of *exempla*, as in the works of some Italian Dominicans,<sup>56</sup> hagiography (especially the vita of St Thomas) and spiritual treatises, as the *Oculus fidei*, written by a

---

<sup>50</sup> Folena (1963), 146; Limentani (1992), 199; Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 157-161.

<sup>51</sup> Holtus (1984), 712.

<sup>52</sup> Caramella (1923), 44-59 and 127-150.

<sup>53</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 189-216.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas de Burton (1866-1868), 244.

<sup>55</sup> Bouloux (2002), 173.

<sup>56</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 184-188.

Carthusian monk of Colonia at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>57</sup> All these examples show that Marco Polo's book was taken seriously enough to be used in a religious text. The use of the book in sermons may have contributed to diffuse knowledge about Asia to a broader audience, in a somewhat similar way as epic literature.

## Conclusions

The great diversity of examples I have presented here – and these are only a few examples – could lead one to think that Marco Polo's book was a sort of Swiss knife: where you can find in it anything you need and use it as you like. This is not completely untrue. Medieval authors and scholars found many topics of interests in this book, as certainly did all other readers, who did not use it afterwards in their own works. The dissemination of Marco Polo's book is not the result of a misunderstanding. It is the result of a confluence of the originality of Marco Polo's narrative and the great amount of new information he provided, as well as the reader's and user's curiosity and desire to obtain knowledge. As a matter of fact, Marco Polo's book has been – and still is – widely diffused, largely read, and highly appreciated.

## References

- Beaune, Colette, and Lequain, Elodie (2007). "Marie de Berry et les livres", in Anne-Marie Legaré, ed. *Livres et lectures de femmes en Europe entre Moyen Age et Renaissance* (Turnhout: Brepols), 49-65.
- Benedetto, Luigi Foscolo (1962). *La tradizione manoscritta del «Milione» di Marco Polo* (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus).
- Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Valeria (1975), ed. *Marco Polo, Milione* (Milan: Adelphi), new ed. 2001.
- Bertoni, Giulio (1903). *La biblioteca Estense e la coltura ferrarese ai tempi del duca Ercole I (1471-1505)* (Torino: E. Loescher).

---

<sup>57</sup> Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), 293-315.

- Bouloux, Nathalie (2002). *Culture et savoirs géographiques en Italie au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Bouloux, Nathalie (2017). “Le statut des récits de voyage dans la géographie humaniste du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle”, in Damien Coulon and Christine Gadrat-Ouerfelli, eds. *Le voyage au Moyen Âge: Description du monde et quête individuelle* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence), 47-62.
- Capelli, Adriano (1889). “La biblioteca Estense nella prima metà del secolo XV”, *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 14: 1-30.
- Caramella, Santino (1923). “L’Asia nell’Orlando innamorato”, *Bollettino della reale società geografica italiana*, 12:44-59 and 127-150.
- Crone, Gerald (1961). “Martin Behaim: Navigator and Cosmographer; Figment of Imagination or Historical Personage”, in *Congreso internacional de historia de descubrimiento: Actas* (Lisbon: Comissão executiva das comemorações do V centenario da morte do Infante D. Henrique), II, 117-133.
- Delisle, Léopold (1868). *Le cabinet des manuscrits* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale), I.
- Delisle, Léopold (1881). *Le cabinet des manuscrits* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale), III.
- Delisle, Léopold (1907). *Recherches sur la librairie de Charles V* (Paris: H. Champion).
- Dutschke, Consuelo Wager (1993). “Francesco Pipino and the Manuscripts of Marco Polo’s ‘Travels’”, PhD diss. (Los Angeles: University of California).
- Fohlen, Jeanine (2008). *La bibliothèque d’Eugène IV (1431-1447): Contribution à l’histoire du fonds Vatican latin* (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana).
- Folena, Gianfranco (1963). “La cultura volgare e l’umanesimo cavalleresco nel Veneto”, in Vittore Branca, ed. *Umanesimo europeo e umanesimo veneziano* (Florence: Sansoni).
- Gadrat-Ouerfelli, Christine (2013). “La version LA du récit de Marco Polo: Une traduction humaniste?”, in Françoise Fery-Hue, ed. *Traduire de vernaculaire en latin au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance: Méthodes et finalités* (Paris: École nationale des Chartes), 131-147.
- Gadrat-Ouerfelli, Christine (2014). “Avignon, porte pour l’Orient. Première moitié du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle”, in Elisabeth Malamut and Mohamed Ouerfelli, eds. *Villes méditerranéennes au Moyen Âge* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence), 297-308.

- Gadrat-Ouerfelli, Christine (2015). *Lire Marco Polo au Moyen Âge: Traduction, diffusion et réception du Devisement du monde* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Gadrat-Ouerfelli, Christine (2016). "Marco Polo en Angleterre: Nouvelles recherches sur la diffusion de son récit dans les îles Britanniques", in Cédric Giraud and Dominique Poirel, eds. *La rigueur et la passion: Mélanges en l'honneur de Pascale Bourgain* (Turnhout: Brepols), 597-616.
- Gadrat-Ouerfelli, Christine (2019). "À quoi servent les récits de voyages? Réflexions sur les lectures et la réception d'un genre littéraire au Moyen Âge", in Ludmilla Evdokimova and Alain Marchandisse, eds. *Le Texte médiéval dans le processus de communication* (Paris: Classiques Garnier), 81-93.
- Gadrat-Ouerfelli, Christine (2023). "Les savoirs géographiques chez les Mendiants", in Joël Chandelier et Aurélien Robert, eds. *Savoirs profanes dans les ordres mendiants en Italie (XIIIe-XVe siècle)* (Roma: Ecole française de Rome), 547-560.
- Holtus, Gunter (1981). "Quelques aspects de la technique narrative dans L'Entrée d'Espagne", in Alberto Limentani, ed. *Essor et fortune de la chanson de geste dans l'Europe et l'Orient latin: Actes du IXe Congrès international de la Société Rencesvals pour l'étude des épopées romanes (Padoue-Venise, 29 août-4 septembre 1982)* (Modena: Mucchi), 703-716.
- Limentani, Alberto (1992). *L'Entrée d'Espagne e I signori d'Italia* (Padova: Editrice Antenore).
- Pellegrin, Elisabeth (1955). *La bibliothèque des Visconti et des Sforza, ducs de Milan, au XVe siècle* (Paris: Publications du CNRS).
- Plebani, Tiziana (2017), ed. *Ego Marcus Paulo: I segreti del testamento di Marco Polo. The secrets of Marco Polo's Will* (Venice: Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana-Scrinium).
- Richard, J. M. (1887). *Une petite nièce de saint Louis: Mahaut comtesse d'Artois et de Bourgogne (1302-1309)* (Paris: Champion).
- Rubió i Lluch, Antonio (1921). *Documents per l'història de la cultura catalana mig-aval* (Barcelone: Institut d'estudis catalans).
- Thomas de Burton (1866-1868). *Chronica monasterii de Melsa, ed. E. A. Bond* (London: Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi scriptores, 43).
- Woodward, David (1987). "Medieval mappaemundi", in J.B. Harley and David Woodward, eds. *The History of Cartography*, vol. I: *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press), 286-370.

Yule, Henry (1992). *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Complete Yule-Cordier Edition* (New York: Dover) 1st ed. 1920.

Zumthor, Paul (1994). "The Medieval Travel Narrative", *New Literary History*, 25.4: 809-824.

# Translating Marco Polo's *Le Devisement du monde*

Sharon Kinoshita

Seingnors, emperaor et rois, dux et marquois, cuens, chevaliers et b[o]rgio[i]s, et toutes gens qe volés savoir les deverses jenerasions des homes e les deversités des deverses region dou monde, si prennés cestui livre et le feites lire, et chi troverés toutes les grandismes mervoilles et les grant diversités de la Grande Harminie et de Persie et des Tartars et Indie et des maintes autres provences, si con nostre livre voç contera por ordre apertement, et come meisser March Pol, sajes et noble citaiens de Venece, raconte.

These are the opening lines of the Franco-Italian recension of Marco Polo and Rustichello of Pisa's *Le Devisement du monde*, the so-called "F" text found in the manuscript Paris, BNF fr. 1116 (copied in c. 1310). The passage has attracted critical attention for its close resemblance to the Prologue of the Arthurian compilation sometimes known as *Méliadus*, the one other surviving text known to have been authored by Rustichello of Pisa. These lines serve as my point of departure for reflections resulting from my 2016 English translation of the *Devisement*: why a new translation was needed and what factors influenced my decisions on how to handle the prose text's distinctive style and vocabulary.

The work commonly known in the Anglophone world as *The Travels* resulted from the jailhouse collaboration between the Venetian merchant Marco Polo and the Arthurian romance writer Rustichello of Pisa in Genoa in 1298. Originally composed in Franco-Italian (the language of choice for non-clerical Italian writers seeking a broad international audience) the text

was quickly translated and retranslated into French, Latin, Tuscan, Venetian, and a spate of other European languages. Typically for the Middle Ages, no two versions were the same, and early French translations circulated under three different titles: *The Description of the World* (*Le Devisement du monde*), *The Book of the Great Khan* (*Le livre du Grand Caam*), and *The Book of Marvels* (*Le livre des merveilles*). Arguably, the text did not become “The Travels” until the mid-sixteenth century, when the Venetian humanist Giovanni Battista Ramusio published an Italian print translation (1559), augmented with many passages found in no other version, as part of his series, *Delle navigationi et viaggi*.

The modern history of *English* translations of Marco Polo is no less complex. In 1818, the Orientalist William Marsden published a translation of Ramusio’s edition under the title *The Travels of Marco Polo, a Venetian, in the Thirteenth Century*. This version was republished at midcentury by Thomas Wright, who added several chapters and abridged the original notes. The resulting “Marsden-Wright” translation has been reissued multiple times, often with new introductions, frequently by travel writers. Meanwhile, in 1871, the Scottish geographer Sir Henry Yule published *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, based on Pauthier’s edition of the Old French manuscripts, retaining the latter’s stylistic abridgments but importing sections from the Franco-Italian and Ramusio versions, and adding copious notes drawn from his expertise as a geographer and scholar. In 1902, the French Sinologist Henri Cordier published a revised edition—subsequently reprinted several times, most recently in a lavishly illustrated edition, with preface and notes by historian Morris Rossabi in 2012. However, the version of Marco Polo most readily available to English-speaking audiences was the Penguin translation by Ronald Latham, published in 1958. This text (based on the 1928 edition of Luigi Foscolo Benedetto) was “designed to reproduce the substance of F and Z [a fifteenth-century Latin version], with the addition ... of any significant matter furnished in less reliable sources.”<sup>1</sup> Then in 2015 a new Penguin translation, by Nigel Cliff, appeared. Even

---

<sup>1</sup> See Polo (1958), 27. We will return to the idiosyncracies of Latham’s translation below.

more expansive than Latham's, it was conceived as "a composite reader's text based on F but containing all the supplemental passages from Z and some from R, together with brief additions or corrections from other 'good' texts."<sup>2</sup>

What this history reveals is that English-language translators have most often approached the *Devisement* in diachronic perspective, almost unanimously acknowledging the F text as preeminent, but freely incorporating interpolations from later manuscripts and translations, up to and including Ramusio.<sup>3</sup> Unmoored from its moment of composition, these works—typically presented as Marco Polo's *Travels*—become evidence for generalized interpretations of "medieval Europe's" vision of a foreign and often exoticized "East."<sup>4</sup> This dilution of historical specificity is sometimes exacerbated by accompanying illustrations and annotations. In the Sterling 2012 *Illustrated Edition*, for example, the chapter on Lesser Armenia is accompanied by a photograph of the interior of the church of Hagia Sophia "near present-day Trabzon, Turkey"—a city not mentioned in the text.<sup>5</sup> A footnote on Layas, "a city upon the sea ... at which there is a great trade," explains: "The Turkish city of Yumurtalik, known as Ayas or Layas in Polo's day, was famous for its abundance of sea turtles, who continue to nest and lay eggs on its beaches. Its modern name is Turkish for 'egg nest'"—a colorful detail, surely, but one irrelevant to the late thirteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

My own work on Marco Polo, in contrast, is based on the conviction that we lose something important when we extract the *Devisement* from its historical moment. Its date of composition, 1298, falls near the exact midpoint of the remarkable century chronicled by Janet Abu-Lughod in her seminal study *Before European Hegemony: The World System AD 1250-*

---

<sup>2</sup> Polo (2015), xlviii.

<sup>3</sup> On the preeminence of F, see Polo (1958), 24-25.

<sup>4</sup> On the pitfalls of taking a diachronic approach to different versions of Marco Polo's text, see Kinoshita (2017), 230-233.

<sup>5</sup> Such discrepancies between text and image were known in the Middle Ages as well, notably in BNF fr. 2810 (*Le livre des merveilles*), which illustrates monstrous races not found in the text itself. See Cruse (2019), 196.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Polo (2012), 25. On the propensity to "explain" medieval places by giving their classical or modern names, see Kinoshita (2008), 48-51.



1350. The difference this particular half-century makes cannot be overstated. The geopolitical map of the world beyond Latin Europe and the Mediterranean was, of course, being dramatically reshaped by Mongol expansion. Most relevant for the Latin Europeans was Hülegü's conquest of Baghdad and overthrow of the 'Abbasid caliphate in 1258, resulting in the establishment of the Ilkhanate of Persia, which launched sporadic diplomatic exchanges with western rulers over the next several decades. Meanwhile, in the Mediterranean, Marco Polo's father Niccolò and uncle Matteo set out on their first journey to the east in 1260 from Constantinople, ruled by a "Latin" emperor friendly to Venice. A year later, the city was (re)conquered by the Byzantine emperor of Nicaea, whose Genoese allies then supplanted the Venetians as the dominant commercial power in the region.<sup>7</sup> An even more significant geopolitical turn occurred in 1291. In that year, the Mamluk sultan of Egypt conquered the Crusader kingdom of Acre and other Latin European outposts, effectively putting an end to nearly two centuries of western presence in the Holy Land.<sup>8</sup> Venetian interests suffered, not only because of the loss of a major eastern Mediterranean entrepôt, but because papal sanctions imposed on trade with the Mamluks during and after the Acre campaign meant western merchants lost access to Alexandria, another major emporium for the transshipment of products from the Indian Ocean and the east.<sup>9</sup> When the Franciscan friar William of Rubruck crossed into Mongol-ruled lands at the behest of King Louis IX of France in 1253—the year before Marco Polo's birth—it was with a sense of trepidation: "... on the third day after we left Soldaia [Sudaq, in the Crimea]," he writes, "we encountered the Tartars; and when I came among them I really felt as if I were entering some other world."<sup>10</sup> By c. 1308 (after the composition of the *Devisement* but before its transcription

---

<sup>7</sup> This reversal of fortune may explain, among other factors, why in 1269 the elder Polos returned to Venice not through Constantinople but through Laiaç and Acre.

<sup>8</sup> F §194 mentions the fall of Acre in connection with military aid rendered by the sultan of Aden. See Polo (2016), 188.

<sup>9</sup> Once again, this world-historical event is obliquely reflected in the Polos' itinerary: returning from China via Ilkhanid Persia in the mid-1290s, they continued on to Venice through the Black Sea empire of Trebizond—not through Acre, as the elder Polos had done in the late 1260s.

<sup>10</sup> William of Rubruck (2009), 70-71.

in BNF fr. 1116), there was a Latin Christian archbishop in Khanbaliq (Beijing)—John of Montecorvino, like William of Rubruck a Franciscan.

At the time I undertook a new translation of BNF fr. 1116, in teaching Marco Polo for several years using Latham's Penguin translation, I had become well aware that it included numerous, sometimes very lengthy passages from R and Z. Trying to make a virtue out of necessity, I gave the students the assignment of analyzing how these interpolations changed or inflected the "meaning" of a given passage. As for further additions of "any significant matter furnished in less reliable sources," it was disconcerting to find that in choosing where to insert them, Latham "has sometimes gone against the balance of the evidence in order to produce," in his words, "a more coherent narrative."<sup>11</sup> Finally, to the description of Andaman found in the F text, Latham adds:

The island lies in a sea so turbulent and so deep that ships cannot anchor there or sail away from it, because it sweeps them into a gulf from which they can never escape. This is because the sea there is so tempestuous that it continually eating away the land, scooping out trees at the root and toppling them over and afterwards sweeping them into this gulf. It is truly marvelous how many trees are driven into the gulf without ever coming out again. Hence it happens that ships that enter the gulf are jammed in such a mass of these trees that they cannot move from the spot and so are stuck there for good.<sup>12</sup>

The indication that any ships reaching Andaman can never leave again encloses it within a kind of narrative Bermuda Triangle—what visitors have gotten away from the island in order to report on it? The interpolation thus calls attention to and puts pressure on the veracity of the account that precedes it. This is particularly significant since Andaman has just been described as home to "very cruel people" with "heads like dogs" who "eat as many men as they can catch." This passage is totally absent from F,

---

<sup>11</sup> See Polo (1958), 27 and 27n. In addition, Latham has dispensed with Marco and Rustichello's 233 sections, dividing the text into nine chapters instead.

<sup>12</sup> See Polo (1958), 258. For the account of the Andaman Islands in F (§172), see Polo (2019/2016), 475, 477/155.

but—unlike the many additions identified as such in the footnotes—it is unmarked in Latham’s translation. Another unmarked interpolation occurs in the chapter on Badakhshan. To the F text’s account of its fortified mountain passes, Latham adds a description of “wide plateaux” with lush fields and pure and salubrious air that cures fevers. “Messer Marco vouches for this from his own experience.” A footnote tells us that “According to R, he was ill in these parts for a year ..., but recovered immediately after acting on the advice to go up into the mountains,” but does not indicate that the entire passage is taken from R.<sup>13</sup> As these two cases show, Anglophone readers of Marco Polo’s “Travels” are given a highly misleading idea of the version that scholarly consensus sees as closest to the lost original.

Whence my decision—bolstered by Simon Gaunt’s book-length analysis of the distinctiveness and importance of F—to undertake a new translation into English. In addition to providing ready access to the text, my goal was to re-embed the *Devisement* in its historical context, providing annotations focused on the half-century from 1250 (the starting point of Abu-Lughod’s study) to c. 1300—occasionally extending my *terminus ante quem* to c. 1310 (when BNF fr. 1116 was transcribed) or to 1324, the date of Marco Polo’s death (and the year before a twenty-one year old Ibn Battuta first set out from Tangier on *hajj*). Thus in contrast to the Sterling edition, the historically appropriate annotation for Ayas reads: “Laias (modern Ayas) is the port of Lajazzo in Cilician Armenia. After the fall of Acre in 1291, it became the Latins’ main entrepôt for the Asia trade”—no sea turtles in sight.<sup>14</sup>

This said, annotating the many sites mentioned in the *Devisement* proved a challenge. Studies by Haw and Vogel (not always in agreement between them) were extremely helpful for place names in China. Beyond this, however, the flip side of the very connectivity enabled by the Mongol conquests (illustrated in Abu-Lughod’s eight interlinked subsystems or in Allsen’s emphasis on exchange) is that this period falls between the cracks of modern nationalist historiographical traditions. Fortunately, the past two

---

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Polo (1958), 77-78 and 78n. For the original passage, see Polo (2016/2019), 38-39/109. On the connotations of this unmarked interpolation, see Kinoshita (2017), 234-237.

<sup>14</sup> Polo (2019), 7n.25.

decades have seen the appearance of revisionist historiographies that have begun to tease out—often from slim or previously ignored sources (archival, historiographical, and material)—complexities of the changes the Mongol conquest produced. First of all came new looks at the Mongols themselves, nuancing the previous emphasis on the violence or destruction accompanying their conquests with a sense of the cultural productivity and exchange fostered under their rule.<sup>15</sup> In the case of thirteenth-century South Asia, macro-histories typically center on the Delhi Sultanate, which Marco does not describe, while other sites are better served in more local or regional histories that do not take “India” as their point of departure.<sup>16</sup> Post-Byzantine, pre-Ottoman Anatolia has begun to emerge in studies on the Seljuks, both before and after their defeat at Mongol hands at the 1243 battle of Köse Dag.<sup>17</sup> New work on the medieval Indian Ocean system should prove useful for future studies of the *Devisement du monde*.<sup>18</sup>

## **Rustichello of Pisa: Franco-Italian and the Prose of the World**

The F text, as we have noted, is composed in the language scholars call Franco-Italian, a blanket designation for Old French composed by writers who were native speakers of a dialect of Italian.<sup>19</sup> To modern eyes this seems an anomaly, but in the Middle Ages it was quite common to write in a language other than in one’s native tongue; in western Europe, after all, Latin was a learned language for everyone.<sup>20</sup> Franco-Italian was at its height in the thirteenth century—in the generation before Dante’s *Commedia* elevated Tuscan to the status of a literary language. Popular texts included *chansons de geste* (Old French epics) copied and, increasingly, composed in the milieu of the princely courts of northern Italy. In Marco Polo’s own lifetime, the Florentine Brunetto Latini, best known as Dante’s

---

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Allsen (2001) and Komaroff and Carboni (2002).

<sup>16</sup> Examples here include Talbot (2001) and Thapar (2005).

<sup>17</sup> Peacock and Yildiz (2014) (2017) and Blessing (2014).

<sup>18</sup> For example, Lambourn (2018) and Prange (2018).

<sup>19</sup> More recently, some Anglophone scholars have begun to refer to “the French of Italy.”

<sup>20</sup> See Kinoshita (2022). On some of the consequences of French as a literary language outside France, cf. Gaunt (2009).

mentor and for his appearance in Canto XV of the *Inferno*, chose French for his encyclopedic compilation the *Livre du tresor* (*Book of Treasure*), composed in 1260 while in exile in France. Closer to home, Martin da Canal wrote his *Estoires de Venise* in French, “because the French language has spread all over the world, and is the most delightful to read and hear above any other.”<sup>21</sup> For these authors in general and for Marco-Rustichello in particular, the significance of the choice to use Franco-Italian is three-fold: it is not the language of the church; it is not the language of the intellectual elite (for whom the touchstone for anything having to do with the East would have been Pliny, Isidore of Seville, and other Latin authorities); and it sets it in conversation with the epics, romances, chronicles and other texts then being composed in the vernacular—like Rustichello’s own *Méliadus*.

Strikingly, all these works were in prose. By 1298, when Marco and Rustichello collaborated on the *Devisement du monde*, prose writing in vernacular French was almost exactly a century old. Old French verse had appeared in the early twelfth century, in the assonanced decasyllables of the *chanson de geste* and hagiographical texts, and in the octosyllabic rhyming couplets used for “romance” (originally conceived as translations/adaptations from Latin), classic examples of which clustered in the second half of the twelfth century. Prose writing in Old French emerged suddenly around the turn of the thirteenth century. The earliest datable examples appear in northeastern France: vernacular translations of Latin prose chronicles, sponsored by a close-knit group of Franco-Flemish nobles resisting the centralizing policies of the French king Philip Augustus.<sup>22</sup> Within a few years, these texts were joined by chronicles of the Fourth Crusade by Geoffrey of Villehardouin and Robert de Clari and the prosification of now-lost verse romances on the origins of the Grail. Then, beginning in the 1220s came the “second generation” Arthurian tales collectively known as the *Vulgate cycle* or the *Lancelot-Grail*—texts like *La*

<sup>21</sup> See Martin da Canal (2009), 3. Brunetto Latini expressed a similar sentiment at the outset of his *Livre du tresor* [(1993), 2]. On Italians writing in French, see Cigni (2010), 188; on the complexities of Franco-Italian and of the literary commerce between French and Italian, see Cornish (2011), especially 70-100.

<sup>22</sup> Spiegel (1993).

*queste del saint graal* and *La mort le roi Artu* that Thomas Malory adapted and translated in the fifteenth century as *La morte Arthur*.<sup>23</sup> From the outset, in other words, Old French prose engages with various forms of rewriting: translation, *dérimage* or *mise en prose*, continuation, interpolation, abridgement, and cyclical expansion. “From the beginning, ... prose romance operates in dialogue with multiple forms and genres. It both continues and departs from established narrative modes.”<sup>24</sup>

This is the background for Rustichello’s Arthurian compilation *Méliadus*, a kind of *prequel* recounting the lives and exploits of the generation preceding the adventures of the Round Table. What we know of Rustichello of Pisa comes from the Prologue of his compilation, which explains (in the third person) that this romance was “translated” (*treslaités*) from the book of “my lord Edward, king of England, at the time he went overseas in the service of Our Lord God to conquer the Holy Sepulchre.”<sup>25</sup> Calling Edward “king of England” places the date of composition after his accession in late 1272, when he was on his way home from Acre, where he had been campaigning since mid-1271. It is generally assumed that Edward and Rustichello met in Italy, during the king’s return journey. However, it is just possible that the encounter took place in the Holy Land, which, tantalizingly, would place Rustichello and the three Polos—Niccolò, Maffeo, and the young Marco—all in Acre at the same time.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, though the *Méliadus* perhaps precedes the *Devisement* by nearly three decades, the two texts are further linked by their mutual association with Genoa: as we know, the latter text originated when Marco “being in prison in Genoa, ... had all these things written up by Messer Rustichiaus of Pisa [who was in this same prison] in the year 1298.”<sup>27</sup> The work of philologist Fabrizio Cigni, editor of *Méliadus*, suggests a likely context for this collaboration. A body of manuscripts dating from the late thirteenth century combining Pisan hands with Genoese *mise-en-page* suggests that Pisan prisoners-of-war taken captive (for example, at the battle of Meloria in 1284) were put

---

<sup>23</sup> Warren (2011), 154.

<sup>24</sup> Warren (2011), 153.

<sup>25</sup> Bogdanow and Trachsler (2006), 368-370; Rustichello da Pisa (1994); Cigni (2014).

<sup>26</sup> Polo (2001), 23.

<sup>27</sup> Polo (2016), 2.

to work copying “a vast ensemble of French literary texts” standardized in a “rapid and intense operation of transcription and translation.”<sup>28</sup>

Rustichello’s Compilation begins with a Prologue easily recognizable to those familiar with the F text of the *Devisement du monde*:

Seigneur enperaor et rois, et princes et dux, et quenz et barons, civalier et vauvasor et borgiois, et tout le preudome de ce monde que avés talenz de delitier voz en romainz, ci prenés ceste, et le faites lire de chief en chief ; si i troverés toutes les granz aventures qui avindrent entre li chevaliers herrant dou tenz li roi Huter Pandragon jusque au tenz li roi Artus, son fiz, et des conpains de la Table Reonde.<sup>29</sup>

The audience that Rustichello assumes will “take pleasure in romance” is the same one that will “want to know the diverse races of men and the diversities of the diverse regions of the world.” As Regina Psaki explains, the unusual variety of political systems characterizing the medieval Italian peninsula meant that “[t]he audience for romance narratives was ... also quite varied: nobles, wealthy bourgeois, petty bourgeois, artisans, an urban underclass, and clerics, to name only a few classes, constituted a notably heterogeneous market for romance in many forms.” *Meliadus* belongs to the early period in which French romances were transmitted, and then composed, in their original language, before translations and original compositions in Italian began to appear.<sup>30</sup>

With this, let us return to the opening passage of the *Devisement du monde* to consider some of its distinctive language and style:

Seingnors, emperaor et rois, dux et marquois, cuens, chevaliers et b[o]rgio[i]s, et toutes gens qe volés savoir les *deverses* jeneracions des homes e les *deversités* des *deverses* region dou monde, si prennés cestui livre et le faites lire, et chi troverés toutes les grandismes mervoilles et les grant *diversités* de la Grande Harminie et de Persie et des Tartars

<sup>28</sup> Cigni (2010), 187 (my translation); Cigni (2006).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Rustichello (1994), 233. A similar list—this time adding “astronomers, physicians, falconers and many other officials and commanders”—appears in the *Devisement*’s account of attendees at the Great Khan’s New Year festival. See Polo (2016/2019), 79/237.

<sup>30</sup> Psaki (2000), 203-204.

et Indie et des maintes autres provences, si con nostre livre voç contera por ordre apertemant, et come meisser March Pol, sajes et noble ci-taiens de Venece, raconte.<sup>31</sup>

Like many contemporary texts, the *Description* bears numerous traces of oral culture. If *you* want to learn about the diversity of the world, the Prologue enjoins us, “take this book and *have it read*.” This reader—or rather, listener—is further interpellated into the text by the phrases “*you* will find” and “our book will tell *you* clearly.”<sup>32</sup> In the rest of the work, this direct address often takes the form of the formulae that strike modern readers as so awkward: “I would have you know ...,” “Know, in truth ...,” and so forth. But it is precisely here, where the prose seems to us most pedestrian or formulaic, that Marco and Rustichello most pointedly command our attention, signaling the veracity of what might otherwise most strain the credulity of a contemporary audience.<sup>33</sup> Less obtrusive but equally typical of thirteenth-century French prose are phrases such as “there is nothing else worth mentioning” (ne a autre couse qe a mentovoir face) that punctuate many of Marco’s geographical entries.<sup>34</sup> These echo moments in the *Quest of the Holy Grail* (*La queste del saint graal*) such as when Galahad “rode many days without finding any adventures worth relating” (chevaucha mainte jornee sans aventure trover qui a conter face).<sup>35</sup> The difference is that for the Arthurian heroes, this dearth is the lull that precedes the appearance of a noteworthy adventure, whereas for Marco and Rustichello, it marks the conclusion of their interest in the place in question.

Another feature evident from Rustichello’s introduction is the propensity to repetition: four occurrences, within one long sentence, of variations

---

<sup>31</sup> Polo (2019), 3 (here and subsequently, my emphases).

<sup>32</sup> Polo (2016), 1.

<sup>33</sup> See Kinoshita (2016), xxix. On the way distinctive features of Old French prose recreate the authority inherent in a performance situation, see Godzich and Kittay (1987).

<sup>34</sup> For example, Polo (2016/2019), 114/353.

<sup>35</sup> See Pauphilet (1978), 46, ll. 19-20 (my translation). A few pages later, Gawain is described in nearly identical terms: “il chevaucha a mainte jornee sans aventure trover qui a conter face” (51, ll. 18-19). For *The Description*, see, for example, Polo (2016/2019), 114/353, 115/357, 117/365, 126/385, 127/389, 391.



on the words “diverse” and “diversity.” As we will below, modern translators have by and large not looked favorably on Rustichello’s phrasing. And yet, in the F text, repetition is not simply tolerated, it is often privileged. The concluding lines of the miracle tale of the Christian shoemaker of Baghdad (§28), for example, contain five occurrences of forms of the word “pray,” alternating between nominal and verbal forms. Three refer to the shoemaker’s prayer [priere] to God and two to the entreaties made by his co-religionists:

When the shoemaker heard what the bishop and the other Christians were telling him, he said that he was not so good a man that God would do such a great thing on account of his prayer [preier]. The Christians very gently entreated [prient] him to make this prayer [priere] to God. What should I tell you? They begged [prient] him so much that he said he would do what they wanted and made this prayer [priere] to his Creator.<sup>36</sup>

To modern ears, such repetition seems monotonous and flat-footed: good style demands variation. In this case, I have differentiated the noun *priere* from the verb *prier* because in modern English, we “pray” only to deities: “I pray you,” addressed to a fellow human being to request a service or favor, rings archaic. What is lost, however, is the sense of semantic continuity, that is, to make a request of a fellow Christian and to make a request of God are acts on the same spectrum of relations between petitioner and petitionee.<sup>37</sup> The shoemaker’s prayer and God’s miracle are intertwined and inseparable responses to two parallel acts of asking.

## Discursive Registers

As long as the *Devisement* is viewed as reportage, editors, translators, and readers have been concerned to separate the wheat of Marco Polo’s experience from the chaff of Rustichello of Pisa’s narrative embellishments: vocabulary, turns of phrase, and whole episodes highly reminiscent of Old

---

<sup>36</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 23/59.

<sup>37</sup> The modern French verb *prier*, in contrast, remains current in both social and spiritual contexts.

French epic (*chansons de geste*) and romance. Sections where such language is particularly dense—the numerous battle scenes in the final book on the Mongol Wars being the prime example—are often attributed to Rustichello, with the strong implication they are therefore less “authentic” than the descriptions of places and customs presumed to represent the original voice of Marco the traveler. On the other hand, taking Rustichello seriously not as Marco’s ghostwriter but as his “co-author” shifts our perspective on the *Devisement* as a collaborative text.<sup>38</sup> Words and phrases typical of works we today consider “literary” are scattered throughout. “Or dit li contes” (now the tale says), one of the most common and characteristic connectors in Old French prose romance, is used in transitional moments in the battles between Prester John and Chinggis Khan and between Hülegü and Berke (Ilkhan of Persia and khan of the Golden Horde, respectively).<sup>39</sup> “Estoire” is used to introduce a parable-like tale of how the Great Khan leaves untouched the precious metal tomb of the king of Mien.<sup>40</sup> The lands devastated by the Mongol conquests of Balkh and Tibet are described as “gaste” or “gastés,”<sup>41</sup> evoking the “gaste forest soutaine” and “terre gaste” of Chrétien de Troyes’s Perceval romance, *Le conte du graal* and its thirteenth-century prose elaborations.<sup>42</sup> The great tents that the Great Khan takes on his hunting expeditions are “of such great value and cost so much that a petty king could not afford them” (de si grant vailance et tant costent ... qe un peitet rois ne le poroit pager)—echoing the unaffordability topos of, for example, the rich pavilion of the fairy mistress of King Arthur’s neglected knight in Marie de France’s *lai de Lanval*: “Not Queen Semiramis ... nor the emperor Octavian could have bought [even] the right flap” (La reïne Semiramis, / ... / ne l’emperere Octovien / n’esligasent le destre pan).<sup>43</sup>

In fact, throughout the *Description*, the Mongols are rendered familiar through the deployment of feudal and courtly discourse in passages that

---

<sup>38</sup> See Psaki (2011), Gaunt (2013).

<sup>39</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 54, 216/153, 657.

<sup>40</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 112/347.

<sup>41</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 36, 100/101, 305.

<sup>42</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, 30 (l. 73), 140 (l. 1708).

<sup>43</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 84/253; Waters (2018), 166-67, ll. 82, 85-86.

underscore the compatibility between the Mongol court and the society of western Europe. Qubilai Khan's political relations, both friendly and adversarial, are couched in a vocabulary that would be instantly familiar to any feudal magnate in Latin Europe. When the Polos reach the Mongol court, Niccolò presents Marco to the Great Khan as "my son and your man" (*vestre home*), a common way of naming the vassal of an overlord.<sup>44</sup> In the history of the Mongols' rise to power, war between Prester John and Chinggis Khan breaks out after the former rejects the latter's request to marry his daughter: "Doesn't he know that he is my vassal (*mes homes*) and my slave (*mon sers*)?"<sup>45</sup> The text's account of court life borrows copiously from the language of romance. Except for eye color, Marco's portrait of Qubilai Khan would not be out of place as the description of a romance hero, or even a romance heroine: "His face is white and red like a rose; his eyes black and beautiful; his nose well made and just right."<sup>46</sup> Each of his four wives is attended by "300 damsels, very beautiful and comely"; in addition, the Great Khan has "many mistresses" (*amies*) chosen from among the most beautiful maidens of his empire.<sup>47</sup> Far from exoticizing the Mongols, the *Description* renders them in terms readily comprehensible to Marco's, and Rustichello's, audience.

Rendering Qubilai and his court in a feudal/courtly vocabulary depicts a Mongol world contiguous with Latin Europe and minimizes any cultural differences between the Mongol khan and any Western prince. This is true from the Prologue, from the point where the elder Polos, Niccolò and Maffeo, are first brought into the presence of the "great lord" (*Grant Seingnor*) Qubilai,<sup>48</sup> and when he sends them home with a message for the Pope, they promise to "carry out his command as if he were their liege lord [*lor seignor lige*]."<sup>49</sup> When Marco places him "in the direct imperial line" (*dreite ligne enmperiaus*) of Chinggis Khan, noting that "rightfully [*droitement*] the lord

---

<sup>44</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 10/25.

<sup>45</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 52/149.

<sup>46</sup> Polo (2016), 72.

<sup>47</sup> Polo (2016), 72.

<sup>48</sup> See Polo (2016/2019), 5/11. Here and elsewhere, the text says "grant seignor" where the chapter rubrics read "Great Khan" (*grand kaan*).

<sup>49</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 6/13.

of all the Tartars should be of this lineage [lengnajes],” the intertwined vocabulary of *droit* (in the sense of feudal rectitude) and lineage underscores the legitimacy of Qubilai’s rule in terms legible to Latin Christendom’s feudal elite.<sup>50</sup> And in repeatedly referring to the “habits and ... customs” (lor costumes et ... lor uçance) of the Mongols or the Southern Chinese, the text evokes cultural difference in ways that naturalize and accept it. Particularly interesting is the case where Marco distinguishes the habits and customs of “true” Tartars—those that follow the nomadic ways (like those earlier described by William of Rubruck) from those who have assimilated to the habits and customs of “idolators” (Buddhists, in China) and “Saracens” (Muslims, in the Ilkhanate).<sup>51</sup>

The F text concludes with a long section introduced under the rubric “Greater Turkey” (la Grant Torquie)—essentially inland Asia.<sup>52</sup> Despite this title, however, the focus of these concluding chapters is not geographical but historical: the wars between rival Mongol states, i.e. the Ilkhanate of Persia and the khanate of the Golden Horde, and the succession struggles within the Ilkhanate following the death of Qubilai’s nephew Abaqa in 1282. These are the sections that have most tended to trigger interventions by the text’s editors and translators, both medieval and modern. The Old French version of the *Devisement* edited by Philippe Ménard, for example, abridges this part substantially. And Sir Henry Yule calls these chapters “the merest verbiage and repetition of narrative formulae without the slightest value,” which he finds “undesirable to print all at length.”<sup>53</sup> This dismissal, I have suggested, is based not only on the obviously “literary” tenor of the scenes presented (attributed to Rustichello) but because their content runs counter to the expectations created when the *Devisement* is cast as “Marco Polo’s Travels.”<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, if we restore the text to its original title—the “description” of a “world” in which Latin Europeans and Mongols share a common culture based on feudal and courtly values—then the long histories of the “Tartar” wars appear in an entirely

<sup>50</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 67/197.

<sup>51</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 55, 59, 127/157, 171, 389; Polo (2016/2019), 58/167.

<sup>52</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 193/589.

<sup>53</sup> Polo (1903), II.456.

<sup>54</sup> Polo (2016), xv-xvi.

different light. In a council scene where Abaqa's son Arghun convokes his barons for help against his usurping uncle Ahmad, for example, he reminds them of several reasons why it is right and reasonable for them to support him, and then concludes: we will win the battle because "we are right and our enemies are wrong" (nos avon droit e nostre ennemis ont le tor).<sup>55</sup> His barons immediately ratify his sentiment: "We can be sure that we will win it, since we are very right and they are very wrong." They will fight with such zeal that "we will have everyone talking about us" (nos faisons parler de nos a tout le monde).<sup>56</sup> This scene echoes two of the most evocative lines of the twelfth-century Old French epic the *Chanson de Roland*, when just before the fateful battle of Roncevaux, Roland exhorts his men to fight bravely: "Païen unt tort e chrestiens unt dreit / Malvaïse essample n'en serat ja de mei."<sup>57</sup> In the Mongol world, however, being in the right cannot be construed as a matter of religion. This is vividly illustrated in the account, given early in the text, of the revolt of Chinggis Khan's kinsman Nayan: though he is a "baptized Christian" (cristienz bateiçiëç), this counts for nothing against the fact that he is "disloyal and a traitor" (desliaus et traitres). Since he attacked his lord, the Great Khan, his defeat and punishment is a "great justice" (grant droit).<sup>58</sup>

This deployment of feudal and courtly vocabulary, I have been suggesting, effectively collapses the cultural distance between the Mongols and the emperor, kings, dukes, counts and other lords of the F Prologue. Other versions of the text, on the other hand, reintroduce markers of cultural difference. One example of the significance even small changes or additions can make occurs in the account of the succession dispute following the death of the Ilkhan Abaqa. At this point, his brother Sultan Ahmad, "who had become Saracen," rushes to court, seizes the treasury, and "gave so generously to his barons and knights that it was a marvel." After this, "Ahmad Sultan conducted a very good lordship [mout bone seignorie] and pleased everyone. But I also tell you that he did a base thing [vilanie couse],

---

<sup>55</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 202/617.

<sup>56</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 203 (translation modified)/617.

<sup>57</sup> Short (2005), 1/151 (ll. 1015-1016).

<sup>58</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 71/207-209.

for which many people highly reproached him.”<sup>59</sup> Tantalizingly, the F text does not expand on this “vilanie cause.” Rather, it laconically sets up and helps to justify the revolt of Abaqa’s son Arghun, who eventually succeeds in overthrowing his usurping uncle. Branch A of the Old French manuscript tradition, on the other hand, at this point adds: “for when he gained the lordship, he took all of his brother Abaqa’s wives and kept them all for himself.”<sup>60</sup> In the eyes of a Latin Christian audience, this act marks Sultan Ahmad as lustful and incestuous, undoubtedly activating anti-“Saracen” stereotypes derived from Muslim practices of polygamy. From the Mongol point of view, on the other hand, marrying the wives of one’s predecessor was an established custom; a more likely cause of Sultan Ahmad’s loss of his followers’ support is that, soon after his accession, he summoned his brother and potential rival Qonqortai from Anatolia and had him executed.<sup>61</sup> Branch A’s brief addition—reproduced in both the Yule-Cordier and Penguin translations—turns the F text’s open-ended allusion into a fact that feeds Western perceptions of Saracen excess and deviance.

This does not mean that the F’s text discursive registers are consistent. Representative of the mix of discourses to be found in the *Devisement du monde* is the distinction between “knights” and “mounted men.” The two, of course, are synonymous as both refer to warriors on horseback, central to the cultures of Inner Asian nomads as well as western European secular elites. Though the distinctions are not water-tight, “mounted men” is typically used with numbers to catalogue the size of the forces that a given leader has at his disposal or leads into a particular battle.<sup>62</sup> Qubilai’s kinsman Nayan “saw himself as so great a lord that he could well field 400,000 mounted men,” leading directly to his rebellion against the Great Khan. In the ensuing battle, he is joined by another cousin, Qaidu, who contributes

---

<sup>59</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 200/611.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Polo (2009), 74 (my translation). This line also occurs in Latham’s translation with no indication that it is not original to F. See Polo (1958), 320.

<sup>61</sup> See Polo (2015), 200n.11, drawing from Amitai (2001), 15.

<sup>62</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 57/163; 68-69/199-201 (eight times in descriptions of the preparations for battle between Qubilai and Nayan); 194/591, 593 (the battle between Qubilai and Qaidu).

another 100,000.<sup>63</sup> “Mounted men” are occasionally paired with “foot soldiers” to indicate the whole of an armed force, as in the “homes a chevauz” and “homes a pies” that Qubilai amasses in response to Nayan and Qaidu’s rebellion or in the maritime expeditionary force sent to Japan.<sup>64</sup> “Mounted men” form the official escort accompanying the Polos across Ilkhanid Persia during their homeward journey to Venice.<sup>65</sup>

If mentions of “mounted men” tend to be quantitative, evocations of “knights” (chevaliers) shade toward the qualitative. Knights, as we have seen, are evoked in the opening line of the Prologue—interpellated, along with kings, counts, bourgeois, and other secular figures likely to be interested in the “diversities” of Marco Polo’s world.<sup>66</sup> They occur in courtly settings: in depictions on the walls of palaces of the Great Khan (in Khanbaliq) and the king of Mangi (in Quinsai); in seating arrangements at imperial feasts; in the French translation of the *Quesitan*—“knights and vassals of the lord”—for the Great Khan’s bodyguard.<sup>67</sup> Craftsmen produce equipment for knights, not mounted men.<sup>68</sup> Ten knights riding side-by-side is the measure used to convey the width of the great stone bridge found just outside Khanbaliq (Beijing).<sup>69</sup> And though impressive numbers of “mounted men” may go on campaign, in the battle scenes themselves it is “knights and foot soldiers” who prepare to attack the Great Khan (in the case of Nayan or Qaidu) and “knights” or “knights and horses” (chevalier et chevaux) who are killed or fall dead to the ground.<sup>70</sup> The formulaic

<sup>63</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 68/199. “Mounted men” is similarly used with numbers at 110/341 (a campaign against the king of Mien) and 117/367, 369 (quelling a revolt by a rebel governor).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Polo (2016/2019), 68/201; 144/445. The king of Abyssinia disposes of “mout bones jens d’armes et homes da chevalz asseç.” See Polo (2016/2019), 184/569.

<sup>65</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 13/35.

<sup>66</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 1/3.

<sup>67</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 74/219, 136/417, 76-77/229-231, 76/227.

<sup>68</sup> See Polo (2016/2019), 28/75. Yangzhou, the city in Mangi that Marco Polo is said to have governed for three years, furnishes equipment to “knights and men-at-arms.” Cf. Polo (2016/2019), 127/389.

<sup>69</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 93/285.

<sup>70</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 68/199; 185/573 (when the Christian king of Abyssinia attacks the sultan of Aden to avenge an affront to his bishop). For knights and horses falling in battle, see 111/345 (against king of Mien) and 70/205, 205/623, 222/677 (in internecine Mongol struggles. In the battle between the Ilkhan Hülegü and Berke, khan of the Golden Horde, great

phrase “barons and knights” (baronç et chevaliers)—pairing great nobles with mounted warriors—recurs frequently, in courtly contexts (to describe festivities at the imperial court, hunting expeditions, or the number of people who fit under Qubilai’s great hunting tent pavilion), or in the dramatized scenes of the rival Mongol wars.<sup>71</sup> At the Mongol overthrow of the ‘Abbasid Caliphate, Qubilai’s brother Hülegü conquers Baghdad with “more than 100,000 knights.” On finding the Caliph with his treasure, Hülegü marvels (a grant mereveie) that he has not given his gold to “knights and mercenaries” (chevaliers et ... soldaer) to protect him.<sup>72</sup>

An interesting case involves Zardandan, a land with customs so strange that it merits one of the longest entries in the section on Cathay: the people have gold teeth (from which the province draws its name), observe couvade, eat raw meat, worship their elders rather than idols, are illiterate, and rely on magicians and enchanters rather than doctors. Nevertheless, the men are “all *knights*, according to their customs [selonc lor usance]; they do nothing but go on campaign and go hunting and birding;” for all of their exotic ways, they are lexically assimilated to the cultural elite of Latin Europe, sharing not only the profession of arms but the noble pastime par excellence of hunting and birding.<sup>73</sup> The most fully courtly episode is the interlude on the daughter on Qubilai’s rebellious kinsman Qaidu, who wins the right not to marry, since no suitor can defeat her in battle. In the end, when she goes campaigning with her father, no “knight [was] worth more than she” (ne avoit chevaliers qe plus hi vailist d’ele) ... Many times this maiden (demoiselle) went among the enemy and took a knight (un chevalier) by force.”<sup>74</sup>

In comparison to the intricate plotting of French prose romances like *La queste del saint graal*, where the adventures of various Arthurian knights

---

numbers of “mounted men” are drawn up on each side around a plain large enough to accommodate a “great number of knights.” See Polo (2016/2019), 216-217 (modified)/661.

<sup>71</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 78, 79/231, 233, 235; 84/251, and Polo (2016/2019), 200/611, 201/613, 202/617, 204/623, respectively.

<sup>72</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 20/49, 51.

<sup>73</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 107/329.

<sup>74</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 199/604-605.



are “interlaced” throughout the work (cutting back and forth among them), Rustichello’s *Compilation* seems less structured, more highly episodic:

Some of the episodes selected by Rustichello are real highlights of Arthurian narrative material, yet the author did little to create any narrative links between them. They follow one another barely in chronological order, held together by rather obvious transitions between the branches. The continuous presence of the characters of Lancelot and Tristan and the theme of their rivalry do form a kind of unifying thread throughout the entire compilation, but the individual episodes tend towards autonomy. A literary study of Rustichello’s work centered on this new kind of aesthetics still remains to be written.<sup>75</sup>

The *Devisement*, in contrast, is organized spatially, in a loose series of itineraries to, within, and out from the lands of the Great Khan. These itineraries should not be mistaken for a single, looping (twenty-four year!) journey taken by Marco Polo himself, as is sometimes implied by maps accompanying his text.<sup>76</sup> On more than one occasion, Marco describes the different itineraries leading out of a given hub, returning to the center each time.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, geography provides the coherence beneath the accumulation of short chapters, a matrix within which details (local customs) or whole episodes (historical vignettes, miracle tales) can be accommodated.

In fact, the *Devisement* goes out of its way to privilege ordered speech. This goes for the narrator, Rustichello, who promises to lay out the marvels and diversities of the world “clearly, in orderly fashion” (por ordre apertement), just as Messer Marco has related, as well as for the Polos themselves: when Marco’s father and uncle first arrive at the Mongol court and are quizzed about the organization of the Latin church, they reply in the “Tartar” language “in a good, orderly, and wise way, like the wise men they were” (bien et ordremant et sajemant come sajes homes qu’il estoient).<sup>78</sup> In the

<sup>75</sup> Bogdanow and Trachsler (2006), 370.

<sup>76</sup> On the pitfalls of construing the *Devisement* as a travel narrative, see Kinoshita (2016), xv-xvi.

<sup>77</sup> Greater Armenia (§22) is one such hub, Kerman (§35) another. See Polo (2016), 15.

<sup>78</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 1/3, 5/11.

main body of the text, breaks or abridgments in geographical sequence are justified by appeals to order. Thus, in the Prologue's overview of Marco's initial journey to Qubilai's court, the narrator specifically withholds description of places between the Mediterranean and the Great Khan's summer capital at Kaipingfu (Coleridge's "Xanadu") since they will be recounted "in due order" (tout per ordre) later on. In the first section of the Book proper, the narrator traces the route from Badakhshan to Kashmir, then breaks off, for "if we went further we would come to India and I don't want to go there at this point, because on our return route we will tell you everything relating to India *in order*" (por ordre)—as indeed he does, in the separately titled "Book of India." References to "order" punctuate the text, used as transitions from one section to the next: thus a place fully described has been rendered "in good order."<sup>79</sup> Stories, such as the way the Great Khan acquired relics of the Sakyamuni Buddha from Ceylon, are recounted truthfully, and "in order" (por ordre).<sup>80</sup>

Despite Rustichello's insistence on "good order," nine times in the *Description*, the text "stutters," as a first-person "I"—presumably Marco—notes that there is something he had forgotten to relate. In all nine cases, the verb employed is a form of the Italianism "dementiqué,"<sup>81</sup> and several of these instances are followed by one of the formulae commanding the reader's special attention: "or saqiés qe," "sachiés touti voirmant," "Il est voir qe," "je voç di q'..."<sup>82</sup> At times, the new insertion is justified on account of its interest or relevance to the text: thus the "beautiful battle" that took place in Vocian "worth mentioning in this book; therefore we will tell you quite clearly how it came about and in what way" (bien fait a mentoivoir en ceste livre. Et por ce la voç conteron tout apertamant, comant el avent et en quel mainere).<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, in the more carefully curated Old French versions of the *Devisement*, some of these mentions of what has

<sup>79</sup> Orthographical variants include "ordeemant," for Mangi (125/383), "ordreemant" for Cathay (99/301) and Gujarat (176/543), or "ordeneemant," in the case of Dongpingfu (118/369).

<sup>80</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 9/23, 40/113, 171/527.

<sup>81</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 59/169, 65/189, 89/271, 105/321, 109/337, 130/397, 168/519, 183/563, 213/647.

<sup>82</sup> Polo (2019), 563; Polo (2019), 169 (cf. 189, 647); Polo (2019), 273; Polo (2019), 321.

<sup>83</sup> Polo (2019), 337 (cf. 397).

been “dementiqué” are regularized in French as “oblié,” as “je vous dirai avant une grant merveille que je avoie oublié a conter.”<sup>84</sup> In other places, the mention of something having been forgotten is simply suppressed. Thus on the Mongol custom of parents arranging a marriage between their deceased children, the F text’s “I will tell you another wondrous habit they have that I had forgotten to write” (encore voç dirai un autre merveilleose usança qu’il ont, que je avoie dementiqué a scrivre) becomes “They have still another custom ...” (Encore ont une autre usage que ...).<sup>85</sup> The most striking example concerns the island of Ceylon. While in F Marco and Rustichello describe the island’s customs and resources in §173 and then return to it several pages later in §178 to describe the shrine of “Sergamoni Borcan” (Sakyamuni Buddha), the Old French redaction stitches the two together in a single chapter.<sup>86</sup>

One notable passage in the book, instead of adding a detail previously forgotten, suppresses an entry that had already been announced. In the final section of the *Devisement*, Marco and Rustichello follows their description of Russia with the announcement that they will now turn to “the Greater Sea”: “It is quite true that there are many merchants and many people who know it, but there are also many more who don’t know it; therefore, for them it is a good thing to put it in writing.” However, they get only one sentence into the account before changing their mind: “Since we have begun with the Greater Sea, we have repented of putting it in writing, for many people openly know it; therefore we will leave it immediately, and will begin other things.”<sup>87</sup> Half a century before, William of Rubruck had opened his *Itinerarium*, a narrative of his journey to the court of the Great Khan (1253-55), with an account of “the Greater Sea” and “Gasaria or Casaria”—that is, the Black Sea and the Crimean peninsula.<sup>88</sup> Now, approaching the turn of the fourteenth century, it has become familiar

<sup>84</sup> See Polo (2003) II.46. Cf also Polo (2003), III.102, IV.85, V.108.

<sup>85</sup> See Polo (2016/2019), 59/169, and Polo (2003), II.36, respectively. Cf. Polo (2019), 321; Polo (2005), IV.77.

<sup>86</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 156, 168-71/477-479, 519-527, and Polo (2009), VI.23-28, respectively.

<sup>87</sup> Polo (2016), 213.

<sup>88</sup> William of Rubruck (2009), 61-62.

enough to a critical mass of merchants and others so that it fails to hold our co-authors' interest.

## The Book of Marvels

One of the best-known manuscripts of the *Devisement*, a luxury volume produced over a century after the original text, is known as *Le livre des merveilles* (*The Book of Marvels*).<sup>89</sup> In the Old French vernacular, “merveille” translates the Latin *mirabilia*, used both for miracles and for wonders or marvels, in the sense of curiosities of nature.<sup>90</sup> In the medieval West, wonders were especially associated with India, in a long tradition dating back to classical antiquity (associated with authors such as Pliny and Solinus) and transmitted through encyclopedists like Isidore of Seville. Textual accounts of wonders were equally resonant in the Islamic tradition, where they constituted a genre of their own, *ajā'ib*. A decade or so before Marco and Rustichello's *Devisement du monde*, a scholar from the Persian city of Qazwin produced a lavishly illustrated book entitled *The Wonders of Creation*.<sup>91</sup>

It is hardly surprising that the *Devisement* traffics heavily in wonder. But what the book identifies as a *merveille*, either directly or in the eyes of figures described in the text, is by and large not what medieval audiences would have come to expect from *mirabilia*. As Simon Gaunt writes, “Marco's *merveilles* are remarkably naturalistic, indeed often of human confection in that they are architectural, manufactured objects, or social customs (particularly those of the Great Khan's court).”<sup>92</sup> Occasionally, there are outlandish things or practices that might fit the cultural parameters of wonder. By and large, however, the *Devisement*, as commentators have noted, is strikingly devoid of the kind of marvels associated with the limits of the known world.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) français 2810 was commissioned by John the Fearless, duke of Burgundy as a New Year's gift for his bibliophile uncle, Jean, duke of Berry. See Cruse (2019), 196.

<sup>90</sup> On wonders, see Bynum (1997) and Daston and Park (1997).

<sup>91</sup> Berlekamp (2011), Carboni (2015).

<sup>92</sup> Gaunt (2006), 64.

<sup>93</sup> Larner (1999), 107-108.

Several evocations of wonder fall within the intercalated histories or stories attached to particular sites: thus on conquering Baghdad, Qubilai's brother Hülegü "marveled greatly" (a grant mereveie) at the Caliph's treasure, and is amazed that he has chosen to hoard it rather than to pay mercenaries to defend his lands; the three Persian kings who bring offerings to a newborn "prophet" (profete) marvel repeatedly at what they find on their visit; the youngest leaves his presence "marveling greatly" (mout mervillant), the second "completely amazed" (tout esbaïs) and the third "very pensive" (mout pensif). When they throw the stone he has given them into a well, the burning fire that falls from the sky is a "great marvel" (grant morvoille).<sup>94</sup>

In the Prologue (§1-19), early indications of wonder involve the Polos themselves. An envoy of the Ilkhan Hülegü who encounters the elder Polos in Bukhara "greatly marveled" (a grant mervoille), for they had never seen any Latin in this country. Once on the road accompanying him to Qubilai's court, however, it is the Polos' turn to find "great marvels" (grant mervoilles) and "diverse things" (diverses choses) on their year-long journey. Several years later upon their return to Acre, the papal legate there "marveled greatly" (a grant mervoie) at what they told him. Finally, when Marco, returning to court, is able to regale the Great Khan with descriptions of all the novelties he has seen on his travels, "everyone who heard him marveled" (unt grant mervoie)—less at the things he has seen than at his skill in describing them.<sup>95</sup>

Many of the text's assignations of "wonder" are a function of numbers or scale. The number of men who died in the Great Khan's battle against his kinsman Nayan is "a marvel to see." The "great quantity" of partridges kept for the Great Khan's hunting expeditions is "a marvel" to behold, as is the number of rooms in the Great Khan's palace in Khanbaliq (Beijing).<sup>96</sup> Other expressions of wonder cluster around the enormity of the resources in Qubilai's empire: the abundance of silk in Dongpingfu is "a marvel"; the volume of merchandise carried up and down the river at Xinzhou matou

<sup>94</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 20/51, 25/65, 26/67.

<sup>95</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 4/9, 5/9, 5/9, 7/15, 11/37.

<sup>96</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 70/79, 63/74, 74/84.

is both “a marvel” and “a marvelous thing to see.” The conquest of the Southern Song empire, Marco Polo’s Mangi, brings even more wonders under Qubilai’s control: the astonishing number of cities—over 1200—will cause the reader to marvel; the revenue derived from salt in Taizhou and Quinsai (Xingzai); the abundance of commodities and precious stones transiting through the port of Zaytun (Quanzhou).<sup>97</sup>

From this inventory of the distribution of wonder emerges what Marco and Rustichello found most significant about Marco’s adventures, on the one hand, and what most likely was to provoke the amazement or skepticism of their audience, on the other.

## Traduttore, Traditore

Having explored some of the distinctiveness of the vocabulary and style of the F text of the *Devoisement du monde*, we turn to some of the decisions faced by its modern translators. In recent years, the emerging field of Translation Studies has made us aware that translation is not a transparent act—that translators must choose or balance between a version that strives to preserve the distinctiveness of the “source” text—even at the risk of awkwardness or, at the extremes, illegibility—and a version that naturalizes the text as much as possible in its “target” language. In the Anglophone context, preference has been given to “fluent translations that can be read as though the works had been written in English in the first instance ... eras[ing] signs of the foreign.”<sup>98</sup> For our purposes, this question of translation from one language to another is redoubled by that of how to treat the cultural distance between the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries and the present day. Should medieval texts in translation speak as much as possible in a modern idiom, or should they challenge modern readers by conserving a vocabulary and style that risk seeming strange to modern audiences? BNF fr. 1116 adds a further complication, that is, linguistic divergences within the text itself: unlike the standard Old French of Brunetto Latini’s *Tresor*, the Franco-Italian of the *Devoisement* contains many

---

<sup>97</sup> Polo (2016/2019), 118/134, 119/135, 135/152, 126/143, 137/153, 141/157.

<sup>98</sup> See Bassnett (2014), 14, referring to Venuti (1995), 17.

Italianisms, distributed unevenly throughout. The miracle of the Christian shoemaker living outside Baghdad, for example, shows a particular density of Italian influence: “veschevo” alongside “vescheve” for “bishop”; “molto” alongside “mout” for “very”; “jorno” for “day”; “une bella femene” instead of “une belle feme” for “a beautiful woman”; “la janba” alongside “janbe” for “leg.”<sup>99</sup>

In translating Marco Polo, however, explicit questions seem to cluster largely around the text’s formulaic style—a typical feature, as we have seen, of thirteenth-century French prose. In his 1958 Penguin version, Ronald Latham aims at providing “a straightforward and readable version.” To this end, “the translator has not felt obliged to reproduce all the anticipations, recapitulations, apostrophizations, and connecting formulae characteristic of F.”<sup>100</sup> In the modern French translation accompanying their edition of the F text, on the other hand, Joël Blanchard and Michel Quereuil adopt the opposite approach, opting to keep “assertive formulas” of the type “je vos di tout voirement que” on the grounds that these are “an integral part of the style of the text and of the concern for truthfulness [véridicité] strongly affirmed by the author.”<sup>101</sup>

A second issue concerns how to treat the F text’s vocabulary. In the 2015 Penguin translation, Nigel Cliff writes: “I have not denied myself the resources of modern English or attempted to reproduce word-for-word the limited vocabulary of the early texts.” Readers interested in a “more literal” translation are advised by Cliff to consult the Moule-Pelliot edition.<sup>102</sup> Yet this “limited” vocabulary is revelatory of Marco Polo’s world. Ships have “rooms” (chanbre), not “cabins” (cabines) and crocodiles (called “large snakes”) have a “nail” (ongle) like that of a falcon or lion, not “claws” (griffes).<sup>103</sup>

As these modern French translations show, Blanchard and Quereuil, who had adopted a “source”-based approach to Marco and Rustichello’s

---

<sup>99</sup> Polo (2019), 57.

<sup>100</sup> Polo (1958), 27.

<sup>101</sup> Polo (2019), lviii.

<sup>102</sup> Polo (2015), xlix.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Polo (2016/2019), 143/439, 105-6/323 and Polo (2019), 438, 322. On forms of “naître” used to refer to plants, animals, and minerals, see Kinoshita (2016), xxviii.

formulaic phrases, curiously jump to a “target”-audience focus for individual lexical items. In particular, they choose “not to maintain, *for example*, words from the family *merveille* except when the context lent them a positive meaning, *compatible with the meaning common today*.”<sup>104</sup> This is, to say the least, a curious choice since “merveille,” as we have seen, is a keyword in medieval culture in general and in the *Devoisement du monde* in particular, so to choose this lexical item in particular for adaptation to modern sensibilities is intentionally to efface much of what Marco has to tell us about the world beyond Latin Europe. The words Blanchard and Quereuil commonly use to translate forms of “merveille” are “étonné” or “étonnement.” But inconsistency occults some small but significant aspects of the original. In the examples from the Prologue quoted above, the Mongol envoy traveling from the Ilkhanate to the court of the Great Khan “fut fort surpris” (was very surprised) when he encountered the two elder Polos; on their way to Qaraqorum, the Polos themselves find “toutes sortes de choses extraordinaires” (all sorts of extraordinary things); and once they return to Acre and report what they have seen, the papal legate there “accueillit cette information avec un grand étonnement” (greeted this information with a great astonishment). While not incorrect, the modern French renderings obscure the “mervoille,” “mervoilles,” “mervoie” of the original.<sup>105</sup>

A more culturally resonant example occurs in Marco’s rendition of the story of the three Magi (described here as three kings of Persia) who bring offerings to a newborn prophet. The original in the F text is punctuated with forms of “merveille.” The youngest king, seeing the prophet in his own image, leaves his presence “mout mervillant” (marveling greatly). When the kings later find a stone inside a box given them by the prophet, “Il se font grant meravoie qe ce puet ester” (they marvel greatly at what it could be). Finally, when they throw the stone into a well and a burning fire falls from the sky, it is a “grant morvoille” (great marvel) that leaves them completely amazed. In the Franco-Italian, the repetition hammers home the sense of wonder experienced by the Magi themselves. In the modern

<sup>104</sup> Polo (2019), lviii (my translation, emphases added).

<sup>105</sup> Polo (2019), 8, 8, 14; 9, 9, 15 (my translation).



French translation, in contrast, this emphasis is lost: the youngest king indeed leaves the prophet's presence "fort étonné" (strongly amazed); but on seeing the stone, the three, "[p]erplexes, ... se demandèrent ce que cela pouvait signifier" (confused, wondered what this could mean); and the fire that falls from the sky is a "grand prodige" (a great wonder).<sup>106</sup> Though the semantic sense is preserved, in translating "mervillant/meravoie/morvoille" as "étonné/perplexe/prodige," the modern French offers us a translation that is more colloquial at the sacrifice of the sense of wonder and the miraculous pervading the original.<sup>107</sup>

Nowhere is the question of how to deal with the lexical repetition typical of the *Devisement du monde* more pressing than in the Prologue's opening lines:

Seingnors, emperaor et rois, dux et marquois, cuens, chevaliers et b[o]rgio[i]s, et toutes gens qe volés savoir les **deverses** jenerasions des homes e les **deversités** des **deverses** region dou monde, si prennés cestui livre et le faites lire, et chi troverés toutes les grandismes mervoilles et les grant **diversités** de la Grande Harminie et de Persie et des Tartars et Indie et des maintes autres provences, si con nostre livre voç contera por ordre apertement, et come meisser March Pol, sajes et noble citaiens de Venece, raconte ...<sup>108</sup>

Strikingly, these opening lines contain four instances of the word "diverse/diversité," setting up Simon Gaunt's contention that the *diversity* of the world is an abiding obsession of the *Devisement du monde*. But this hammering repetition of course sounds clunky to the modern ear. Thus here, on the very first page of the Prologue, translators intervene to attenuate the monotony of the original; in Latham's version:

Emperors and kings, dukes and marquises, counts, knights, and townsfolk, and all people who wish to know the **various** races of men and

<sup>106</sup> Polo (2019), 64, 67, 67; 64, 66, 66 (my translation).

<sup>107</sup> Similarly, Rustichello's use of "Or dit li contes" (Now the tale says), a staple formula of Arthurian prose romance, is effaced when it is rendered "Le récit dit ici" (The narrative here says) on one occasion and "Si l'on en croit l'histoire" (If we believe the story about this) on the other. See Polo (2019), 152, 656.

<sup>108</sup> Polo (2019), 3.

the **peculiarities** of the **various** regions of the world, take this book and have it read to you. Here you will find all the great wonders and **curiosities** of Greater Armenia and Persia, of the Tartars and of India, and of many other territories. Our book will relate them to you plainly in due order, as they were related by Messer Marco Polo, a wise and noble citizen of Venice ...<sup>109</sup>

Whatever is gained in euphony and idiomatic expression is bought at the price of erasing the source text's emphasis on diversity. The same is true of Blanchard and Quereuil's French translation:

Empereurs et rois, ducs et marquis, comtes, chevaliers et bourgeois, messeigneurs, et vous tous qui désirez vous informer sur les **diverses** populations et sur les **curiosités** des **diverses** régions du monde, prenez ce livre et faites-le lire : vous y trouverez toutes les extraordinaires merveilles et la grande **singularité** de la grande Arménie, de la Perse, de la Tartarie, de l'Inde, et de bien d'autre pays ; notre livre vous l'exposera de façon ordonnée et véridique, conformément au récit de messire Marco Polo, sage et noble citoyen de Venise ...

These samples suggest that two occurrences are permissible; beyond that, "diverse/diversity" gives way to peculiarities and curiosities on the one hand, and curiosities and singularity on the other.<sup>110</sup>

## Conclusion

In explaining the conservative approach they adopt in their edition of the F text, Joël Blanchard and Michael Quereuil write:

Avec cette version franco-italienne nous voyons le texte en train de se former, avant d'être poli par ses traductions et adaptations successives ; nous pouvons presque entendre Marco et Rustichello à Gênes en train de composer à deux voix cette œuvre unique.

---

<sup>109</sup> Polo (1958), 33.

<sup>110</sup> The Yule-Cordier translation gives "various," "diversities," "sundry," and "divers." See Polo (1903), I.1. Cliff, largely following Latham, gives "various," "peculiarities," "various," and "chief curiosities." See Polo (2015), 3.

In this Franco-Italian version, we see the text in formation, before being polished by successive translations and adaptations; we can almost hear Marco and Rustichello in Genoa in the act of composing, in two voices, this unique work.<sup>111</sup>

Like Blanchard and Quereuil, I believe that the features of the F text, including some that previous editors and translators have seen as regrettable defects, contribute in no small part to its interest. This version of the *Devisement du monde* gives us not just a compendium of late medieval knowledge of the lands beyond the *dār al-Islām*, but a glimpse of that world through the eyes of a participant observer with neither the Latinate learning nor the same motives or goals that typified the clerical travelers who followed in Marco's wake.<sup>112</sup> The work demanded in translating Rustichello's sometimes rough vernacular highlights some of the most distinctive features of BNF fr. 1116's Franco-Italian version, making it all the more important, I think, to give modern readers a sense of the well-traveled merchant and the experienced romance writer in the act of composing.

## References

- Abu-Lughod, Janet L. (1989). *Before European Hegemony: The World System A. D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Allsen, Thomas T. (2001). *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Amitai, Reuven (2001). "The Conversion of Tegüder Ilkhan to Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 23: 15-43. Reprinted in his (2007) *Mongols in Islamic Lands* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate).
- Bassnett, Susan (2014). *Translation* (New York: Routledge (The New Critical Idiom)).

---

<sup>111</sup> Polo (2019), xlvī (my translation).

<sup>112</sup> On the pictures of China and India in Marco Polo and some subsequent clerical writers, see Kinoshita (forthcoming).

- Berlekamp, Persis (2011). *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Persia* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Blessing, Patricia (2014). *Rebuilding Anatolia after the Mongol Conquest: Islamic Architecture in the Lands of Rūm, 1240-1330* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate).
- Bogdanow, Fanny, and Richard Trachsler (2006). "Rewriting Prose Romance: The Post-Vulgate *Roman du Graal* and Related Texts," in Glyn S. Burgess and Karen Pratt, eds. *The Arthur of the French: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval French and Occitan Literature* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press (Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages; 4)), 342-392.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker (1997). "Wonder," *American Historical Review*, 102/1: 1-26.
- Carboni, Stefano (2015). *The Wonders of Creation and the Singularities of Painting: A Study of the Ilkhanid London Qazvīnī* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).
- Chrétien de Troyes (1990). *Le conte du graal ou Le roman de Perceval*, ed. and trans. Charles Méla (Paris: Le Livre de Poche (Lettres Gothiques)).
- Cigni, Fabrizio (1992). "Pour l'édition de la *Compilation* de Rustichello da Pisa: La version du ms Paris, B.N., fr. 1463," *Neophilologus*, 76/4: 519-534.
- Cigni, Fabrizio (2006). "Copisti prigionieri (Genova, fine sec. XIII)," in Pietro G. Beltrami et al., eds. *Studi di Filologia romanza offerti a Valeria Bertolucci Pizzorusso* (Pisa: Pacini), 425-439.
- Cigni, Fabrizio (2010). "Manuscripts en français, italien, et latin entre la Toscane et la Ligurie à la fin du XIIIe siècle: Implications codicologiques, linguistiques, et évolution des genres narratifs," in Christopher Kleinhenz and Keith Busby, eds. *Medieval Multilingualism: The Francophone World and its Neighbours* (Turnhout: Brepols (Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe; 20)), 187-217.
- Cigni, Fabrizio (2014). "French Redactions in Italy: Rustichello da Pisa," in F. Regina Psaki and Gloria Allaire, eds., *The Arthur of the Italians: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Italian Literature and Culture* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), 21-40.
- Cornish, Alison (2011). *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy: Illiterate Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Cruse, Mark (2019). "Novelty and Diversity in Illustrations of Marco Polo's *Description of the World*," in Bryan C. Keene, ed., *Toward a Global Middle Ages: Encountering the World through Illuminated Manuscripts* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum), 195-202.

- Daston, Lorraine, and Katharine Park (1997). *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books).
- Gaunt, Simon (2006). "La Greigneur merveille du monde: Marco Polo and French as a Marker of Cultural Relativity," *French Studies Bulletin*, 27/100: 63-66.
- Gaunt, Simon (2009). "Translating the Diversity of the Middle Ages: Marco Polo and John Mandeville as 'French' Writers," *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 46/3: 235-248.
- Gaunt, Simon (2013). *Marco Polo's Le Devisement du monde: Narrative Voice, Language and Diversity* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer (Gallica; 31)).
- Godzich, Wlad, and Jeffrey Kittay (1987). *The Emergence of Prose: An Essay in Prosaics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press).
- Haw, Stephen G. (2006). *Marco Polo's China: A Venetian in the Realm of Kubilai Khan* (London: Routledge).
- Kinoshita, Sharon (2008). "Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligés* in the Medieval Mediterranean," *Arthuriana* 18/3: 48-61.
- Kinoshita, Sharon (2016). "Introduction" and "Principles of Translation and Annotation," in Polo (2016), xiv-xxx.
- Kinoshita, Sharon (2017). "Traveling Texts: De-orientalizing Marco Polo's *The Description of the World*," in Gesa Mackenthun, Andrea Nicolas, and Stephanie Wodianka, eds. *Travel, Agency, and the Circulation of Knowledge* (Münster: Waxmann), 223-246.
- Kinoshita, Sharon (2022). "Premodernities," in Jenny Burns and Derek Duncan, eds. *Transnational Modern Languages: A Handbook* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press (Transnational Modern Languages)), 243-250.
- Kinoshita, Sharon (forthcoming). "China and India," in Sebastian Sobecski, ed. *A Global History of Medieval Travel Writing: European Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Komaroff, Linda, and Stefano Carboni, eds. (2002). *The Legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly Art and Culture in Western Asia, 1256-1353* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art).
- Lambourn, Elizabeth A. (2017). "Islam Beyond Empires: Mosques and Islamic Landscapes in India and the Indian Ocean," in Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu, eds. *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons), 755-776.
- Lambourn, Elizabeth A. (2018). *Abraham's Luggage: A Social Life of Things in the Medieval Indian Ocean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

- Larner, John (1999). *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).
- Latini, Brunetto (1993). *The Book of Treasure (Li Livres dou Tresor)*, trans. Paul Barrette and Spurgeon Baldwin (New York: Garland Publishing (Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Series B; 90)).
- Latini, Brunetto (2007). *Tresor*, ed. Pietro G. Beltrami, Paolo Squillaciotti, Plinio Torri, and Sergio Vatteroni (Turin: Giulio Einaudi).
- Martin da Canal (1972). *Les Estoires de Venise: Cronaca veneziana in lingua francese dale origini al 1275*, ed. Alberto Limentani (Florence: Leo S. Olschki).
- Martin da Canal (2009). *Les Estoires de Venise*, trans. Laura K. Morreale (Padua: Unipress (Archivio del Litorale Adriatico; 12)).
- Pauphilet, Albert, ed. (1978). *La Queste del Saint Graal: Roman du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion (Classiques français du moyen âge)).
- Peacock, A. C. S., and Sarah Nur Yildiz (2013). *The Seljuks of Anatolia: Court and Society in the Medieval Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris).
- Peacock, A. C. S., and Sarah Nur Yildiz, eds. (2016). *Literature and Intellectual Life in 14th-15th Century Anatolia* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag).
- Polo, Marco (1903). *The Travels of Marco Polo, a Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, 2 vols., trans. Henry Yule and Henri Cordier (London: John Murray).
- Polo, Marco (1958). *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. Ronald Latham (New York: Penguin).
- Polo, Marco (2001, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009). *Le Devisement du monde*, 6 vols., ed. Philippe Ménard et al. (Geneva: Droz).
- Polo, Marco (2012). *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Illustrated Edition*, ed. Morris Rossabi, trans. Henry Yule, rev. Henri Cordier (New York: Sterling Signature).
- Polo, Marco (2015). *The Travels*, trans. Nigel Cliff (s. l.: Penguin Random House).
- Polo, Marco (2016). *The Description of the World*, trans. Sharon Kinoshita (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Press).
- Polo, Marco (2019). *Le Devisement du monde: Version franco-italienne*, ed. and trans. Joël Blanchard and Michel Quereuil with Thomas Tanase (Geneva: Droz).
- Prange, Sebastian R. (2018). *Monsoon Islam: Trade and Faith on the Malabar Coast* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

- Psaki, F. Regina (2000). "Chivalry and Medieval Italian Romance," in Roberta L. Krueger, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Psaki, F. Regina (2011). "The Book's Two Fathers: Marco Polo, Rustichello da Pisa, and *Le Devisement du Monde*," *Mediaevalia*, 32: 69-97.
- Rabbat, Nasser (2006). "'Aǧīb and Gharīb: Artistic Perception in Medieval Arabic Sources," *The Medieval History Journal*, 9/1: 99-113.
- Rustichello da Pisa (1994). *Il romanzo arturiano di Rustichello da Pisa*, ed. and trans. Fabrizio Cigni (Pisa: Cassa di risparmio di Pisa/Pacini).
- Short, Ian, ed. (2005). "Part I. The Oxford Version," in *La Chanson de Roland/The Song of Roland: The French Corps*, gen. ed. Joseph J. Duggan (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Spiegel, Gabrielle M. (1993). *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Talbot, Cynthia (2001). *Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Thapar, Romila (2005). *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History* (London: Verso).
- Venuti, Lawrence (1995). *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge).
- Vogel, Hans Ulrich (2013). *Marco Polo Was in China: New Evidence from Currencies, Salt and Revenues* (Leiden: Brill (Monies, Markets, and Finance in East Asia, 1600-1900; 2)).
- Warren, Michelle R. (2011). "Prose Romance," in William Burgwinkle, Nicholas Hammond and Emma Wilson, eds. *The Cambridge History of French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 153-163.
- Waters, Claire M., ed. and trans. (2018). *The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Translation* (Petersborough, ON: Broadview Press).
- William of Rubruck (2009). *The Mission of William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253-1255*, trans. Peter Jackson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Press).
- Zadeh, Travis (2010). "The Wiles of Creation: Philosophy, Fiction, and the 'Aǧā'ib Tradition." *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 13/1: 21-48.

# La poétique du voyage dans le *Devisement du monde*: Éléments de style

Danièle James-Raoul

Le projet littéraire de Marco Polo est de mettre sous les yeux de ses lecteurs, en le décrivant avec précision, c'est-à-dire en en distinguant les êtres et les choses, le monde oriental exotique que le voyageur a vu, côtoyé ou approché ; il s'agit de représenter dans le détail, de *deviser*, conformément à la vérité, un ailleurs exotique immense, caractérisé par des gens, des végétaux, des animaux, des us et coutumes particuliers, « moult de grans merveilles de diversetez [des] chosez » (4, 6-7).<sup>1</sup> Pourtant, le *Devisement du monde* ne présente pas cette belle unité descriptive annoncée, attendue, qui aurait été comme à l'image de la réalité orientale profuse offerte au voyageur. Le récit polien est non seulement celui d'un marchand guidé par les affaires, mais aussi celui d'un émissaire diplomate fidèle admirateur de Khoubilai Khan ou encore d'un ethnologue curieux du monde étrange qui l'entoure : son écriture apparaît comme fondamentalement en tension, entre simplicité et complexité, linéarité et détours, flou et précision, sécheresse de l'inventaire et développements descriptifs ou anecdotiques. De fait, la poétique du *Devisement du monde* est placée sous le signe d'une *diverseté* très sensible qui exemplifie en elle-même la variété caractérisant le genre littéraire polymorphe du récit de voyage, qui permet à l'écriture de prendre une multitude de facettes, entre guide de voyage, journal de bord, carnet de route, reportage, dans une multitude de domaines.<sup>2</sup> C'est peut-être dû au fait qu'elle résulte de la mise en œuvre *a posteriori*, tendue sur les fils d'une mémoire sollicitée longtemps après et peut-être soutenue par des

---

<sup>1</sup> Notre édition de référence : Ménard (2001-2009). J'ai ici plaisir à remercier Dominique Lapierre pour m'avoir transmis le texte électronique qu'elle a réalisé de cette édition.

<sup>2</sup> Richard (1981).



notes prises sur le vif des déplacements, d'une collaboration demeurant vague entre le voyageur vénitien, Marco Polo, censé dicter son récit, et l'écrivain compilateur arthurien, Rustichello da Pisa, censé le rédiger. C'est sous l'angle de ces tensions que je voudrais examiner, dans cette étude, le style du récit polien dans la version française du manuscrit *BI*, composée vers 1310-1311, du vivant du voyageur, style composite, si divers qu'il va parfois jusqu'à donner l'impression d'être démultiplié, en restreignant mon attention à trois points qui donnent au *Devisement du monde* son originalité : les instances narratives, démultipliées à l'envi de manière complexe ; le façonnage lexical et syntaxique chargé de donner accès, autant que possible, à un inconnu fantasmatique ; les balancements incessants entre la ligne droite et les détours, voire les boucles du récit.

## **Raconter, écrire un témoignage : Il, je, nous et les autres**

Si la démultiplication des instances narratives tend à faire reposer la responsabilité de la vérité du propos sur l'auteur, sujet parlant et voyant, et non sur le scribe ou l'écrivain, sujet enregistreur et écrivant, elle permet aussi de mieux saisir la spécificité littéraire du récit polien.

Le protocole de lecture est clairement donné dans le prologue ; il fonde le récit de voyage sur un témoignage véridique afin de mettre sous les yeux du lecteur le monde singulier et pour lors inconnu dans lequel le voyageur a évolué :

Pour savoir la pure verité des diverses regions du monde, si prenez cest livre [...] : si trouverez les grandesimes merveilles qui [y] sont escriptes [...], si comme nostre livres [vous] contera tout par ordre [apertement] des que mesires Marc Pol, sajes et nobles sitoiens de Venice, raconte pour ce que il les vit ; mais auques il y a choses qu'il ne vit pas, mais [l']entendi d'ommes certains par verité. Et pour ce, me trons nous les choses veues pour veues, et l'entendue pour entendue, a ce que nostre livre soit vrais et veritables, sanz nule mençonge. (Prologue, 1-13)

Le premier chapitre commence ainsi, de manière symptomatique, par « Il fu voirs » (1, 1), à quoi fait directement écho le début du chapitre 19, après les premiers chapitres récapitulants à grands traits le long séjour des Polo : « Il est voirs ... ».<sup>3</sup> L'affirmation de la vérité est omniprésente, tout au long du récit : « ce est chose veritable » (25, 9) ; « ainsi est la veritez » (25, 17-18) ; on compte 37 occurrences du substantif *verité*, 50 de l'adjectif ou l'adverbe *voir*, 5 de l'adjectif *veritable* et 2 de l'adverbe *voirement*. Des précisions sur la délégation des témoignages sont même parfois données comme une sorte de gage à la traçabilité et à la fiabilité de la source (p. ex., en 151, 9-16, au sujet de la lettre de la reine de Hangzhou à Baian, qui la transmet au Grand Khan et dont Marco Polo a connaissance, « puis le dit et le sot »). Le récit suit plus ou moins le voyageur et le fait que celui-ci ne soit pas allé dans tel ou tel endroit cautionne parfois les réticences du récit, parfois non :

[...] plus ne vous en conterons ne des yllés, pour ce que trop sont desvoiables lieux, et pour ce aussi que le dit mesire Marc Pol n'i fu pas. (160, 64-67)

Ces allégations ont beau faire partie de l'appareillage rhétorique traditionnel d'un récit dont on veut asseoir l'autorité, d'autant plus sujette à caution que la matière en est un continent inconnu, de longue date propice aux fables et aux inventions mensongères, on ne peut qu'être frappé par cette insistance. La démarque de l'énonciateur, pour être typique des écrivains médiévaux qui affirment leur emprise sur leur manière de *conter* une histoire, est nette :

[...] qui le diroit autrement, ce seroit bourde et fable. (59, 35-36)  
 [...] ce sont dé choses veritables sanz nulle fable. (156, 77)

---

<sup>3</sup> Cette formule, au présent de vérité générale ou au passé simple, revient régulièrement dans le récit, sous la responsabilité de l'instance énonciative, parfois renforcée en *bien fu voirs* ou *c'est tout voir*. Voir aussi 22, 20 ; 24, 18 ; 25, 1 ; 29, 5 ; 36, 1, 56 ; 42, 1 ; 47, 1 ; 51, 6 ; 59, 13 ; 63, 6, 11-12 ; 69, 105 ; 74, 99 ; 75, 11 ; 81, 21 ; 84, 15 ; 87, 1 ; 91, 1 ; 94, 47 ; 95, 1 ; 97, 120-121 ; 101, 1, 7-8 ; 103, 7 ; 107, 14 ; 113, 10 ; 114, 83-84 ; 120, 6 ; 134, 12-13 ; 138, 1 ; 148, 11 ; 149, 17 ; 161, 10 ; 169, 54 ; 178, 18 ; 184, 22 ; 187, 21-22 ; 193a, 1.

Parce que le conteur-voyageur, Marc Pol, est à la source de ce récit dont il assume la responsabilité (dès le prologue), il y est nommé une soixantaine de fois,<sup>4</sup> de façon prépondérante au début, dans les quarante premiers chapitres, avec près des deux tiers des occurrences et, un peu, en saupoudrage, dans le *Livre d'Ynde* (une dizaine d'occurrences y trouvent place) : la récurrence des premières mentions correspond précisément à la mise en place de l'histoire telle qu'elle est d'abord racontée à grands traits et institue Marco Polo en personnage essentiel à la confection du livre. Les rubriques accueillent et mettent en valeur 9 de ces occurrences ;<sup>5</sup> 10 autres se logent à l'ouverture des chapitres, dans la première phrase, ce qui contribue à placer le voyageur sur le devant de la scène. Le jeune *baceler* qu'il est au début du récit est simplement appelé par son prénom *Marc*, éventuellement précédé de l'appellatif *messire*, qui inscrit d'emblée le respect dû à un riche héritier, accompagnant son père et son oncle. Puis le succès de la première mission que le Grand Khan a confiée au jeune homme autorise la description définie *messire Marc Pol* qui, après quelques tâtonnements dans l'écriture, s'impose et devient définitive sous la plume de Rustichello ;<sup>6</sup> c'est l'avis élogieux du souverain et de son entourage qui déclenche cette nouvelle appellation empreinte de considération, comme si le jeune émissaire avait réussi là une initiation lui donnant son nom, schéma narratif prometteur qui rappelle ce que l'on observe pour quelques héros arthuriens :<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> On compte précisément 59 occurrences de ce nom propre, à quoi l'on peut adjoindre 3 occurrences du prologue mentionnant Thibaut de Chepoy.

<sup>5</sup> Par comparaison, on signalera que 39 rubriques contiennent la mention du *Grand Khan* dans le même manuscrit.

<sup>6</sup> On compte ainsi 27 occurrences de *Marc* ou *mes(s)ire(s) Marc* : 1, 4 ; 4, 8 ; 9, 22 ; 10, rubr., 5 ; 11, rubr. (avec correction) ; 12, 15 ; 13, rubr., 1 ; 14, rubr., 2, 15 ; 15, rubr., 1 ; 16, rubr., 1, 29 ; 17, rubr., 1, 31, 36, 45 ; 18, rubr., 2, 17, 60-61 ; 146, 23 ; 35 occurrences de *messire Marc Pol* : 3 dans le prologue relatif à Thibaut de Chepoy (présent dans d'autres mss de la version française) ; Prol., 7, 20 ; 16, 10, 13 ; 30, 12 (avec correction) ; 31, 34 ; 35, 69 ; 40, 5 ; 59, 16, 18 ; 61, 35 ; 104, 1-2 ; 125, 2-3 ; 143, 11 ; 145, rubr., 23-24, 31, 56-57, 95 ; 146, 18 ; 151, 15-16 ; 152, 32 ; 156, 79 ; 160, 66-67 ; 161, 50-51 ; 165, 74, 79, 144, 170, 177 (avec correction) ; 185, 37 ; 194d, 9.

<sup>7</sup> On pourrait citer ici, entre autres, Perceval, Lancelot dans le roman en prose éponyme et son correspondant allemand Lanzelet, Guinglain le bel Inconnu, Énide ...

« Se cilz jones homs vit, il ne puet faillir a estre homme de trop grant senz et de grant valeur », si que pour ce des lors en avant il fu apelez mesure Marc Pol, et ainsi le nommera des ore mais nostre livre, car c'est bien raisons. (16, 7-12)

Or cette dénomination fait en réalité retour dans le livre, servant la cohésion, car c'est celle-là même qui a été employée dès le prologue, c'est le nom de l'éminent commanditaire du livre qui a engagé l'écrivain tenant la plume et dont sont racontées l'histoire, l'ascension, la réussite, aussi l'émancipation vis-à-vis de son père et de son oncle, au moins comme héros du récit.<sup>8</sup>

L'apparition et la nomination du personnage sont justifiées parce que *le dit Marc Pol* est au centre du livre dont il est à la fois le sujet et l'objet, le conteur et le personnage :

[...] .I. filz de .XV. ans, lequel avoit non Marc de cui cest livre parole. (9, 21-22)

[...] le dit Marc Pol, celui meismes de qui nostre livre parle [...]. (143, 11-12)

[...] messire Nicholas Pol et messire Mafe, son frere, et mesure Marc Pol, filz du dit messire Nicholas Pol, ceulz de qui cestui livre est es[cr]it [...]. (145, 22-25)

L'explicit spécifique des manuscrits des familles *A2*, *A4* et *D*, « Et atant fine mesure Marc Pol », en témoigne avec éclat, évinçant complètement l'écrivain. Marco Polo est ainsi convoqué pour ses actions qui interviennent directement dans la rédaction à venir : il est celui qui voyage, parfois de manière périlleuse, celui qui voit et entend, interroge et recueille les témoignages des autres. Une certaine familiarité s'instaure, marquée par le démonstratif *ledit*, qui précède et distingue sa mention à 18 reprises.<sup>9</sup> Contrairement à ce que l'on observe dans d'autres versions, comme la version

<sup>8</sup> 22 occurrences du nom du voyageur interviennent dans le sillage ou en précession du nom de son père et/ou de son oncle, ou encore en lien avec leur mention. Voir 1, 4-5 ; 9, 20-22 ; 10, rubr., 4-5 ; 11, rubr. ; 12, 15 ; 13, rubr., 1 ; 14, rubr., 2, 15-17 ; 15, 1 ; 17, rubr., 1, 35-36 ; 18, rubr. ; 61, 34-35 ; 145, rubr., 22-24, 30-32, 55-57, 94-96.

<sup>9</sup> Sur l'emploi spécifique de ce démonstratif en moyen français, tantôt agglutiné et tantôt désagglutiné par les éditeurs de notre texte, voir Marchello-Nizia (1979), 312.

franco-italienne, on n'observe pas de mention associant explicitement ce nom à un *je* narratorial,<sup>10</sup> ce qui donne l'impression que le voyageur « joue le rôle d'une autorité muette ». <sup>11</sup> Des jeux de miroirs ou de mises en abyme intéressants se mettent en place dans les premiers chapitres, donnant une singulière profondeur au récit et organisant aussi la transmission des informations entre différentes instances : dès l'abord inscrit dans une généalogie et emmené tout jeune homme par son père et son oncle jusqu'au Grand Khan, Marco Polo devient bientôt lui-même émissaire du Grand Khan à travers son royaume ; il raconte ses aventures, ce qu'il a vu et entendu au Grand Khan d'abord, à Rustichello ensuite et enfin, par rebond, à ses lecteurs ; il nourrit le livre qu'il a fait écrire, que nous avons entre les mains et qui parle de lui.

La mention du nom *Marc Pol* va aussi de pair avec la nécessité sous-jacente d'établir d'emblée une assise soignée de l'*ethos* de ce jeune marchand, qui pourrait être un personnage de roman, étant donné sa vie hors du commun, mais qui demeure finalement un être assez lisse dont les sentiments restent soigneusement cachés : distingué par l'empereur, il est promis à un destin exceptionnel parce qu'il est « homme de trop grant senz et de grande valeur ». <sup>12</sup> Le récit adopte systématiquement une perspective encomiastique et est particulièrement élogieux sur les qualités du personnage (qui, certes, est aussi aux commandes du livre...). Il insiste à plusieurs reprises sur trois d'entre elles : d'abord, son amour de la vérité et sa fiabilité, <sup>13</sup> comme on l'a vu ; ensuite, sa sagesse pleine de prudence, <sup>14</sup> appuyée sur son savoir (ce verbe lui est souvent attribué) <sup>15</sup> et son intelligence, entre autres exemplifiés par son apprentissage rapide des coutumes, de plusieurs langues et de quatre écritures, par son rôle et celui de sa famille dans la prise de la cité de Xiangyang après un siège de six ans ; enfin, son côté sympathique et avenant (« de si biau portement », 15, 9) qui font qu'il plaît

<sup>10</sup> Eusebi (2018). Voir les chapitres XL, CXXV, CLI, CLII, CLXI, CLVI. Pour de plus amples comparaisons sur le sujet, voir notamment Ménard (2013a), 250-253.

<sup>11</sup> Id., (2013b), 76.

<sup>12</sup> 16, 8-9.

<sup>13</sup> 16, 2-3, 18-20.

<sup>14</sup> Voir 15, 6, 9, 13 ; 16, 6, 25 ; 17, 37.

<sup>15</sup> Voir Prologue, 20 ; 15, 4, 5, 14, 22 ; 16, 5, 18, 29, 31 ; 36, 45 ; 151, 16 ; 156, 79, 83, 84.

beaucoup à l'empereur et devient en un rien de temps son favori. Rien sur son courage, son esprit d'entreprise, sa souplesse, son humanisme, son sens des affaires, qualités qui devaient pourtant être sans doute les siennes également ... Que ces compliments soient fondés ou non – on aurait mauvaise grâce à les récuser étant donné le parcours hors du commun réalisé par le Vénitien –, on ne peut s'empêcher de remarquer qu'ils dessinent précisément les qualités minimales requises de l'orateur par l'*ars rhetorica*, pour que celui-ci puisse bien disposer son auditoire, le captiver, le charmer, lui plaire, emporter son adhésion ... Il y aurait peut-être là une touche subtile, peut-être du marchand qui endosse prioritairement les qualités d'un écrivain, peut-être de l'écrivain pisan qui accorde ses propres caractéristiques à son commanditaire.

Le fait est que celui qui aurait pu n'être qu'un scribe sans épaisseur, quasi transparent dans le projet de mise en écrit qui lui était confié, va s'arroger, comme instance narrative omniprésente, une place importante et voyante dans un récit qu'il tend à « s'approprier ».<sup>16</sup>

Face au personnage de Marco Polo, face à ce *lui*, se tient l'écrivain, Rustichello da Pisa : il est celui qui procède à la *mise en écrit* voulue par Marco Polo (Prologue, 21), expression disant le travail d'écriture sur une matière donnée préalablement.<sup>17</sup> Comme tel, le Pisan s'inscrit aussi dans une communauté professionnelle et artistique, parce que le choix de cette formulation rappelle précisément celle que l'on observe dans nombre de prologues de fictions médiévales antérieures ou contemporaines : à défaut d'être des créateurs, les auteurs s'affichent comme des écrivains. À deux reprises notables, dans des circonstances semblables de commentaires métanarratifs, Rustichello est convoqué à la troisième personne pour signaler sa fonction essentielle : son nom, mentionné dans le prologue, *Mesire Rasta pysan*, est associé à une entreprise de rédaction commanditée par le

<sup>16</sup> Ménard (2013a), 250 ; Segre (2008), 12, considère que Rusticchello, en disant *je*, « riprendre possesso » du récit.

<sup>17</sup> Aussi employée en 69, 135 et 156, 75. Ailleurs, on trouve des expressions mentionnant le fait d'*escrire*, soit rapporté à l'instance narrative de première personne, soit à la voix passive, l'action étant présentée comme un résultat : 70, 35 ; 115, 42, 45-46, 50, 51-52 ; 129, 56 ; 145, 25 ; 146, 38 ; 151, 146-147, 160, 17.

Vénitien (« fist retraire »<sup>18</sup>) ; le choix de *maître* pour parler de lui comme enregistrant le récit transmis apparaît juste avant d'aborder la partie consacrée à l'Inde :

Et le maistre le mettra tout ainsi apertement comme le dit messire Marc Pol le conte et pour ce que il le set bien [...]. (156,77-79)

Dans les deux cas, le dédoublement ainsi opéré par celui qui tient la plume crée une mise à distance valant pour argument d'autorité. Le plus souvent cependant, Rustichello s'exprime sous une première personne *je* qui, comme Valeria Bertolucci Pizzorusso l'a bien montré pour la version franco-italienne, semble être fondamentalement l'écrivain face au voyageur.<sup>19</sup> C'est en général le cas dans la version française, même si le *je* conteur me semble aisément pouvoir être, ici et là, un amalgame subtil de l'écrivain et du voyageur.

J'ai relevé 475 occurrences de ce *je*, explicite (c'est-à-dire mentionné) ou implicite (quand il est omis mais que le verbe régi est à la première personne du singulier), dans le récit de notre version manuscrite – chiffre bien sûr susceptible d'erreur, mais qui souligne, au moins de manière relative, l'investissement du récit par cette instance narrative, voire son envahissement, et qui suggère aussi, sans doute, le caractère oral secondaire de ce récit de voyage. Le narrateur demeure rarement caché, comme dans cette question rhétorique : « Pourquoi ont il ce non ? » (35, 29-30). Deux occurrences sont véritablement problématiques, à cause du statut normalement extradiégétique du narrateur. La première, qui régit le verbe *veoir*, est vraiment litigieuse, parce qu'elle réfère à l'évidence au voyageur qui a été en présence du roi de Coromandel, non au narrateur porte-plume :<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Prologue, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1989), 209-242. On notera que les deux seuls possessifs correspondant au *je* le soulignent : « mon conte » (69, 136), « ce mien livre » (36, 95).

<sup>20</sup> Cette formulation qui met le narrateur en position d'agent voyant semble propre aux manuscrits *B1* et *B2* : elle n'apparaît pas dans la version franco-italienne, et n'est pas retenue dans les manuscrits de la famille *A* et *D* ; le passage n'est pas conservé dans la famille *C*. J'ai relevé par ailleurs trois cas litigieux similaires dans la version franco-italienne où intervient un *je vi* : LIX, 11 ; CXLVI, 5 et CXC, 14.

[...] ce que je vi porter sus lui d'or et de pierres et de pelles, si valent plus d'une cité. (169, 79-81)

La confusion, ou, peut-être, la fusion est ici patente, le narrateur se donnant pour homodiégétique, au cœur du récit, à la fois témoin et acteur, et suggère, par récurrence, que le *je* de la version française du *Devisement du monde* peut aussi bien cacher, ici et là, le personnage Marco Polo. La seconde occurrence peut faire débat, dans la mesure où le sujet régit la périphrase au présent de narration *veul entrer* :

Or vous laisserons de cestes contrees et de ces parties, pour ce que, se nous alons avant, nous enterrions en Ynde, et je n'i veul ore pas entrer pour ce que, a nostre retour, les conterons toutes par ordre d'Ynde. (48, 25-29)

Cette formulation ne peut se concevoir au sens propre si l'on envisage sous le *je* l'écrivain Rustichello – c'est alors obligatoirement le *je* du voyageur Marco Polo qui parle –, mais, dans son acception métaphorique, elle demeure passable pour le Pisan, d'autant qu'elle intervient de surcroît dans une phrase où la narration hésite entre le *je* et le *nous*, passant de l'un à l'autre, comme dans une subtile décoloration, j'y reviendrai.<sup>21</sup>

Le narrateur *je* est essentiellement confiné dans les tâches traditionnelles qui lui incombent et la palette des verbes régis (à tous les temps) est fort restreinte : *dire, conter, deviser, moustrer, nommer, escrire, commencer, oublier (a dire / conter / escrire), soi en passer outre (a conter)* ; les semi-auxiliaires interviennent similairement en lien direct avec cette même activité de production du récit : *faire lonc conte / a savoir, savoir conter, voloir conter / commencer a conter / deviser / retourner a [s]on conte*, et, une seule fois, dans l'exemple cité précédemment, *entrer*. Seul le verbe *croire*, qui modalise à trois reprises le discours,<sup>22</sup> insuffle quelque sentiment, le narrateur hasardant par là un commentaire subjectif. Fondamentalement, au moins de manière explicite, le narrateur *je* ne s'affirme pas comme individu dirigé par ses sentiments. Il produit le récit,

<sup>21</sup> Notons ici que la version franco-italienne présente la même configuration des pronoms personnels en XLVIII, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Voir 92, 75 ; 151, 143 ; 165, 146.



l'anime, le régite. Se signaler avec autant de dynamisme et de force, c'est mettre en évidence un rôle qui aurait pu lui échapper, bien sûr, mais c'est aussi entrer directement en concurrence avec celui qui est par ailleurs donné comme le détenteur du récit, le *conteur* Marco Polo, c'est entretenir savamment, aussi, la confusion sur l'identité du *je* qui s'exprime, comme dans les occurrences où le récit dépend d'une volonté :<sup>23</sup>

Et pour ce que je ne vous ai pas conté touz leur faiz des ydolastres, le vous veul je conter. (61, 13-14)

Porte-plume choisi comme tel, le *je* ne cesse de dire qu'il raconte, de manière omniprésente, comme l'indique la haute fréquence avec laquelle le verbe déclaratif *dire* au présent de l'indicatif sertit, non sans lourdeur, le propos.<sup>24</sup> Mais en fait, avec ces *je di*, *je vous di*, l'énonciation met en relief l'énoncé autant que le moi :

Mais je vous di qu'ele n'est pas saine province, mais enferme durement. (19, 7-8)

La province est toute plaine de granz montaignes et de [moult] estrois pas et fors, si que je vous di que onques li Tartar ne porrent avoir la seignourie entierement. (22, 28-31)

Et sachiez que cest plain que je vous di est moult chaut lieu. (35, 6-7)

Parfois usurpant même, ici et là, une responsabilité concernant la véracité transmise (*je vous di sanz faille / pour certain*),<sup>25</sup> le *je* souligne aussi de son autorité un fait difficilement croyable.

<sup>23</sup> Au total, on note 8 occurrences où s'affirme la volonté du *je* disant. Voir aussi 24, 53 ; 36, 80, 94 ; 48, 27 ; 69, 136 ; 75, 1 ; 82, 25.

<sup>24</sup> On compte 122 occurrences du verbe *dire* à la première personne du singulier, au présent de l'indicatif, souvent introduites par la coordination *et*, qui relance le propos dans un effet d'hyperbate (*et vous di ...*), ou l'adverbe *si*, qui construit l'énoncé comme logiquement issu de celui qui le précède, donné comme présupposé admis (*Si vous di ...*). Voir Marchello-Nizia (1985). Parfois, les mentions s'accumulent en grappe, comme en 160, 34, 40, 43, 67 ; 165, 53, 55, 76, 117, 140, 169 ; 166, 6, 8. On constate pourtant que la récurrence de ces *je di* est quatre fois moins importante dans la version française examinée que dans la version franco-italienne où j'ai relevé 485 occurrences (en ne considérant que la portion allant jusqu'au chapitre CCIV, § 2, ce qui correspond *grosso modo* au texte de la version française).

<sup>25</sup> Voir, par exemple, 18, 48 ; 93, 30 ; 138, 73-74.

S'arrogant le choix de la conduite d'un récit qui ne lui a pourtant été que transmis, le *je* assure aussi des fonctions de régie narrative, partagées équitablement entre annonces (164 verbes à P1 au futur, auxquels on peut rajouter les 8 occurrences de présent-futur du type *je veul conter*) et rappels (175 au passé).<sup>26</sup> Il fait de la réclame pour ce qui va suivre (*je vous dirai, je vous conterai, je vous deviseray* : ces trois verbes totalisent plus de 93 % des occurrences au futur). Il rappelle ou récapitule ce qu'il a dit (*si comme je vous ay dit, que je vous ai dit, Or vous ay conté de, Or vous ai devisé, que je vous ai nommé...*) ou, exceptionnellement, écrit (*comme je vous ay escript*). Dans toutes les occurrences, le verbe *dire*, qui a le spectre sémantique le plus générique, est employé environ deux fois plus que le verbe *conter* (les autres verbes étant peu récurrents) : ce qui importe, c'est d'appuyer le propos de manière brute. Le récit fait ainsi des bonds en avant ou des rappels en arrière incessants, le narrateur tissant des liens solides entre les différents épisodes, charpentant la cohésion, soulageant la mémoire de son auditoire ou de ses lecteurs. D'une manière d'écrire qui semble symptomatique de Rustichello, on constate aussi, comme dans les romans de chevalerie, la présence de formules narratoriales d'abrégement du discours comme *Que vous (en) diroie je ?*<sup>27</sup> ou *Pour coi vous en feroie lonc conte ?*,<sup>28</sup> ou une de leurs variantes. Ce genre d'intervention dessine un sujet à respecter, qui exerce sa pression sur le scribe et influe sur le régime de l'écriture : la *matiere* du propos est souveraine, digne d'intérêt,<sup>29</sup> inépuisable (*car / mais trop seroit longue matire*)<sup>30</sup> ou, au contraire – et c'est le cas le plus fréquent –, déjà épuisée dans les lignes précédentes (*Autre.s chose.s n'i a, Autre chose n'i a qui a r.a.mentevair / raconter / conter-face*).<sup>31</sup> Sans doute, n'est-il pas inintéressant de noter, d'une part, que ce

<sup>26</sup> À sept exceptions près, les verbes sont au passé composé : ce sont donc essentiellement des accomplis du présent, en lien direct avec l'énonciation.

<sup>27</sup> 11, 10 ; 14, 1 ; 18, 52 ; 51, 35 ; 64, 8 ; 78, 1, 15 ; 120, 36 ; 122, 18 ; 138, 45-46 ; 145, 70 ; 158, 32 ; 193a, 9, 76 ; 194a, 18.

<sup>28</sup> 14, 18-19 ; 65, 23 ; 78, 61 ; 121, 10.

<sup>29</sup> P. ex., 97, 48-50 : « Encore vous conteray je une autre chose que je vous avoie oublié a dire et a conter, qui bien fait a ramentevoir en ceste matere ».

<sup>30</sup> 20, 14-16 ; 28, 57 ; 156, 54-55.

<sup>31</sup> Voir 52, 6 ; 55, 20 ; 60, 4 ; 105, 19-20 ; 109, 24 ; 116, 84-85 ; 123, 5-6, 34-35 ; 125, 20-21 ; 128, 21-22 ; 129, 4-5 ; 131, 16 ; 132, 6 ; 133, 7-8 ; 136, 18 ; 137, 11-12 ; 140, 15 ; 141, 11-

dernier type de phraséologie, qui souligne moins une impossibilité de la langue ou une incapacité de l'écrivain qu'une inutilité du discours, est en particulier très répandu sous la plume de nombre d'écrivains arthuriens contemporains, comme l'est précisément Rustichello, d'autre part, que d'autres auteurs de récits de voyages ne les emploient pas avec une telle fréquence (je n'en ai pas relevé dans le *Voyage aux Indes* de Niccolo de' Conti mis en forme par Bracciolini,<sup>32</sup> et en ai trouvé très peu dans le *Voyage en Asie* d'Odoric de Pordenone traduit par Jean Le Long,<sup>33</sup> où l'instance narrative souligne en revanche fréquemment qu'il ne dit ou n'écrit pas tout).<sup>34</sup>

Le *je* exerce enfin une fonction phatique qui, bien qu'attendue, prend une ampleur considérable dans ce récit de voyage. Il interpelle constamment par le *vous* le public occidental destinataire, ce qui induit de manière originale une certaine vivacité dans le récit polien et laisse envisager, à son tour, une réception tant orale qu'écrite de l'ouvrage.<sup>35</sup> On compte 802 occurrence de ce *vous*, sujet ou régime, éventuellement implicite dans des verbes conjugués à cette P5 de l'indicatif ou de l'impératif : contrairement à ce que propose par exemple à son début le prologue de la version franco-italienne (« Seingnors, enperaor et rois, dux et marquois, cuens, chevalers et b[o]rj[i]ois, et toutes gens qe volés savoir ... »), ce *vous* n'est pas précisé dans la version française. Comme un jongleur traditionnel, le *je* sollicite l'écoute en annonçant du spectaculaire ou en transformant en événement le simple fait, marquant son rôle de metteur en scène : *et orrez comment /*

---

12 ; 143, 19 ; 144, 13-14 ; 146, 35 ; 150, 31-32, 44 ; 153, 12, 25, 42-43, 59 ; 154, 50, 60 ; 155, 24 ; 161, 56-57 ; 163, 5-6, 19 ; 164, 17 ; 165, 172-173 ; 166, 11-12 ; 168, 151 ; 171, 55 ; 174, 38 ; 175, 10-11 ; 180, 12 ; 181, 5 ; 190, 7 ; 191, 12-13. On notera, dans le même ordre, des formulations telles que « Or vous ai conté tout le fait de ces provinces ... que plus n'i a matiere » (70, 31-33) ; « Or nous partirons de ceste matiere puis que nous le vous avons contee » (133, 53-54) ; « sanz aventure trouver qui a conter face » (120, 39-40).

<sup>32</sup> Guéret-Laferté (2004).

<sup>33</sup> Andreose et Ménard (2010). P. ex., « qui trop seroient longues a raconter » (II, 21-22).

<sup>34</sup> Voir entre autres VIII, 16-17 ; IX, 38-39 ; XI, 25-27, 52-53, 71-74 ; XIII, 4 ; XVI, 54-56 ; XIX, 29-30 ; XX, 34-38 ; XXI, 29-30 ; XXXIV, 12 (« tant ... que nul ne porroit croire »).

<sup>35</sup> Comme Philippe Ménard l'a bien remarqué (2013a, 252), les verbes *oïr* et *entendre* ayant pour sujet ce *vous* sont récurrents dans la version française. On notera la coordination entre *entendre* ou *oïr* et *lire* en Prologue, 14 (« qui ce livre orra ou lira le doie croire ») et 124, Rubr. (« si comme vous le porrez entendre et lire »).

*quel*,<sup>36</sup> (*si*) *comme vous orrez / si orrez comment / si comme vous porrez oïr / vous avez entendu / oÿ*,<sup>37</sup> *veez / pouez veoir*,<sup>38</sup> *sachiez*,<sup>39</sup> *ne vous merveilliez*.<sup>40</sup>

Aux côtés du *je*, un *nous* prend assez facilement le relais comme instance narrative : on en compte 343 occurrences, majoritairement dévolues à des verbes déclaratifs, secondairement à des verbes de mouvement. Face à la mention de l'autre, ce Marc Pol implanté dans le domaine de la locution, ce pronom pluriel est d'abord possiblement exclusif, correspondant à une première personne du singulier emphatique, dite de majesté, qui correspondrait au seul écrivain. Les verbes déclaratifs ou en rapport avec l'écriture, dont il est le sujet, suggèrent cette interprétation :

Or vous conterons de son affaire selonc ce meïsmes que mesure Marc Pol oÿ conter a pluseurs hommes de ces contrees. (40, 3-6)

[Des] .II. royaumes de l'autre partie de celle ylle ne vous conterons riens pour ce que le dit [messire] Marc Pol n'i fu pas. (165, 177-178)

On notera que ce pronom trouve place avec bonheur dans les marques de régie présentes dans les formules de fin de chapitre ou d'abrégement du discours – ce qui est assez traditionnel (et relève également des domaines du *je*, comme on l'a vu). Il se déploie par prédilection dans le futur des effets d'annonces (avec 276 occurrences), indiquant par là que l'écrivain domine son sujet et peut anticiper sur la suite, comme s'il connaissait celle-ci :

<sup>36</sup> 36, 95-96 ; 59, 12-13 ; 62, 17 ; 103, ...

<sup>37</sup> 7, 32-33 ; 17, 2 ; 27, 2-3 ; 28, 45 ; 39, 29-30 ; 69, 38-39 ; 84, 60 ; 88, 48 ; 92, 163 ; 95, 80 ; 97, Rubr. ; 103, 4 ; 111, 20-21 ; 112, 23-24 ; 114, 120 ; 116, 86-87 ; 119, 134-135 ; 123, 36 ; 124, Rubr., 63-64 ; 129, 64-65 ; 137, 40-41 ; 151, 230-231 ; 156, 87-88 ; 165, 133-134 ; 167, 13 ; 169, 182 ; ...

<sup>38</sup> 26, 35 ; 28, 52-53 ; 75, 14 ; 86, 2, à quoi on peut ajouter une occurrence dans le prologue de Thibaut de Chepoy.

<sup>39</sup> Cet impératif à valeur essentiellement phatique est un marqueur du discours du *je* : ses occurrences sont placées sous sa bannière éditoriale, à trois exceptions près qui figurent dans des propos tenus par des émissaires du Khan. On en compte 224 occurrences (21, 16, 23 ; 32, 1 ; 35, 6, 31 ; 51, 35 ; 54, 12 ; 57, 26, 41, 59 ; 59, 9 ; 61, 14 ...) et certains passages ou longs chapitres en regorgent : 151, consacré à la capitale de Hangzhou (16 occurrences), 169, sur la côte de Coromandel (16 occurrences) et 165, sur l'île de *Jana*, sans doute Sumatra (9 occurrences).

<sup>40</sup> 28, 46.

Or laisons de Mausul, si parlerons de Baudas la grant cité. (23, 26-27)

Ce pronom peut ensuite sembler inclusif en bien des endroits et associer, dans un même élan, le *je* du narrateur et le *vous* du public à qui l'on fait vivre le voyage. Certains possessifs correspondants ne laissent aucun doute : « Nostre Seigneur » (18, 57), « une nostre euvangile » (25, 13), « les nostres » [des faisans] (71, 42), « nostre païs » (73, 31), « Adam nostre premier pere » (75, 9), « nostre temps » (78, 63-64), « nostre langue » (84, 17), « nostre Eglyse » (168, 117), « nostre pape de Romme » (184, 15), etc. L'exemple suivant en témoigne :

Et ainsi mengüent il toutes les autres chars crues, tout aussi bien comme nous mengerions la cuite. (117, 44-46)

Je serais enfin encline à identifier certains emplois de *nous* (ou du possessif correspondant, comme dans *notre livre*, *notre matière*, *notre ylle*, *notre retour*) comme inclusifs de l'écrivain et du voyageur, notamment quand le verbe régi est un verbe de mouvement (ce qui n'advient jamais avec le *je*), comme *aler*, *partir*, *departir*, *entrer*, *chevauchier*, *nagier*. Associant dans un même déplacement, réel et fictif, le voyageur et le scribe, le pronom *nous* suggère que le second épouse parfaitement le projet du Vénitien, qu'il le partage pleinement. La fin du chapitre 130 exemplifie cette interprétation :

Or nous partirons de ci et chevaucurons .III. journées avant vers midi en unne prouvince, [laquelle] est nommée [Cyanglu], dont nous vous conterons ci dessous. (130, 8-11)

L'emploi du déictique spatial *ci*, associé au *nous*, me semble en effet lui aussi remarquable par son ambiguïté : il ne réfère pas explicitement, comme c'est le cas le plus fréquent dans le récit,<sup>41</sup> à l'espace du livre manuscrit, cas traditionnel ; par nature, cet adverbe (comme *ça*) est censé désigner le lieu où se trouve le locuteur de première personne ; dans la réalité du texte, il réfère à l'ailleurs lointain du voyageur. Le *ci* superpose

<sup>41</sup> Cet emploi est celui qui figure systématiquement en tête de chaque rubrique, y compris celle du prologue, et aussi notamment en lien avec un adverbe qui situe le propos plus haut ou plus bas dans le livre : *ci avant*, *ci après*, *ci dessus*, *ci dessous*, etc. J'en relève 32 occurrences.

donc, comme le *nous*, me semble-t-il, l'espace de Marc Pol et celui de Rustichello. Je relève au total 23 emplois similaires de cet embrayeur.<sup>42</sup>

De manière symptomatique, d'ailleurs, la syntaxe opère ici et là des rapprochements entre le *je* et le *nous*, passant de l'un à l'autre dans une même phrase ; on en compte une vingtaine de cas, tant dans la version française que dans la version franco-italienne, ce qui est peu :

Or vous avons conté de la Petite Hermenie, si vous conterai de Turquemanie. (19, 21-22)

[...] l'Arbre Seul, que nous appelons l'Abre Sec et vous dirai comment il est fait. (39, 12-14)

[...] je n'i veul ore pas entrer pour ce que, a nostre retour, les conterons toutes par ordre d'Ynde. (48, 28-29)

Ces télescopages entre pronoms de rang différent, tout à fait courants en langue médiévale, peuvent bien signifier la parfaite identité représentée par les deux pronoms, mais ils suggèrent aussi que la ligne de fracture entre l'écrivain et le voyageur est en réalité fort mince ...

Le livre qui en résulte est bien le fruit de cette collaboration : les déterminants qui accompagnent sa mention le disent clairement, car ils sont versés tour à tour du côté de ces trois instances narratives (*lui, je, nous*), avec des choix qui me semblent parlants. Si les formulations « son livre »<sup>43</sup> ou « ce mien livre »<sup>44</sup> demeurent exceptionnelles, dominent « cest / ce / cestui

<sup>42</sup> Voir 47, 12 ; 53, 10 ; 54, 14 ; 55, 8 ; 112, 22 ; 130, 8 ; 141, 11 ; 142, 11, 21 ; 144, 13 ; 147, 27 ; 149, 34 ; 150, 23, 26, 32 ; 164, 6 ; 169, 49, 54 ; 171, 50 ; 178, 26 (*Yci*) ; 179, 3 ; 180, 8 ; 182, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Prologue de Thibaut de Chepoy ; 194d, 9-10 : « Et atant fine messire Marc Pol son livre de la Division du monde et des merveilles d'icelluy ».

<sup>44</sup> 36, 94-95 : « Or veul commencer a conter des contrees que je nommerai en ce mien livre [...] ».

livre »<sup>45</sup> ou « le livre »<sup>46</sup> et surtout « notre livre »,<sup>47</sup> en emploi dominant dans la deuxième moitié du récit et souvent doté de la même ambiguïté ambiante pour identifier précisément qui est le possesseur :

Et ce vous mousterrai je tout apertement en nostre livre que c'est tout voir ce que je vous ai dit [...]. (75, 10-11)

Et si vous di que le dit Marc Pol, celui meismes de qui nostre livre parle, sejourna en ceste cité de Ianguy [...]. (143, 11-12)

Aussi bien, à la fin du chapitre 65 et au début du chapitre 66, une nouvelle instance narrative prend le relais, *li contes*.<sup>48</sup> Usuelle dans les romans arthuriens en prose, elle donne l'illusion que le texte se délivre de lui-même, comme détaché d'une source individualisante, comme si l'écrivain ou le voyageur-auteur n'avait pas voix au chapitre.

La démultiplication des instances narratives rend ainsi compte d'un partage des tâches plus compliqué qu'il n'y paraît entre Marco et Rustichello, bien plus certainement d'une étroite collaboration qui tend insensiblement à araser les écarts, mais elle assure aussi son unité au récit et génère en définitive de la profondeur, de la mise en perspective.

## Donner accès à la *diverseté* : La précision et le flou dans la *mimesis* de la profusion

Parler ou écrire sur cet Extrême-Orient, encore passablement inconnu du public occidental mais largement fantasmé et ce, de longue date, place d'emblée le locuteur face à un défi d'autant plus grand qu'il n'est pas le

<sup>45</sup> 17 occurrences avec le démonstratif. Voir, p. ex., Prol, 14, 23 ; 1, 10 ; 4, 9 ; 9, 22 ; 28, 59-60 ; 69, 134 ; 115, 42 ; 145, 24.

<sup>46</sup> Dans chacune de ces 4 occurrences, l'article défini a un rôle cataphorique et s'impose en raison d'une caractérisation qui suit le nom à sa droite : livre « que monseigneur Tybault ... » (Prologue de Thibaut de Chepoy) ; « du Grant Caam » (Prologue, Rubr.) ; « DU DEVISEMENT DES DIVERSITEZ que mesure Marc trouva » (18, 60-61) ; « d'Ynde » (157, Rubr.), « nommé du Grant Kaan de la grant cité de Cambalut » (Explicit). On pourrait rattacher à cet ensemble une occurrence supplémentaire (Prol., 26), où l'adjectif relatif dit de liaison *lequel* détermine le nom *livre* en emploi anaphorique.

<sup>47</sup> 19 occurrences sur 46 : Prol., 6 ; 13, 8 ; 16, 11 ; 60, 5 ; 75, 1, 11 ; 96, 36 ; 115, 23, 44 ; 120, 4 ; 129, 56 ; 143, 12 ; 144, 15 ; 146, 39 ; 156, 58, 68 ; 160, 17, 71 ; 167, 11-12.

<sup>48</sup> « Mais ore laisse li contes a parler de ... » (65, 33) et « Or dist li contes que ... » (66, 1).

voyageur : celui de composer avec les défaillances du langage commun, ses limites, ses carences pour faire advenir la nouveauté, l'altérité, la différence, l'extraordinaire. De cette confrontation à une réalité excédant le langage s'ensuit une hésitation incessante, dans le récit polien, entre flou et précision, indéfinition et généralisation, sensible dans le lexique autant que les stratégies syntaxiques.

Certes, les écrivains ont toujours ressenti l'affliction d'une écriture incomplète qui n'arrive à représenter qu'en partialisant et en adaptant ses pauvres moyens au projet fixé : l'incommensurabilité de la réalité (abstraite ou concrète) et du langage occupe une place spécifique dans le *Devisement du Monde*. Il est difficile de savoir à qui attribuer, à celui qui dicte ou à celui qui écrit, la gêne afférente qui s'exprime explicitement à la toute fin du chapitre précédant l'ouverture du *Livre d'Ynde* ; quoi qu'il en soit, cette impuissance larvée qui s'avoue ricoche sur la compréhension du lecteur :

Si en commencerons des maintenant, si comme nous pourrons deviser ne sarons, et comme vous meismes le porrez oïr et entendre. (156, 85-88)

Le moyen le plus simple pour parler de la réalité orientale en se faisant aisément comprendre est d'employer le mot français à disposition. Le vocabulaire qui véhicule l'information à transmettre est, de ce fait, peu recherché, peu technique dans l'ensemble : les mots rares n'en sont que plus remarquables. La bonne compréhension de ces mots est signalée par le fait que peu d'entre eux<sup>49</sup> sont déformés dans les copies manuscrites. À défaut, un mot peut être aussi choisi avec la plus grande extension sémantique possible, pour évoquer approximativement, sous la généralité, la réalité particulière nouvelle, quitte à préciser la dénomination en l'ajustant

---

<sup>49</sup> P. ex., la grille de fer, *greil(le)* ou *graticule* (variante : *craticule*), qui retient la vapeur lors de la fabrication de la tutie, apparaît sous la forme *gravelle* (« gravier ») dans les manuscrits de la famille française B, ce qui laisse supposer que le processus physico-chimique qui est décrit dans le chapitre 38 n'est pas resté complètement intelligible au copiste. L'équipement des maisons par des systèmes de manchons à air posés sur le toit, qui donnent de l'aération, de la fraîcheur, est appelé *ventieres* (192, 8, 9) dans la plupart des manuscrits, mais il devient incidemment *venteles*, *venrieres* et même *ventrieres* dans quelques autres.



par quelque détail descriptif signifiant : les exemples sont nombreux. Déguiser ainsi l'inconnu, c'est aussi gommer d'une certaine façon l'altérité dérangeante, offrir au public le plaisir de la familiarité. Ainsi en est-il du zébu, dont le nom fait défaut dans le vocabulaire français de l'époque, et qui est appelé *buef* (35, 15), mais dont la description (avec la présence de la bosse sur le haut de l'échine) ne laisse aucun doute pour le moderne :<sup>50</sup>

Et vous dirai du buef premierement. Il sont [moult grans et touz blanz comme nois] ; le [poil] ont petit et plain, et ce avient pour le lieu qui est chaut. Il ont les cornes courtes et grosses, non aguës. Entre les espaulles ont une boce roonde et haut[e] bien .II. paumes. Il sont la plus belle chose a veoir du monde et quant il les chargent, il se couchent comme chameus, et puis se lievent avec leur charge, car ce sont moult fors bestes. (35, 15-23)

Parfois, ce choix de placer la réalité vue sous la bannière d'un hyperonyme français est abusif et la narration tend à le dire : les adjectifs *divers* (« différent, étrange ») ou *devisé* (« différent, distingué ») font alors leur apparition, soulignant la différence entre les deux réalités référentes, occidentale et orientale, et l'inadéquation partielle du mot employé, comme un moindre mal dans l'homologie pédagogique. C'est le cas d'une multitude de *choses* (174, 24), de fruits (167, 10), de *bestes* (35, 15 ; 83, 70 ; 169, 228-229, 174, 16 ; 175, 7), d'oiseaux (169, 229), de poules (174, 23) ou encore des *francelins* ou *francolins*, sortes de perdrix à pattes rouges qu'on voit à Rudbar :

Et a ce plain a une generation d'oisiaus que l'on apele francelin, qui sont devisé aus autres francolins du monde, car il sont blanc et noir et les piez et le bec ont vermeil. (35, 11-14)

De même, le nom *unicorne* est prêté, mais fallacieusement, au rhinocéros de Sumatra qui n'a rien à voir avec la *licorne* fabuleuse que l'on appelle

---

<sup>50</sup> Les quelques erreurs du manuscrit *BI*, corrigées d'après d'autres manuscrits, suggèrent la difficulté qu'a eue le copiste à se représenter un tel *bauf*...

ainsi, en Occident. Le narrateur a beau employer le nom canonique d'*unicorne*, au terme de sa description, il ne peut que constater qu'elle « n'est pas si faite, comme nous disons en ce pays » (165, 47-48).

Là où la représentation bute sur l'inconnu, où les mots spécifiques font défaut en français, le cadre analogique, qui rapproche de ce qui est connu du public occidental, permet en effet de faire accéder aux nuances de la réalité. La comparaison fait advenir les notions, elle image simplement, sans nécessité préalable d'une connivence de son destinataire pour comprendre ce qui est dit ; la métaphore, qui permet de dire et de faire sentir autrement, en ramassant l'expression de manière à superposer implicitement des points communs entre comparé et comparant, requiert en revanche la complicité du destinataire pour être comprise et ne pas laisser de doute sur l'analogie fondatrice existant ; elle a un pouvoir subjectif essentiel, dont elle tire sa suggestivité, justement : c'est donc une figure de rhétorique d'un maniement complexe qui peut dérouter dès lors qu'elle réfère à des objets inconnus. Bien sûr, de manière symptomatique, le récit polien s'appuie sur des comparaisons, non sur des métaphores. L'échantillon de comparaison procuré par une réalité banale peut indiquer aisément, de manière didactique, la taille, la couleur, l'éclat, le prix, la fréquence ou toute autre caractéristique du comparant ; il rapproche, fait voir, fait imaginer. Les fruits de l'Arbre sec, arbre mythique venant du fond des temps, qui se serait desséché au moment de la Crucifixion, sont comparés à des bogue de châtaignes, mais vides, tandis que l'arbre en lui-même est jaune « comme [buis] » (39, 16-17). Le « caliphe de touz les Sarrazins du monde » habite à Bagdad « aussi comme a Romme est li sieges des papes des Crestiens » (24, 2-3). Les spécialistes du récit polien réussissent ainsi souvent à retrouver les espèces ou les réalités de la vie décrites même brièvement, même en l'absence du nom adéquat, grâce à des détails signifiants, par exemple la roussette et le vautour royal de Pondichéry dans les oiseaux présentés :<sup>51</sup>

Il ont en ce paÿs oisiaus volans de nuis qui s'appellent chauves souriz,  
et sont aussi granz comme ostours, et leur ostoir si sont tuit noir comme

---

<sup>51</sup> Charignon (1924), III, 197.

corbel, et sont assez plus granz des nostres et bien volant et bien oyselant. (169, 230-234)

Mais parfois les comparaisons n'ont qu'une valeur esthétique évocatrice et ne permettent pas de déterminer le référent avec certitude : girofliers ou théiers confondus ; boas, pythons pour les uns ou plutôt crocodiles pour les autres ... Quelques comparaisons semblent aussi moins abordables pour le public occidental et traduisent la familiarité du voyageur plus que de l'écrivain sans doute, comme celle qui rapproche les palmiers *gomuti* de Sumatra de petits dattiers, arbres que ne connaissent sûrement pas les lecteurs ou auditeurs du *Devisement du monde* :

Sachiez qu'il ont une maniere d'arbres, et quant veulent du vin, si en taillent une branche et metent un pot moult grant a la branche de l'arbre la ou est tailliee la branche. Et en ce jour et en celle nuit s'emple le dit pot et est moult bons a boire ; et s'en y a de blans et de vermaus. Les arbres sont samblables a petis da[d]jiers [...]. (165, 87-93)

Le recours aux néologismes, fondés sur des calques de mots disponibles dans la langue-source, est une autre solution toute trouvée pour faire advenir une réalité nouvelle, trop compliquée pour se loger sous l'un des mots de la tribu ... Ce procédé n'a d'utilité pour le lecteur occidental que si le conteur donne de surcroît la traduction de ces mots translittérés plus ou moins correctement en français, mais cette démarche paraphrastique est systématiquement assurée, ce qui indique bien la volonté pédagogique à l'œuvre ; elle précise même la conversion des valeurs financières :

[...] ont un leur seigneur que il apelent *none*, qui vaut a dire en François quens. (49, 10-11)

[...] si treuvent les messages du seigneur une poste que il appellent iamb et nous disons « poste de chevaux ». (97, 8-10)

[...] il leur en vendent un bien .V<sup>C</sup>. pois d'or, qui valent plus de .C. pois que nous disons mars d'argent. (169, 122-124)

Certains noms propres ne demeurent pas en reste, une traduction ou une périphrase descriptive, voire une explication, leur enlevant toute opacité :

[...] il trouva un chastel qui est appelez Cala Acopensten, qui vaut a dire en françois chastiaus de les aourous dou feuc, et ce est bien leur non car les gens de cest chastiau aourent le feu. (30, 18-21)

[...] la mer de Cin, qui vaut a dire la mer qui est encontre le Manzy [car ou langage de ces isles] quant il dien[t] Cin [c'est a dire le Mangy]. (160, 31-33)

[...] et l'appellent Sagomam Boucam, qui vaut a dire « Sagomam saint ». (168, 114-115)

Le principe didactique de l'anaphore associative permet en particulier de faire entrer par effraction ce type de nouveautés lexicales à la suite de noms connus, le plus souvent des hyperonymes, comme dans un paradigme. Par exemple, sont ainsi évoqués de nombreux types particuliers de *dras* ou de *soies*, dont les noms rares, d'origine persane, arabe ou asiatique, varient au fil de l'espace : la soie *guele* (22, 51), précisément une soie jaune « du Geluchelan », celle qui s'appelle *moselin* (23, 19), « de Mosul », ou *jasoy* (33, 3), « fabriquée à Yezd », les tissus *nasich* et *nac* ou *nasque* (24, 14 et 73, 43), qui désignent des « brocards d'or », et *quermesis* (24, 15), qui sont quant à eux rouge cramoisi. Les italianismes, quant à eux, ne sont jamais glosés, ce qui suggère leur parfaite intégration dans la langue de celui qui parle autant que de celui qui écrit. Soigneusement relevés dans notre édition, ils concernent en particulier la direction dans l'espace (*tramontane*, *levant*, *maistre*, *ponent*, *garbin*, *seloc*, etc.), la mer et les marins (*able*, *arbre*, *ars*, *bras*, *caneve*, *capdoiles*, *chausine*, *compas*, *coursaus*, etc.), des nouveautés et faits de civilisation des pays décrits (*cendal*, *cha(s)cion*, *esportes*, *forestier*, *generation*, *patarin*, *soupost*, *ventiere*, etc.). Mais, à part ces quelques exemples, le vocabulaire approprié, non véhiculé jusque-là dans les textes encyclopédiques, fait défaut, de manière indéniable, notamment dans les domaines de la biodiversité animale et végétale.

Certaines réalités restent ainsi inaccessibles, comme tous ces oiseaux « que nous ne savons nommer » (36, 8-9) ou ces « moult beaux fruiz de plusieurs manieres moult bons et assez de grant maniere » (29, 21-23) ; d'autres restent douteuses, comme le *rokh* rapproché du griffon, qui, pour les gens du Moyen Âge, est l'oiseau fabuleux par excellence :

Et l'appellent la gent des illes « ruc » et n'a autre non, pour quoi je ne sai s'il est plus de si granz oisiaus ou se il sont les oysiaus gris. (185, 43-46)

Les procédés de suppléance témoignent quant à eux de la loi du moindre effort et contribuent à leur façon à entretenir le flou dans un mode généralisant, qui est celui de la mention ou de la notation lapidaire, non pas de la description. De façon banale, ils font intervenir tout un matériel lexicosyntaxique fondé sur l'indétermination et caractérisé par une extension large englobante, voire maximale : pronoms et adjectifs indéfinis (*tout, maint, plusieurs, autre, autel*), pronom neutre démonstratif *ce*, substantifs *choses, marchandises, appareil, affaire*. La somme des informations qui nous sont transmises semble parfois trouver sa justification dans l'énonciation plus que dans l'énoncé, comme dans le propos suivant où la référenciation échappe :

Et si vous di en verité que l'affaire de ceste province est si grant de toutes choses, et aussi du grant droit que le Grant Sire y a chascun an, que a painnes se porroit escripre. (151, 140-143)

Ces formulations interviennent notamment pour mettre un terme à une série accumulative, un propos hyperbolique ou superlatif que celui qui parle ou écrit juge impossible ou inutile de donner intégralement. Mais, par là-même, elles créent aussi une ouverture, un prolongement du discours sur un inconnu dont le lecteur peut tenter de poursuivre la représentation en imagination, à son gré, en exploitant ce qui lui a été déjà donné. Tantôt la suppléance clôt l'énumération, évite toute précision : *et tous autres ... , de toutes manieres / façons, de pluisours manieres / façons, comme mestier leur est, a leur usance, a leur volenté, qui besoin leur est*. On pourrait ici s'arrêter sur le syntagme *toutes choses*, qui traduit un désir d'exhaustivité satisfait à moindre frais dans une genericité parfaitement indéfinie et totalisante ; la proposition ou la phrase s'achève parfois sur une telle mention dans le récit polien, à moins d'une ultime coordination spécifiante qui relance le propos en hyperbate :

Elle est de grant plenté de toutes choses. (43, 12-13)

[...] il en vient tant que ce est sanz fin de toutes choses [...]. (94, 41-42)

Il ont habondance de toutes choses et de coton. (54, 6-7)

Tantôt, l'expérience un peu singulière qui s'y logeait, située dans le registre du haut degré ou du superlatif, n'est pas transmissible, ni par celui qui écrit, ni par aucun autre écrivain, ce qui dispense de la poursuite du récit :

Et si vous di que ce flun va si loings et par toutes pars et par tant de citez que nulz ne le vous porroit dire, lesquelles citez sont dessus ce flun. (146, 12-14)

[...] en ce palais est si desmesurement grant richesce que trop seroit grant merveille qui le porroit dire sanz faille. (158, 17-19)

On pourrait se dire que les adjectifs qualificatifs permettent de corriger quelque peu ces insuffisances inhérentes aux substantifs à disposition dans le vocabulaire, pour caractériser le monde oriental, mais ils sont d'un emploi relativement peu développé, autant que j'aie pu en juger dans une étude précédente portant uniquement sur le *Livre d'Ynde*.<sup>52</sup> Lieux privilégiés de la subjectivité, les adjectifs nous parlent plus de l'énonciateur que du monde. Leur faiblesse quantitative explique aussi la double impression de sobriété<sup>53</sup> et d'imprécision souvent relevée à propos de la représentation dans le *Devisement du monde*. Sur 21.261 mots employés dans ce *Livre d'Ynde*, 877 seulement sont des adjectifs qualificatifs ou des participes passés employés comme adjectifs, soit à peine plus de 4 % de l'ensemble des mots. Ce nombre d'occurrences correspond à 168 lemmes différents, ce qui est très peu, et près des trois-quarts d'entre eux sont employés une ou deux fois : le souci de la caractérisation n'est pas une marque du style du récit polien, ce qui renforce le flou artistique de l'ensemble, mais il est significativement appuyé sur des mots qui semblent choisis avec soin. La répartition des adjectifs est quasi égale entre adjectifs objectifs (83 adjectifs pour lesquels la présence d'un énonciateur fait défaut) et subjectifs (85 adjectifs colorés par cette même présence énonciative et exprimant de ce

---

<sup>52</sup> James-Raoul (2019), 839-854.

<sup>53</sup> Boutet et al. (2009), 30.

fait un sentiment, une émotion ou un jugement évaluatif spécifique). Mais leur emploi enregistre un gros décalage puisque les occurrences des adjectifs objectifs (qui précisent la couleur, la forme, la taille, la proportion, la posture, l'aspect, la religion, le sexe, la solidité, le comportement, la relation à, la propriété acquise ou l'état)<sup>54</sup> correspondent à environ un quart de l'ensemble, comme si le pittoresque était récusé, les trois quarts restants étant des subjectifs.

Au sein de ces derniers, les affectifs, qui traduisent une réaction émotionnelle du sujet parlant, comme *chier*, *couroucié*, *cruel*, *desespéré*, *douteux*, *esbahi*, *estrange*, etc., sont rares (13 adjectifs pour 25 occurrences), ce qui va dans le même sens que l'absence de verbes de sentiments, tandis que les subjectifs se divisent harmonieusement, en nombre de lemmes mais non en nombre d'occurrences, entre les non-axiologiques<sup>55</sup> (38 pour 181 occurrences) et les axiologiques<sup>56</sup> (34 pour 419 occurrences). Au sein des premiers, au caractère graduable, possédant une double norme, interne à l'objet et spécifique de l'énonciateur, la haute fréquence de l'adjectif *grant* (286 occurrences) fait signe : elle oriente le récit vers le gigantisme, caractéristique des merveilles orientales et montrée comme grandiose. Comme le dit Pierre-Yves Badel, « la merveille relève moins du monstrueux que du gigantesque. [...] tout est plus grand dans l'univers décrit par Marco Polo ».<sup>57</sup> Quant au second type d'adjectifs, les axiologiques, ils sont valorisants pour un peu moins des deux tiers, véhiculant une vision du monde fondamentalement jolie et positive, entretenant « le fantasme de l'abondance d'un pays de Cocagne, où comme il est dit au chapitre 174, tout est plus beau et meilleur qu'en Occident ».<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Ainsi *argenté*, *atourné*, *batu*, *bouli*, *chaucé*, *clos*, *cloé*, *couvert*, *doré*, *entaillié*, *envernissé*, *escuré*, *ferme* (13 occurrences), *fouillé*, *labouré*, *mort* (17 occurrences), *nu* (10 occurrences), *ordené*, *paint*, *quarré*, *ront*, *seic*, les adjectifs de couleur, etc.

<sup>55</sup> Par exemple *fort* (13 occurrences), *grant*, *gros* (24 occurrences), *large*, *lonc*, *menu*, *petit* (23 occurrences), *plain*, *sain*, *soutil*, *travaillé*, *viel*, etc.

<sup>56</sup> Ainsi *bel* (32 occurrences), *bon* (54 occurrences) et aussi *avenant*, *digne*, *dur*, *fier*, *gentil*, *hounourable*, *lait*, *magique*, *mal*, *mauvais*, *poissant*, *precieus*, etc.

<sup>57</sup> Badel (1998), 16.

<sup>58</sup> Boutet et al. (2009), CXII.

On y fait miroirs d'acier, moult biaux et granz. (38, 2-3)

[...] il labourent draps d'or et de soie et cendaux moult bien et moult bel [...]. (105, 7-8)

Il ont pelles qui sont rouges, moult belles et de grant vaillance, et qui bien valent autant comme les blanches, et sont moult grosses et roondes, et si en ont grant habondance et si ont moult de pierres precieuses. (158, 19-23)

Une étude sur l'ensemble de l'ouvrage mériterait d'être menée. Sur l'extrait considéré, la répartition des adjectifs souligne que, pour peu que l'échelle des normes du locuteur rejoigne celle de son public (ce qui est vraisemblable à l'époque médiévale et confère aussi, aux adjectifs objectifs liés à la religion, des valences affectives et axiologiques secondaires patentes), la subjectivité colore en fait majoritairement la caractérisation dans le récit, mais sans se montrer au grand jour, mais implicitement, voire, en se faisant passer pour de l'objectivité distanciée, sinon scientifique. Cela explique la vision que l'on puisse avoir d'un récit semblant lisse, sans aspérité. Mais ce n'est qu'un effet ... Le *Devisement du monde*, au moins dans sa qualification, est bien plus subjectif qu'il n'y paraît !

L'hyperbole témoigne de cette affluence subjective : elle s'impose comme figure dominante, portée par l'omniprésence de *moult* (947 occurrences uniquement dans les parties de récit), à un moindre degré par les superlatifs ou les comparatifs de supériorité. Elle dit le regard émerveillé devant la profusion, la bonté, la beauté inimaginables ; elle traduit et image les fantasmes des Occidentaux sur le monde oriental : à Bagdad, le calife a « une tour toute plaine d'or et d'argent et d'autre tresor, que ce fu la plus grant quantité ensamble que nul homme veist onques en nul lieu » (24, 24-27) ; le Vieux de la Montagne possède « le plus grant jarding et le plus bel qui onques fust veus, plains de touz les fruis du monde et y avoit les plus belles maisons et palais qui onques fussent veuz » (40, 9-13). Cette figure envahit le discours et donne l'impression de concerner toutes les réalités vues : les dattes de Bagdad, les faucons de Kerman, le sel des montagnes près de Taliqan, les archers mongols, le musc des Tangut, les chameaux blancs de Calacian, les poissons de Dali, le gibier de chasse et d'eau en



Chine du Nord, les fruits de Hangzhou, le camphre de Pancur, l'île de Ceylan, le bois de brésil de Ceylan, les étoffes de coton empesé (*bouguerans*) d'Erzingan autant que de Mutapali, les marchands de Guzarat, l'Inde majeure sont ainsi *les meilleurs du monde*. Mais exagérer sans cesse tend aussi, malencontreusement, à estomper l'individualisation, parce que tout est toujours *moult grant* (257 occurrences), *moult bel* (111 occurrences), *moult bien* (49 occurrences), et même, *greigneur* (69 occurrences, hors toponymes), *plus bel* (27 occurrences), *mieulz* ou *meilleur* (63 occurrences).<sup>59</sup> On est comme plongé dans une surenchère permanente dans laquelle sombre le pittoresque défini et particulier : Erzingan, Tabriz, Khotan, Yutian sont tour à tour « la plus noble » cité, comme le sont Bagdad et Dongping dans leur région, tandis que Boukhara est la « meillour » qui soit dans toute la Perse. Même le superlatif peut être affecté du superlatif :

Mais il ont pour plus meillour et plus loial la premiere femme. (68, 66-67)

Au plan phrastique, l'hyperbole trouve son pendant dans le procédé de l'énumération de réalités mentionnées au pluriel, à valeur concrétisante, qui juxtapose et surtout coordonne,<sup>60</sup> pour le moderne non sans lourdeur, les différentes espèces ou les réalités les plus diverses, à la manière d'un catalogue : la phrase enfle, s'étale, à l'image d'un monde de profusion, semblant aperçu sur un vaste étalage ou recomposé artificiellement par un regard synoptique. La singularité vient précisément de cette pluralité accumulée, comme massive, apte à se faire passer pour de l'exhaustivité :

Il ont habondance de forment et d'orge et de [mil] et de panis et de touz blez et de vins et de touz fruis. (32, 36-38)

---

<sup>59</sup> On ne relève que 89 autres exemples de superlatifs ou comparatifs généralisés de supériorité touchant d'autres adjectifs ou adverbes, dont *noble, haut, gros, sage, fin, puissant, fier, sain* ...

<sup>60</sup> La conjonction *et* coordonne en ajoutant, en additionnant un élément à un autre, sans hiérarchie, en particulier sans hiérarchie temporelle : elle domine de manière écrasante en tête de phrase dans le récit, avec 1418 occurrences, soit 10 fois plus que d'occurrences de *si* (127 occurrences).

Et vous di que les marcheans y viennent d'Ynde avec leur ne[s] chargies d'espiceries et de perrerie et de peles et de dras de soie et dorez et de dens d'olifans et d'autres pluisours marchandise[s] [...]. (36, 12-16)  
[...] trouvant moult belles contrees plaines de fruis et habitacions assez et grant marchié de toutes choses et vignes assez. (45, 12-15)

Lor vesteures sont de touz le plus de dras a or et de dras de soie fourré de riches pennes, sebelines et d'ermes et de vairs et de [goupils] moult richement. (69, 16-19)

Il ont poivre et noiz muguetes et espic et garingal et cubebes et girofle et de toutes autres espices que l'en sache. (162, 10-12)

La prédilection pour les tournures impersonnelles et le choix de la voix passive ou pronominale plutôt qu'active – peut-être motivé par la langue italienne –, <sup>61</sup> qui tendent à supprimer les agents des actions rapportées, accroissent encore l'estompe à l'œuvre et donnent surtout à voir une réalité brute – un produit, un objet, un fruit, un arbre, le plus souvent –, comme extraite de son environnement :

[...] et puis se trueve une autre clinee [...]. (36, 2)

En celle terre se fait le vin de dattes avec espices, [qui] est moult bon. (36, 24-25)

Et en ceste maniere se pechent les pelles en grant quantité, quar de ci issent les pelles qui s'espandent par tout le monde. [...] Bien est voirs que loing de ci a .CCC. milles se truevent aussi, mais ce est de septembre jusques a demi octouvre. (169, 48-56)

En cest païs s'adoubent moult grant quantité de cuirain de chascune maniere de cuir [...]. Et s'en adoubent [tant] que il en chargent chascun an moult de nez qui vont par Arrabis et par autre part. Yci fait on moult de belles cuiriees de cuir vermeil [...]. (178, 20-27)

Surtout, on note la récurrence du pronom caméléon *on*, tantôt véritable personnel valant comme masque euphémisant du *je*, tantôt substitut du *nous* et tantôt véritable indéfini. Il s'impose avec une grande liberté, sans aucune

---

<sup>61</sup> Voir Boutet et al. (2009), LXX.

rigueur et parfois même également en télescopage syntaxique de l'anaphore avec une première personne du singulier ou du pluriel :

Et vous porroit l'en bien conter comment, mais por ce que trop longue matiere est, ne le vous conterai pas ore, mais avant, quant lieu et tans en sera. (18, 12-15)

Si ce pronom est absent des 17 premiers chapitres, progressivement, au fil du texte, son emploi va se déployant,<sup>62</sup> encore qu'un peu plus du tiers des chapitres n'en présentent pas d'occurrences, sans que je puisse dire pour-quoi, à ce stade de mon étude.<sup>63</sup> Le *on* devient notamment partie prenante des formules du type « Quant l'en / on se part de », qui introduisent les chapitres<sup>64</sup> ou un nouveau mouvement à l'intérieur d'un même chapitre.<sup>65</sup> La dépersonnalisation à l'œuvre qui s'ensuit favorise aisément le rôle de guide pratique que peut revêtir pour autrui un récit de voyage. Inversement, c'est une façon de donner de l'ampleur aux autres instances narratives, comme par contamination : la généralité subsume la particularité, elle s'accommode d'une sorte de neutralité extérieure qui sert la vérité à transmettre au présent. Ce choix lexicosémantique, relayé par l'indéfini *chascuns*, est ainsi judicieusement convoqué quand il s'agit de démystifier les croyances antiques. L'exemple de l'amiante, que tout un chacun peut trouver comme minerais en terre, en témoigne :

Et si sachiez [qu'en] ceste montaigne on trueve une vaine de laquele on fait le salemondre. Et sachiez de voir que la salemondre n'est pas

<sup>62</sup> On en compte 520 occurrences au total, sous la forme *on* ou *l'en*.

<sup>63</sup> Signalons, outre les chapitres 1-17, les chapitres 19-21, 23, 25-26, 31, 41-42, 47, 50-53, 58, 61, 64, 66, 68, 75-77, 79, 81-82, 86, 88, 90, 93, 96, 98, 100-103, 108, 115, 120-121, 125-127, 130, 132, 144, 148, 155, 159, 167, 173, 176-177, 179, 181-182, 185, 188-191, 193b-194d.

<sup>64</sup> Voir 37, 39, 43, 49, 60, 62, 70, 71, 72, 107, 110, 111, 119, 123, 136, 137, 140, 141, 142, 143, 149, 151, 154, 162, 163, 165, 166, 168, 169, 171, 174, 183, 184, 192. À ce relevé s'ajoutent quelques variantes : « Quant on chevauche/a chevauchié » (35, 57, 74, 106, 112, 113, 124, 134) ; « Quant l'en a alé » (45) ; « Quant l'en est parti » (105, 109, 135) ; « Quant l'en a passé » (117, 118) ... « Et quand l'en se part de ..., si chevauche l'en ... » (33, 5-6) ; « Et quant on a chevauchié ... si trueve on ... et quant on a monté ... si trueve on ... Et toutes foiz [trueve l'en] ... l'en trueve ... » (33, 25-38) ; « Quant on se part de ..., si trueve l'en ... » (39, 1-2), « si trueve l'en » (39, 11), etc.

<sup>65</sup> Voir 43, 11 ; 44, 11 ; 45, 11, 25, 41 ; 49, 14, 27, 37 ; 55, 17 ; 56, 13, 23-24 ; 106, 15, 23 ; 109, 15 ; etc.

beste c'on dit en no paÿs, mais est vainne de terre, et orrez comment. Il est voirs que chascuns sache que par nature n'a nule beste [ne nul] animal qui peust vivre dedenz le feu, pour ce que chascun animal est [fait] de .IIII. elemens. [...] Et cil meïsmes de la contree le conterent en ceste maniere, car qui le diroit autrement, ce seroit bourde et fable. (59, 9-36)

Sous l'égide de Marc Pol, la réalité reprend ainsi ses droits, les mensonges reculent, l'accès aux merveilles de la Création peut se faire.

De fait, en dépit du flou et de l'imprécision qui semblent régner, de ces tensions multiples qui tiraillent le récit de voyage entre objectivité et subjectivité, Marco Polo serait, à en croire Pietro d'Abano au début du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle, « l'observateur le plus attentif qu'on ait jamais connu ». <sup>66</sup> Avec lui qui nous entraîne, nous parcourons ou découvrons un nouveau monde.

### ***Deviser* le monde : La ligne et la boucle**

Animé par le désir de *deviser* un voyage extraordinaire, le récit polien hésite entre la simplicité d'un rapide inventaire ordonné, concentré sur des réalités pratiques essentielles des contrées atteintes, et l'exubérance à peine contenue d'un guide de voyage plus personnel, grâce à des bulles descriptives, anecdotiques ou métatextuelles, qui laissent pressentir le sujet parlant, qui qu'il soit.

La composition de cet ouvrage retient la première l'attention, parce que, d'emblée, à deux reprises dès le Prologue, l'accent est mis sur l'*ordre* suivi :

[...] si comme nostre livres [vous] contera tout par ordre [apertement] [...]. (Prol., 5-7)

Lequel livre, puis [demourant] en la carsere de Gene, fist retraire par ordre par mesire Rasta pysan [...]. (Prol., 26-27)

Cette caractéristique (la seconde occurrence ne figure pas dans la version franco-italienne) pointe du doigt une compétence rhétorique essentielle de celui qui écrit. Elle revient dans le corps du texte à dix reprises jusqu'au

---

<sup>66</sup> Badel (1998), 27.

début du *Livre d'Ynde*.<sup>67</sup> Certes, le fait de raconter une histoire *ordeneement* est, précisément, une qualité attribuée aux Polo (6, 3-5), puis à leur fils (16, 20-21),<sup>68</sup> quand ceux-ci s'adressent au Grand Khan, mais, comme j'ai pu le montrer dans le cas des auteurs de fictions romanesques, l'art de la *dispositio* est précisément l'apanage des écrivains médiévaux :<sup>69</sup> on ne s'étonnera pas que le Pisan se l'attribue en particulier. En effet, parce qu'ils ne peuvent s'affirmer comme de véritables auteurs détenteurs de l'*inventio* de leurs œuvres, car Dieu est le seul créateur, les clercs médiévaux se montrent comme des *artifex* travaillant au bout d'une chaîne qui délègue la création, comme des scribes mettant par écrit l'histoire qui leur a été confiée ou qu'ils ont trouvée. Leur talent réside alors dans leur aptitude et leur originalité d'abord à organiser, à agencer les matériaux de leur récit (c'est l'art rhétorique de la *dispositio*), ensuite à bien les écrire, si possible efficacement et joliment (c'est l'art de l'*elocutio*). La présentation de Rustichello se loge admirablement bien dans ce moule pré-établi qui domine aux XII-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles : le rédacteur déploie son art dans sa mise en écrit du récit de voyage que lui a dicté Marco Polo, qui représente l'auctorialité extérieure première. Il se montre ouvertement comme un écrivain de son temps. On sait que les versions franco-italienne, toscane, vénitienne, latine de Tolède (ms. Z), le fragment *Cotton* de la British Library offrent un prologue différent de celui qui figure dans tous les manuscrits de la famille française et qui calque celui que Rustichello donne à sa compilation du *Roman de Palamède* :<sup>70</sup> pour moi, ce n'est pas un hasard ; j'y verrais volontiers une trace primitive de l'original ... Moyennant quoi, la critique a souligné de longue date le caractère hétérogène de cette composition, qui

<sup>67</sup> Voir 13, 8-9 ; 48, 27-29 ; 88, 44 ; 93, 23 ; 103, 24 ; 112, 23 ; 119, 134-135 ; 129, 56-57 ; 138, 126-127 ; 156, 58-60. Seules les deux premières occurrences figurent similairement dans la version franco-italienne qui propose par ailleurs seulement quatre autres occurrences : CXXXIII, 14 (Dongping) ; CLXXV, 16 (saint Thomas) ; CLXXVII, 26 (Ceylan) ; CLXXXIII, 9 (Guzarat).

<sup>68</sup> Cette qualité ne se trouve pas mentionnée dans *F*, mais elle est présente dans d'autres manuscrits de la famille française (*A1, A2, A4, B3, B4, C1, D*).

<sup>69</sup> James-Raoul (2007), 75-81.

<sup>70</sup> Voir Ronchi et Segre (1982) 2, note 1, et Chênerie et al. (2001), 171.

obéit au double principe de la linéarité et de la boucle ...<sup>71</sup> Mais l'esthétique médiévale diffère en ce domaine de la nôtre et la liberté de recourir à des gabarits ou à des normes variés au fil d'un texte est un principe constamment mis en œuvre. L'hétérogénéité n'est pas une déficience.

Au plan macrostructural, le récit de voyage, qui retrace des itinéraires géographiques réalisés dans le temps, inscrits dans la durée, s'organise en deux parties nettement identifiées au niveau métatextuel. Les chapitres 1 à 18 sont dévolus à une présentation générale à valeur de résumé global, véritable mise en bouche qui forme un tout nommé « prologue » :<sup>72</sup> la fonction thématique de ce passage s'accompagne, nous l'avons vu, d'une focalisation progressive sur celui qui est appelé à devenir le personnage principal et le conteur du récit, *Marc Pol*. La fin du chapitre 18 annonce, de fait, une rupture avec ce qui précède puisque le *je* narratorial annonce désormais « commenc[er] LE LIVRE DU DEVISEMENT DES DIVERSITEZ que mesure Marc trouva ». Se met ici en place le procédé de régie que l'on observe par ailleurs dans les sommes romanesques en prose du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et qui consiste à employer une formule conclusive à deux volets, le premier, rétrospectif, mettant un terme au sujet qui vient d'être traité dans le chapitre que l'on clôt ainsi, le second, prospectif, annonçant la suite développée dans le chapitre suivant. Le titre choisi en cette fin de chapitre 18 est rappelé en écho, à la fin du chapitre 194d dans les manuscrits A2 et A4, par la mention « livre de la Division du monde et des merveilles d'icelluy », tandis que, dans l'*explicit* spécifique des manuscrits B1, B2, B3, B4, est donné un autre titre plus restreint : « le livre nommé du Grant Kaan de la grant cité de Cambalut », qui répond quant à lui au début du prologue « Ci commence li livres du Grant Caam ». La volonté de boucler le texte sur lui-même est caractéristique de la version française<sup>73</sup> et intime la reconnaissance d'une littéarité spécifique.

---

<sup>71</sup> Je renvoie en particulier aux différentes et copieuses introductions littéraires données dans les différents tomes de mon édition de référence.

<sup>72</sup> Le narrateur dit précisément à la fin du chapitre 18, 58-59 « je vous ai conté tout le fait du prologue ».

<sup>73</sup> Pour une présentation des différents *explicit* qui existent selon les versions, voir Chênerie et al. (2001), 40-50.

À l'intérieur de ce vaste ensemble constitué par les chapitres 19-194d, on peut distinguer trois sous-parties qui, au plan stylistique, établissent une progression à thème constant : les voyageurs vers la Chine, de la Petite Arménie jusqu'à la résidence d'été du souverain ; le royaume de Khoubilai Khan ; l'*Inde*. La première va des chapitres 19 à 74 et correspond au voyage menant jusqu'au souverain mongol, dont la mention, comme une présence tutélaire, se déploie à partir du chapitre 50, à mesure que les voyageurs se rapprochent de leur but. La seconde moitié du chapitre 73 et le chapitre 74, consacrés aux palais impériaux, font transition et s'accompagnent d'un fort effet d'annonce. La deuxième partie, des chapitres 75 à 156, règle la focale sur Khoubilai Khan : la signification de ce nom en chinois ouvre avec bonheur, dans l'immense majorité des versions manuscrites, cet ensemble, puisque ce nom revêt la forme marquée d'un superlatif de type biblique, à l'image d'un personnage lui-même hors du commun et fascinant visiblement l'énonciateur. Si un sous-titre n'est pas explicitement donné dans le texte à cette succession de chapitres, la bascule narrative est très nette et près de 72 % des occurrences du nom du souverain (*le grant Caan, Cublay*, avec toutes variations graphiques et morphologiques) s'y trouvent :

Or vous veul commencer en nostre livre a conter les granz faiz et toutes les granz merveilles du Grant Caan qui ore regne, qui Cu[b]lay Caan est appelez, qui vaut a dire en françois le grant seigneur des seigneurs et des seignours empereours. (75, 1-5).

La fin du chapitre 156 annonce un nouveau centrage à venir sur ce qui est alors nommé l'*Inde*, confirmé dans la rubrique du chapitre 157 qui fait état de cette partition en mentionnant « le commencement du livre d'Ynde ». Cette sous-partie conduit à la fin de l'ouvrage dans la famille française, même s'effilochant sur la mention historique de guerres de succession (absente des manuscrits *B*). On observe que, dans la version française, le nom *merveille*, dont la présence a été annoncée dans la rubrique du prologue (« Ci commence li livres du Grant Caam, qui parole de la Grant Ermenie, de Persse et des Tartars et d'Ynde et des granz merveilles qui par le monde sont »), vient renforcer de sa présence le marquage de cette composition

tripartite : il est présent, dévolu à la seule Petite Arménie, dans la rubrique 19 (mention absente de *F*, p. ex.) ; à la fin du chapitre 74 et au début du chapitre 75 pour régir la mention du Grand Khan ; à la fin du chapitre 156 et dans la rubrique 157 pour parler de l'Inde.

Au plan microstructural, la disposition en chapitres d'inégale longueur, inaugurés par des rubriques numérotées censées annoncer le thème traité, épouse parfaitement le projet d'une relation de voyage qui fait passer d'un ancrage référentiel à un autre. Au plan stylistique, ce choix suit une progression majoritairement linéaire, dans laquelle le propos du premier énoncé devient le thème du suivant. S'instaure un arrimage serré entre la fin d'un chapitre, la rubrique et le début du chapitre suivant, ce qui concourt à imposer la linéarité comme règle : le principe de l'anaphore (majoritairement fidèle) est pour ainsi dire toujours appliqué – je note une réelle rupture, un refus anaphorique entre les seuls chapitres 18 et 19 –, l'anaphore étant parfois (une vingtaine de fois) décalée un peu en amont ou en aval dans le corps du texte. Elle soude idéalement ces trois niveaux, plus rarement deux, et impose un cadre mémoriel efficace :

Or vous en ay conté, si vous diray de la cité de Catuy. (146, 51-52)

147. Ci dit le VII<sup>XX</sup>. et .VII. chapitre de Catuy, c'est a dire de la cité de Catuy.

Catuy est unne petite cité et est vers yseloc. (147, 1)

Le récit donne ainsi l'impression de progresser à sauts de puces, régulièrement déclenchés par les formules de fin de chapitres qui font passer d'un sujet à un autre, le plus souvent d'un lieu à un autre, ce que les ouvertures de chapitres peuvent mettre en évidence, à leur tour, par des formulations typées qui assurent un redémarrage dynamique : *Il fu / est voir(s)*,<sup>74</sup> (*Or / Encore / Et*) *sachiez*,<sup>75</sup> *Quant l'en se part*, *Quant l'en a chevauchié* ... Le cheminement inscrit dans la durée est premier : ce n'est pas un hasard si près des trois quarts des 199 chapitres s'ouvrent soit sur un toponyme – en

<sup>74</sup> 12 ex. Chap. 1, 19, 25, 36, 42, 47, 76, 87, 91, 95, 101, 138 ; avec léger décalage de la formule qui n'inaugure pas le chapitre mais se trouve repoussée dans le texte, chapitres 51, 63, 113, 120, 148, 149, 161, 193a.

<sup>75</sup> 30 ex. Chap. 32, 68-69, 83-86, 88, 90, 94, 96-100, 102, 104, 120, 146, 155-156, 159-161, 164, 188, 193b-194, 194b, 194d.



général le nouveau thème à venir –,<sup>76</sup> soit sur un connecteur temporel, majoritairement *Quant*.<sup>77</sup> La mécanique, bien huilée, permet d'installer un cadre type au récit de voyage, qui lui donne parfois l'air d'un catalogue, surtout quand les chapitres sont peu fournis en matière. La prédilection pour la phrase prédicative, qui place en tête de chapitre le nom annoncé dans la rubrique, suivi du verbe copule *est*,<sup>78</sup> donne un accès rapide à l'information définie, comme dans une notice de dictionnaire ou un ouvrage encyclopédique.

Quand ce cadre s'efface ou s'estompe ici et là, on note alors que ce qui pouvait sembler artificiel ou mécanique est en réalité un agent essentiel de la cohésion textuelle. Les formules conclusives sont absentes dans 48 chapitres sur 199 et jamais dans le *Livre d'Ynde* proposé par la famille *B* :<sup>79</sup> quand cela se produit, la rigueur de l'enchaînement semble mise à mal et le découpage en chapitres plus factice (on pourrait citer par exemple les brefs chapitres 101-102-103, qui sont une extension du chapitre 100 sur quelques points remarquables de la vie des sujets du souverain). Parfois, ces formules sont incomplètes, le volet rétroversif manquant, ce qui donne l'impression que le chapitre suivant est un bourgeonnement de celui qui est en passe d'être faussement conclu ;<sup>80</sup> parfois, le volet proversif manque<sup>81</sup> ou est vaguement formulé,<sup>82</sup> annonçant la reprise du cheminement (« irons avant »), une « autre matière » ou la poursuite de « la matière », une « autre province », d'« autres nouvelles » ou d'« autres choses ».

<sup>76</sup> 57 ex. Chap. 21, 24, 29-30, 33-34, 38, 40, 44, 46, 48, 50-56, 58-59, 61, 63, 73, 115 (*Ceste province de Tebet*)-116, 125-132, 139, 144-145, 147-148, 150, 158, 167, 172-173, 175-182, 185-187, 189-191 ; le toponyme est introduit par une préposition en 9, 20, 22, 193.

<sup>77</sup> 87 ex. Chap. 1, 3-4, 5, 7-8, 10-12, 15 (*Or*)-18 (*Et quant*), 26-28, 31, 35, 37, 39, 41 (*Et quant*), 43, 45, 49, 57, 60, 62, 65, 67 (*Après*), 70-72, 74-75 (*Or*), 77, 79-80, 89 (*Endementières que*), 92-93, 103 (*Depuis que*), 105-109 (*Et quant*)-114 (*Après*), 117-119, 121-124, 133-137, 140-141 (*Adont*)-143, 149, 151-152 (*Or*)-154, 157 (*Or*), 162-163, 165-166, 168-169 (*Et quant*), 171, 174, 183-184, 192, 193a (*Or*), 194b-194c (*Et quant*).

<sup>78</sup> 57 ex. Chap. 21, 24, 29-30, 33-34, 38, 40, 44, 46, 48, 50-56, 58-59, 61, 63, 73, 116, 125-132, 139, 144-145, 147-148, 150, 158, 167, 170, 172-173, 175-182, 185-187, 189-191.

<sup>79</sup> Chap. 1-17, 25-27, 30, 33-34, 37, 40-41, 44, 63-64, 68, 77-79, 81, 83, 85, 92-93, 98-99, 101-102, 107, 120-121, 193a, 194b, 194d.

<sup>80</sup> Chap. 24, 28, 36, 45, 73, 75-76, 114, 129, 134, 137, 193.

<sup>81</sup> Chap. 33-34, 122.

<sup>82</sup> Chap. 33, 35-38, 42, 61-62, 73, 75, 100, 104, 108, 111-112, 118-119, 123, 135, 155, 159, 162, 169 (on peut ici hésiter entre l'absence et le flou).

laissant la suite indéterminée, que ce choix soit la preuve d'un détachement négligent, de la volonté d'introduire quelque suspens, voire la trace d'une dictée extérieure faite par bribes :

Et autre chose n'i a qui face a ramentevoir. Si nous en irons avant pour vous conter des autres choses. (155, 24-26)

Parfois, le cadre formulaire perd ses contours lapidaires et nettement délimités, comme, par exemple, dans les chapitres 55 (sur Qiemo), 69 (sur les dieux des Mongols), 75 (sur les hauts faits de Khoubilai), 94 (sur Khanbalikh) ou 114 (sur le Tibet). En 156, chaque volet est tellement amplifié que la formule se détend sur plus d'une trentaine de lignes (56-88) : comme pour pallier cet évanouissement, la formule se trouve de nouveau projetée, sous une forme plus académique, au début du chapitre suivant.<sup>83</sup> Parfois, la formule perd sa place, ce qui tend à remettre en question son efficace. Par exemple, au chapitre 186, la formule a beau conclure sur le chapitre et annoncer le suivant (« Autre chose n'y a, si vous dirons de la medienne Ynde qui a non Abasie », 40-41), elle ne joue pas immédiatement son rôle puisqu'elle est suivie d'un développement digressif sur la tripartition de l'Inde qui retarde le passage au chapitre 187. Parfois, une annonce est faite et aussitôt annulée, le récit bifurquant sur un autre sujet, comme au chapitre 69, le sujet annoncé (« le Grand Khan et sa cour impériale) étant reporté à plus tard « quant temps et lieux en sera » (69, 134), le récit se repositionnant sur la plaine de Barguzin. Parfois encore, ce sont les rubriques qui sont trop restrictives ou décalées dans le thème annoncé : elles montrent en trompe-l'œil un récit qui, en définitive, ne se conformera pas au seul thème donné et qui s'évadera, mine de rien, du cadre imparti. Les exemples de ce genre de divagations non annoncées sont légion, c'est un fait, concentrées en particulier dans les chapitres dévolus au Grand Khan, comme si un tel sujet ne pouvait être circonscrit mais débordait toujours : le chapitre 84 expédie le palais du fils de Khoubilai en une dizaine de lignes pour s'étaler largement sur la cité de Khanbalikh ; le chapitre 85 procède de même et passe de la

---

<sup>83</sup> « Or puis que vous avez oÿ conter de tantes provinces tereines nous vous laisserons de ceste matiere, si nous commencerons a entrer en Ynde por vous conter toutes les merveilles qui y sont. » (157, 1-4)

garde impériale à la disposition à table de la cour. Les rubriques successives qui reprennent le même sujet soulignent moins du sur-place que des écarts narratifs internes à l'œuvre (p. ex. les chapitres 68 et 70 sur les coutumes des Mongols ; les chapitres 77-79 sur la bataille entre le Grand Khan et Nayan ; les chapitres 114-115 sur la province du Tibet).

Dans l'ensemble, le narrateur donne l'impression de vouloir surtout transmettre, sur le mode énumératif, un savoir multiple, expérimenté ou connu de seconde main, compartimenté en chapitres qui correspondent à des étapes du voyage. La mobilisation de ce savoir s'organise de façon essentielle sur les noms propres de lieux et de personnages, donnés presque systématiquement,<sup>84</sup> avec constance, ce qui apparente le récit de voyage aux genres de l'épopée ou de la chronique, où la mention des noms ancre la célébration de l'histoire et sa commémoration. Indépendamment de confusions bien relevées ici et là par les critiques, ce choix tend à construire une référence absolue dans l'espace et le temps du récit de voyage, encore appuyée sur 8 mentions de dates (plus une dans le Prologue), propices à servir ou à entretenir la vérité annoncée. Marco Polo, en comparaison d'autres voyageurs contemporains comme Guillaume de Rubrouck,<sup>85</sup> Odoric de Pordenone, Ibn Battûta<sup>86</sup> ou Niccolo de' Conti, néglige certes nombre de détails sur la vie en Chine ou dans les Indes, demeure elliptique ou vague, comme on l'a vu. Face au désir de tout dire s'exerce en effet la nécessité sensible de *conter de*, qui suppose l'extraction d'une portion. L'un des patrons narratifs du récit polien semble ainsi suivre une sorte de nomenclature originale, enregistrant ou remodelant les lieux parcourus autant que ceux qui n'ont pas été visités mais dont on veut parler. Mais parce qu'est raconté tout ce qui est digne d'intérêt, sans rien omettre, le reste étant délaissé, indépendamment du retour d'expressions formulaires de

---

<sup>84</sup> Par exemple, manque le nom de l'esprit invoqué en 56, 28-29. Dans le manuscrit *B1*, on observe un blanc en 9, 3-4, destiné à rajouter le nom manquant du pape mentionné (« le Pape estoit mort, qui avoit a non Pape ... ». D'autres manuscrits se chargent de rajouter le nom *Innocent* (*A3, C*) ou *Clement* (*F, D*). Les autres noms propres signalés et non précisés concernent toutes des pluralités, qui s'accrochent aisément de l'anonymat : les idoles en 74, 105-106, 130-132, 153-154 ; les impératrices en 81, 10-12.

<sup>85</sup> Kappler et Kappler (1997). Voir aussi Guéret-Laferté (1998), 239-253.

<sup>86</sup> Charles-Dominique (1995).

tous ordres,<sup>87</sup> l'inventaire n'est jamais tout à fait le même d'une ville ou d'une province à l'autre, certains points retenant l'attention, d'autres étant passés sous silence. La variété habite cet ailleurs qui, bien qu'oriental et, sauf exceptions, non chrétien, est indéniablement à la gloire de Dieu. Les villes, provinces et royaumes sont présentés comme des creusets de la vie sociale et économique, avec des spécificités concernant leur taille, leur renommée, leur langage, leur religion et leurs rites funéraires comme l'incinération, leur alimentation, leurs richesses minérales ou végétales, leurs productions et ventes de marchandises, aussi des traits physiques ou comportementaux spécifiques de leurs habitants. Ils sont situés, de manière relative, géographiquement et politiquement, au sein d'une région, avec des indications de trajet, de distance à parcourir, de direction, de mention de la visibilité ou non de l'étoile polaire, de climat, de tribut payé au Grand Khan, d'utilisation de monnaie de papier. Ce type rapide en forme d'épure, qui semble répondre à une *check-list* essentielle et fait courir le récit polien, s'épanouit en particulier lors du voyage en Perse ou dans les Indes. Marco Polo s'y montre alors plus en arpenteur qu'en visiteur.

La progression linéaire est en effet parasitée de manière incessante par une progression à thèmes dérivés. La réalité de l'itinéraire vécu est pliée à celle du livre écrit, ordonné et agencé à sa guise, et la linéarité laisse place aux boucles, zigzags ou arabesques. Une esthétique du détour, de la pause s'affirme face à celle de la ligne droite, de la hâte. Ici, ce n'est que simple notation ; là, c'est un développement.

Parce que la matière véhiculée est immense, ramifiée au fil du voyage, des lieux, des personnes rencontrées, on observe une vingtaine de cas d'anachronie : des annonces de ce qui sera développé plus tard, quand les circonstances narratives s'y prêteront mieux, et des retours en arrière, qui remémorent et resituent. Je considère ici les fils narratifs lancés à plusieurs chapitres de distance et non pas les simples mentions, innombrables dans

---

<sup>87</sup> Outre celles que j'ai déjà citées, citons encore, par exemple, « sans aventure trouver », « Autre chose n'i a qui face a ramentevoir », « si ... que ce fu/est (grant) merveille », « il i naist, il ont monnoie de chartres », « il vivent de char et de lait et de ris », « il vivent de marchandises et d'ars », « il ont langage par eulz », « ne font treu a nului », celles qui s'articulent autour de la forme *trouvant* (« viles et chastiaus », « chastiaus et citez », « belles herberges », « moult belles contrees », etc.).

le corps du texte (hors fins de chapitres), de ce qui précède ou suit immédiatement – dans le même chapitre ou d'un chapitre à l'autre –, à valeur phatique, qui accrochent directement l'attention du public et dynamisent son écoute, son souvenir, ou celles, vagues, qui consistent à replacer le récit au sein de l'ensemble.<sup>88</sup> Ces phénomènes d'anachronie, toujours pris en charge par une instance narrative, suggèrent, comme dans les sommes romanesques de l'époque, qu'il est bon de renforcer par tous les moyens la cohésion. Les prolepses soulignent notamment que la composition est sous surveillance, qu'elle suit aussi un plan préétabli, connu de celui qui délivre le récit ; elles imposent l'omniscience de l'auteur-narrateur, la soumission de l'écrivain au voyageur. Anticiper sur la suite du récit et s'arrêter immédiatement, au prétexte que ce n'est pas le bon moment de procéder à ce dévoilement, transforme l'anachronie en déviation du récit et frustre l'attente. Ces annonces narratives sont peu nombreuses.<sup>89</sup> Les analepses sont en nombre beaucoup plus élevé :<sup>90</sup> elles sont là pour rafraîchir les données qui, en se sédimentant, ont pu s'enfouir ; elles épaississent le récit en ce qu'elles mettent en relation des lieux, des êtres et des choses qu'on aurait pu croire disjoints ou dont on pensait ne plus entendre parler.

Outre ces détours de la narration, les décrochages sont suscités par des changements des procédés narratifs qui évitent toute platitude monotone à l'ensemble et introduisent variété, animation : l'ampleur du *Devisement du monde*, même dans la version manuscrite française de la famille B, plus

<sup>88</sup> P. ex. en 4, 7-10 ; 129, 53-57 ; 156, 63-65.

<sup>89</sup> Voir 13, 5-9 / 74, 4-5 (sur la résidence d'été de Khoubilai) ; 18, 14-15 / 157, 5-61 (sur les jonques chinoises) ; 18, 27-29 / à partir du chap. 157 (sur l'Inde) ; 21, 19-21 / chap. 23, précisément 5-17 (sur Mossoul) ; 28, 57-60 / chap. 184 (sur Bagdad) ; 48, 25-29 / à partir du chap. 157 (sur l'Inde) ;

<sup>90</sup> Voir 70, 1-3 (sur la sépulture des empereurs mongols) / 68, 16-20 ; 76, 5-6 (sur Khoubilai Khan, le sixième Khan) / 68, 1-4 ; 87, 65-67 (sur les jongleurs divertissant la cour) / 85, 72-76 ; 88, 2-3 (sur le nom des gardes impériaux) / 85, 2-4 ; 92, 1-2 et encore 92, 162-163 (sur Khanbalikh) / 83, 1-2 et 88, 47-48 ; 93, 6-8 (sur Shangdu) / 74, 4-5 ; 93, 13-15 (sur le lait des juments blanches versé à terre) / 74, 61-62 (des juments noires sont mentionnées ...) ; 93, 20-23 (sur la Fête Blanche) / chap. 87 ; 129, 52-53 (sur Tcheng-tou-fou) / 113, 5 ; 139, 5-8 (rien de précis sur la cité, mais l'importance de la flotte sur le fleuve Jaune, frontière entre la Chine du Nord et celle du Sud, a été effectivement déjà mentionnée) / 137, 26-29 ; 146, 45-46 (sur les bambous de quinze pas) / 114, 7 ; 168, 22-23 (sur le vin des palmiers *gomuti*) / 165, 87-96 ; 192, 10-12 (sur Ormuz) / 169, 118 + 173, 3 + 191, 3, 4 et, surtout, chap. 36 ; 194a, 3-5 (sur l'Arbre Sec) / 39, 12-21.

brève que bien d'autres, suggère qu'il existe un réel plaisir à enjoliver la narration par des descriptions, des anecdotes qui font digression, parfois du discours rapporté directement, quelques commentaires métatextuels. De fait, les chapitres très brefs, de moins de 10 lignes (5, 6, 52, 100, 101, 132, 181, 190, *194d*) sont finalement peu nombreux. Le style lapidaire n'est donc pas dominant dans ce récit de voyage et tend à céder, à la moindre occasion, à la tentation de l'amplification. Certains chapitres enflent même démesurément ou presque, dépassant les 100 lignes (69, 74, 83, 92, 97, 114, 118, 119, 138, 145, 151, 165, 169, *193a*), ce qui se produit à partir du chapitre dévolu aux dieux (en réalité, surtout, au mode de vie des Mongols) et concerne par prédilection le cœur du sujet : Khoubilai Khan.<sup>91</sup> Affirmer que ces excursus qui font des boucles dans le récit sont le fait de l'écrivain plus que du voyageur me semble un peu court, ne serait-ce que parce qu'ils naissent de la mention première d'une réalité orientale (objectale, végétale, minérale, historique) que l'on rapporte spontanément au savoir du voyageur et aussi parce que le Vénitien a été immédiatement distingué par le Grand Khan pour la qualité de ses récits. On imagine bien, en outre, que l'invention créatrice de l'écrivain était sans doute nécessairement limitée par son absence de connaissances personnelles sur les sujets abordés ... Il est également impossible d'y déceler une griffe du style différente de celle du reste du récit, tant le mixage littéraire entre Marco Polo et Rustichello est réussi. À part l'hyperbole, ce qui frappe uniment au plan rhétorique, ce sont les répétitions et redites, qui, dans notre esthétique moderne, sont considérées comme des lourdeurs et des maladresses : elles habitent l'ensemble du *Devisement du monde* sans aucune spécificité. Elles estampillent de leur présence ce texte médiéval en prose comme tout autre de cette époque :

Yci fait on moult de belles cuiriees de cuir vermeil entaillié a oisiaus et a bestes, moult belles, cousues de [fil] d'or et d'argent [moult soutilment], et sont moult belles [...]. (178, 26-29)

---

<sup>91</sup> 26 des 49 occurrences du nom *livre* se déploient dans le récit en Chine, chapitres 60 à 156 ... Les *explicit* des manuscrits *B3* et *B4* parlent du « rommans du Grant Kaan de la grant cité de Cambalut ».

Il importe en fait de voir en elles des instruments rhétoriques essentiels de l'art d'écrire, servant l'efficacité et l'ornementation du propos. Elles relèvent d'une esthétique d'époque.

Si la veine descriptive, infuse, qui émaille le récit d'une multitude de détails, est dominante, les êtres et les choses étant sommairement caractérisées sur le mode de la notation sèche,<sup>92</sup> parfois de la typologie rapide,<sup>93</sup> les descriptions ne sont pas écartées pour autant, partagées entre orientation laudative ou dysphorique, conformément à leur nature rhétorique première et, beaucoup plus rarement, tonalité objective, presque scientifique. Le début du portrait de Khoubilai souligne que ces deux orientations ne sont pas exclusives l'une de l'autre :

Le Grant Caan, seigneur des seigneurs, qui Cublai est appelez, est de telle façon. Il est de belle grandesc, ne petit ne grant, mais il est de moienne grandesc. Il est charnus, de belle maniere, et est trop bien tailliez de tous membres et si a le vis blanc et vermeil, les ieux noirs, le nez bien fait et bien seant. (81, 1-7)

Fleurons de l'art d'écrire dans les fictions du troisième quart du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, les descriptions de personnages et d'objets ont vu ensuite leur étoile quelque peu pâlir, à cause de leur stéréotypie, de leur gratuité parfois factice. Mais elles demeurent en nombre dans le *Devisement du monde*, imposées par le projet même du livre, souvent porteuses d'une *mimesis* bien particulière, qui chatouille l'imagination : celle de l'extraordinaire, entre étonnement face à la beauté, la taille, la richesse ou la profusion inhabituels et prodige incroyable. On remarque que ce premier type de descriptions (personnes ou animaux, végétaux, minéraux, objets fabriqués)

---

<sup>92</sup> P. ex., les habitants du Cachemire « sont brunes gens et maigres, les femmes sont moult belles si comme brunes. (48, 9-10) ; « Il se vestent moult povrement et leurs vesteures sont de piaux de bestes et de chanevas et de bouguerans. » (114, 115-117).

<sup>93</sup> P. ex., les cinq sortes de grues en Mongolie orientale (73, 66-78), les diverses espèces d'aigles (90, 15-21), les différentes idoles chinoises (160, 1-10), les quatre sortes de perroquets de Quilon (174, 17-21). Cette tendance à l'organisation sérielle, quasi mathématique, rappelle celle qui est mise en œuvre dans l'organisation de l'immense royaume de Khoubilai, de ses armées, ses palais, la poste, l'étiquette qui régit le placement à table, ses jonques, etc.

est assez bref,<sup>94</sup> sauf exceptions (p. ex., les navires transportant les marchandises, où la description se prolonge sur celle de leur fonctionnement, les idoles chinoises, les rois du Coromandel et leurs bijoux, les gazelles porte-musc du Tibet ou les crocodiles de Dali), et qu'il dérive rapidement de la représentation physique à la représentation comportementale pour les êtres animés ou, pour les inanimés, à la mention de leur production, leur transformation ou leur utilisation : c'est le cas des melons, de l'amiante, du musc, des bambous, du sel, des huîtres perlières, des diamants, de l'indigotier, des dattes ou de la vigne, du poivre, des buffles dont on tire le cuir, etc. L'œil du marchand s'impose ici et guide le récit vers les productions rares et précieuses, convoitées par les Occidentaux. Ces passages tendent à s'enchaîner sans heurt à ce qui précède, dans une parfaite continuité, comme mimétique d'une contiguïté ambiante enregistrée par l'œil du témoin, suivant une logique du regard qui parcourt, sans rompre le *conte* de l'inventaire. À Sumatra, par exemple, on passe ainsi des éléphants aux rhinocéros puis aux singes et aux autours :

Il ont olifans assez et si ont aussi unicornes qui ne sont gueres mains que les olifans de grandescce. [...] Elle est moult laide beste a veoir. Elle n'est pas si faite, comme nous disons en ce paÿs, qu'elle se prent au sain d'une pucelle virge, mais c'est tout le contraire. Il ont singes moult grant quantité de pluseurs [façons] et si ont ostoirs touz noirs comme corbiaus [...]. (165, 38-52)

On remarque d'autant mieux les rares descriptions cadrées par une formule narratoriale qui attire l'attention, située par exemple à leur début, comme dans celle du zébu (35, 15), des poules à duvet (154, 45-46), du palmier *gomuti* (165, 87) ou du rubis du roi de Ceylan (168, 32-33), voire à leur début et à leur fin, comme pour les grands navires qui sillonnent les mers (sans doute des jonques chinoises) – la première des merveilles qui retient l'attention dans le *Livre d'Ynde* et occupe presque tout le chapitre –, ou pour les sagoutiers, annoncés également comme « autre grant merveille »

---

<sup>94</sup> Une comparaison rapide avec d'autres voyageurs médiévaux, comme Ibn Battûta, ou encore Niccolo de' Conti, confrontés aux mêmes réalités orientales qu'ils décrivent précisément, souligne des différences fondamentales de traitement.



(165, 173). Ce genre de marquage détache le passage au cœur du récit et en souligne le caractère rhétoriquement accessoire : la description est ainsi montrée comme une boursoufflure ou un renchérissement. C'est là l'usage premier de l'insertion descriptive dans les romans de la seconde moitié du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, qui tend à s'estomper, à se faire moins voyant au cours du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Dans le *Devisement du monde*, cette façon de procéder – avec prédominance du seul cadrage en amont – caractérise plutôt deux autres types de descriptions, dévolus aux lieux – c'est par exemple le cas du lac près du monastère de Saint-Léonard (22, 33-42), du palais de Khoubilai à Khanbalikh (83), de cette ville (84, 11-58), du pont de pierre sur le Sang-kan (104, 12-32), du pic d'Adam (168, 48-56) – et aux scènes – dont les exemples sont innombrables. On note que le départ entre ces deux types de descriptions n'est pas toujours étanche, la première débouchant souvent sur la seconde, insensiblement. Le lieu mis sous les projecteurs tend aisément à se transformer en scène, comme dans un théâtre ; la représentation donnée est le moment d'une anecdote, historique ou comportementale, détaillant un usage, un comportement, une coutume ancrée dans le passé. L'orientation vers l'éloge ou le blâme, caractéristique, chez les Anciens, du genre épидictique, donc de la description, peut alors ressurgir. L'insertion rhétorique de ces passages au sein du récit tend en effet à souligner le caractère extraordinaire du propos qui dérive, mais aussi à indiquer qu'il est senti comme une sortie de la *matiere* traitée, susceptible de durer, le propos pouvant enfler jusqu'à occuper la totalité du chapitre. Le miracle de la pierre d'église enlevée à la base de la colonne de l'église dans la ville de Samarcande en témoigne :

Je vous dirai une grant merveille qui avint en ceste cité. Il fu voirs, n'a pas encore granment, que Sigaray, frere germain au Grant Caam, se fist crestien, qui estoit seignour de celle contree et de maintes autres. [...] Et est ainsi la dite coulombe encore et sera tant comme a Dieu plaira. Or laissons de ce [...]. (51, 4-54)

On relève dans cet exemple l'emploi du nom *merveille* et de la tournure impersonnelle *avint que*, qui monte en épingle l'histoire : ce sont là des

formulations employées ailleurs (éventuellement, sous une forme dérivée),<sup>95</sup> qui estampillent de manière presque archétypale nombre de ces descriptions et en justifient l'utilité autant que le plaisir.

L'horizon d'attente créé dans le récit de voyage rejoint, par moments, celui du roman, de l'hagiographie ou encore de la chronique. Les individus mis en scène prennent vie à moindres frais. D'abord, les sentiments qui les meuvent ou qu'ils suscitent chez autrui (le voyageur notamment et, à sa suite, le lecteur-auditeur) sont notés assez fréquemment à l'aide d'un nom, d'un adjectif ou d'un verbe qui, parfois répété, estampille le passage.<sup>96</sup> Les discours rapportés directement font aussi leur apparition dans 44 passages et contribuent, avec leur cortège d'interrogations, d'exclamations, d'impératifs ou d'apostrophes, à animer le récit de leurs intonations ou rythmes particuliers ; ils ont toujours valeur de dramatisation. Ils sont le plus souvent réduits à quelques lignes,<sup>97</sup> introduits en amont par un mot déclaratif, selon l'usage encore dominant dans la littérature en prose du temps, débouchant exceptionnellement sur un échange, comme entre le père de Marco Polo et le Grand Khan (14, 16-18), éclairant de vivacité une scène de tension comme entre Alaü, le seigneur des Tartares du Levant et le calife vaincu de Bagdad (24, 30-46), le Prêtre Jean et le roi d'Or réduit à être

<sup>95</sup> Pour d'autres occurrences de la tournure impersonnelle cataphorique *avint que* ou sa variante anaphorique *ce avint*, voir, p. ex., 15, 1 (les rapides progrès du jeune Vénitien à la cour du Grand Khan) ; 17, 9 (la mort de la reine Bolgata) ; 25, 1, 12 (le calife de Bagdad et ses lectures de la Bible) ; 30, 30 (la légende des Rois Mages) ; 51, 17 (à la mort de Djaghataï, la restitution de la pierre faisant pilier dans l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste ; événement annoncé en 51, 5) ; 58, 20 (la coutume de demander à sa femme d'honorer les visiteurs de passage) ; 145, 93 (à la fin du siège de la cité de Xiangyang, prise grâce au stratagème des Polo).

<sup>96</sup> Notamment, par ordre de fréquence, l'étonnement, la méchanceté ou la cruauté, la joie et le plaisir, le respect ou l'estime, la tristesse ou la douleur, la peur, la trahison ou la déloyauté, la honte, l'amour ou l'amitié, la colère, le mépris, l'espérance enfin. On note un peu moins de 450 mentions de ces seuls sentiments, ce qui indique leur fréquence.

<sup>97</sup> Font exception le discours du calife de Bagdad mettant au défi, sous peine de mort, les chrétiens de son royaume de déplacer une montagne (25, 27-36), la demande des magiciens au Grand Khan pour contenter les idoles (74, 105-117, avec discours narrativisé), la plaidoirie du roi d'Or auprès des hommes du Prêtre Jean (108, 3-8), le message d'allégeance du vieux roi du Champa au Grand Khan (161, 23-34), la réponse des ascètes yogis à ceux qui leur demandent pourquoi ils vont nus sans en éprouver de honte (172, 66-74), le discours d'Ahmad Teküder à ses soldats (194c, 12-35).

gardien de bétail (108, 21-28), le mage possédé interrogé par ses collègues au sujet du diagnostic à poser sur le malade (119, 70-80).

On observe des choix récurrents de scènes, particulièrement propices à porter des anecdotes de type historique ou anthropologique. Dans un univers pourtant radicalement différent, des topiques dont le public occidental choisi était friand surgissent avec les scènes de batailles (13 exemples, souvent soulignés dans les rubriques, appuyés sur des mentions de dates, parfois déployés sur plusieurs chapitres successifs comme en 76-78, 120-122, 158-159, 194*b-d*, avec des formules proprement épiques comme « Or poïst on veoir, l'en n'i oïst pas Dieu tonnant, la bataille fu moult aspre et moult felonnesse »), avec les scènes de chasse (outre les notations nombreuses qui font allusion à cette activité, sont développées celles de Khoubilai sur quatre chapitres, 89-92, celle aux crocodiles, 118, 34-79, ou encore celle qui cause la mort de saint Thomas, 170, 33-41). Nourrissant ici et là une tonalité épique, nombre de ces scènes montrent l'emprise du Grand Khan, son pouvoir attractif sur son peuple et sur l'énonciateur. Les miracles racontés à la manière des *exempla* prouvent la grandeur de Dieu (le monastère de Saint-Léonard, 22 ; la montagne de Bagdad, 25-28 ; la pierre de la colonne dans l'église Saint-Jean-Baptiste à Samarcande, 51 ; l'église de Saint-Thomas, 170) et font pièce aux scènes d'enchantements multiples où magie et religion païenne sont mêlées : dans un cas comme dans l'autre, le merveilleux est accepté comme tel par l'énonciateur. Enfin, les coutumes étranges, parfois même dérangeantes pour l'Occidental médiéval, qui portent en particulier sur la sexualité, le mariage, les rites funéraires, la façon de considérer la vie et la mort, constituent le fonds roulant de la veine anthropologique qui s'épanche dans le récit : ces *costumes*, *manieres*, *usages* ou *usances*, *affaires* (au sens de « situation ou état, condition ») sont mises en avant de manière incessante, comme si le livre répondait au souhait émis initialement par le grand Khan. Elles nous sont parfois livrées de manière brute, en apparence distanciée, et on a pu signaler l'apparente froideur objective du voyageur capable de porter « un regard non théologique sur l'altérité », <sup>98</sup> qui se tient à distance, d'ailleurs

---

<sup>98</sup> Boutet et al. (2009), CIX.

parfois trop loin pour distinguer, comprendre ou interpréter correctement ce qu'il voit, qui ne juge pas, qui ne se prononce pas. Par exemple, l'anthropophagie dans le royaume du Fujian ou le droit de cuissage dans celui de Champa ont beau être soulignés par le narrateur, ce qui suggère leur caractère particulier, leur mention fait montre d'une objectivité impersonnelle, inattendue pour le moderne :

Et si sachiez que il menjuent de toutes chars, et si vous di que il mengüent char d'omme moult volentiers, mais que il ne sont mort de sa droite mort ; mais ceulz qui sont occis vont il cerchant et menjant moult volentiers, car il le tiennent a moult bonne char. (154, 16-21)

Sachiez que en ce regne ne se puet marier femme se le roy ne voit la femme avant ; et se elle li plaist, si la prent a femme et se elle ne li plaist, si li donne tant du sien que elle se puet bien marier. (161, 45-49)

Mais l'anecdotique n'est jamais gratuit, il a une valeur informative ou moralisante autant qu'il parle à l'imaginaire et aux sentiments ; il nourrit la littérature. Aussi bien, à l'extrême inverse des propos dépouillés sur le mode de vie et les comportements des peuples rencontrés, l'énonciateur peut-il nous signifier son point de vue en indiquant, au début ou à la fin, les leçons de ce qu'il évoque, nous livrant ses commentaires, réprobateurs, étonnés ou admiratifs, n'hésitant pas à démystifier des croyances erronées autant qu'à adhérer à des illusions ou à réécrire la vérité, expliquant ou justifiant aussi son avis. Le *Devisement du monde* est truffé de ce genre de remarques, destinées à partager un avis sur l'ailleurs et l'Autre :

[...] et ce est chose veritable que touz les Sarrazins du monde veulent touz jourz moult grant mal aus Crestiens du monde. (25, 8-11)

Il vestent vestemens noirs et blans et dorment sus nates et font si aspre vie que c'est merveilles. (74, 151-153)

Et vous di que c'est moult belle chose a veoir des fieres bestes que ces lions prennent, car quant il veulent chacier atout ces lions, si les portent en unne charette couverte et avec chascun a un petit chiennet. (90, 11-15)

Et vous conterai une mauvaise coustume qu'i ont. (165, 104-105)

Et sachiez que li fait de ces ydres si sont tant de deableries que ce n'est pas bon que il soit escrit en nostre livre, pour ce que trop seroit mauvaise chose a oïr. (160, 15-18)

Le soin apporté à la logique est patent : la relation cause-conséquence mainte fois avancée, comme on le voit dans les exemples précédents, impose de la même façon l'authenticité du propos fondée sur la réalité, qu'il s'agisse d'une véritable entreprise de démystification très novatrice (la Porte de Fer censée contenir les peuples barbares de Gog et Magog, des Comans, sans doute ; la salamandre, qui est un minéral, non pas une bête ; les petits hommes d'Inde empaillés, qui sont des singes ; l'ambre issu des cachalots et non de l'écume de la mer ; l'indigo, qui est un végétal, non un minéral), de ce que la modernité considérera comme une reconstruction littéraire de la vérité (c'est le cas de nombre d'expéditions historiques menées par Khoubilai, que le voyageur amalgame souvent en un unique récit raccourci et compact, mais plus dramatique, plus efficace) ou une innutrition où le mythologique le dispute au légendaire (les rois Mages, la montagne déplacée par la foi, le royaume du Prêtre Jean, les Cynocéphales, l'histoire de Bouddha ...) ou aux contes (le savetier qui se crève un œil, la récolte des diamants, l'oiseau rokh, la princesse qui ne veut se marier qu'avec celui qui pourra la vaincre à la lutte, p. ex.).

Le succès immédiat du *Devisement du Monde* qu'on place gentiment sous le nom de Marco Polo donne à réfléchir sur son style, rien moins que désincarné, gageant la littérarité de ce récit de voyage original. De par son mode de production particulier qui a demandé la collaboration entre le voyageur, témoin conteur, et l'écrivain chargé de la *mise en écrit*, le récit surprend par une poétique fondamentalement en tension qui fait proliférer les instances narratives, les différences de focales, les changements de régimes de l'écriture, comme à l'image de l'abondance orientale. On ne peut parler pour autant *des* styles de cet ouvrage qui s'impose aussi, entre autres intérêts multiples, par son style, car le style est ce qui, par excellence, unifie et donne sa griffe à un texte littéraire. Par la fusion opérée de manière harmonieuse et concertée entre la parole vive et l'écriture qui en garde la mémoire, par la subjectivité qui s'infiltré dans les représentations du

monde offerte et en détache certains pans, le *Devisement du monde* n'a certes rien d'un livre scientifique, comme nous pourrions l'entendre aujourd'hui de manière restreinte, mais il nous fait « regarde[r] d'un œil aiguisé maintes réalités de géographie humaine ». <sup>99</sup> Par là, il a tout d'un récit de voyage nouvelle manière, selon la mode historiquement datée de son époque, aux facettes multiples et chatoyantes, en elles-mêmes séduisantes jusqu'à aujourd'hui, parce que chacun d'entre nous peut y trouver ce qu'il espère, ce qu'il attend, ce qui l'intéresse.

## Références

### Textes

- Andreose, Alvisé ; Ménard, Philippe (2010). *Le voyage en Asie d'Odoric de Pordenone, traduit par Jean Le Long, OSB, Itinéraire de la pègregrination et du voyage (1351)* (Genève : Droz).
- Badel, Pierre-Yves (1998). *Marco Polo : La description du monde* (Paris : Librairie générale française).
- Blanchard, Joël ; Quéreuil, Michel (2005). *Le devisement du monde, Tome IV : Voyages à travers la Chine*, in Ménard (2001-2009) (Genève : Droz).
- Boivin, Jeanne-Marie ; Harf-Lancner, Laurence ; Mathey-Maille, Laurence (2003). *Le devisement du monde, Tome II : Traversée de l'Afghanistan et entrée en Chine*, in Ménard (2001-2009) (Genève : Droz).
- Boutet, Dominique ; Delcourt, Thierry ; James-Raoul, Danièle (2009). *Le devisement du monde, Tome VI : Livre d'Ynde, Retour vers l'Occident*, in Ménard (2001-2009) (Genève : Droz).
- Charignon, Antoine Joseph Henri (1924). *Le livre de Marco Polo, citoyen de Venise, conseiller privé et commissaire impérial de Khoubilaï Khaân, rédigé en Français sous sa dictée en 1298 par Rusticien de Pise, revu et corrigé par Marco Polo lui même en 1307* (Pékin : Albert Nachbaur).
- Charles-Dominique, Paule (1995). « Ibn Battûta : Voyages et périples », in id., *Voyageurs arabes : Ibn Fadlân, Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battûta et un auteur anonyme* (Paris : Gallimard).

---

<sup>99</sup> Id. (2001), 99.

- Chênerie, Marie-Luce ; Guéret-Laferté, Michèle ; Ménard, Philippe (2001). *Le devisement du monde, Tome I : Départ des voyageurs et traversée de la Perse*, in Ménard (2001-2009) (Genève : Droz).
- Delclos, Jean-Claude ; Roussel, Claude (2006). *Le devisement du monde, Tome V : A travers la Chine Sud*, in Ménard (2001-2009) (Genève : Droz).
- Eusebi, Mario (2018). *Marco Polo : Le Devisement dou monde, 1. Testo, secondo la lezione del codice fr. 1116 della Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (Venezia : Edizioni Ca' Foscari).
- Faucon, Jean-Claude ; Quéruel, Danielle ; Santucci, Monique (2004). *Le devisement du monde, Tome III : L'empereur Khoubilai Khan*, in Ménard (2001-2009) (Genève : Droz).
- Guéret-Laferté, Michèle (2004). *Poggio Bracciolini ; De l'Inde : Les voyages en Asie de Niccolo de' Conti* (Turnhout : Brepols).
- Kappler, Claude-Claire ; Kappler, René (1997). *Guillaume de Rubrouck : Voyage dans l'empire mongole, 1253-1255* (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale).
- Ménard, Philippe (2001-2009). *Marco Polo ; Le devisement du monde*, 6 tomes (Genève : Droz).
- Ronchi, Gabriella ; Segre, Cesare (1982). *Milione : Le divisament dou monde* (Milano : Mondadori).

### Études critiques

- Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Valeria (1989). « Enunciazione e produzione del testo nel *Milione* », *Morfologie del testo medievale, Studi linguistici e semiologici*, 28 : 209-242.
- Guéret-Laferté, Michèle (1998). « Les gestes de l'Autre », *Le geste et les gestes au Moyen Âge : Senefiance*, 41 : 239-253.
- James-Raoul, Danièle (2007). *Chrétien de Troyes, la griffe d'un style* (Paris : Champion).
- James-Raoul, Danièle (2019). « Qualifier le monde dans le *Livre d'Ynde* de Marco Polo », in Sébastien Douchet, Marie-Pascale Halary, Sylvie Lefèvre, Patrick Moran and Jean-René Valette, eds. *De la pensée de l'histoire au jeu littéraire : Études médiévales en l'honneur de Dominique Boutet* (Paris : Champion), 839-854.
- Marchello-Nizia, Christiane (1979). *Histoire de la langue française aux XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris : Bordas).

- Marchello-Nizia, Christiane (1985). *Dire le vrai : L'adverbe « si » en français médiéval, essai de linguistique historique* (Genève, Droz).
- Ménard, Philippe (2013a). « L'écriture du récit de voyage : Les références du narrateur au voyageur dans la version française du *Devisement du Monde* de Marco Polo », in François Moureau, ed. *Itinéraires littéraires du voyage* (Genève : Droz), 243-253.
- Ménard, Philippe (2013b). « Les mentions du nom de Marco Polo dans les principales rédactions du *Devisement du monde* », *Critica del testo*, 16.1 : 61-83.
- Richard, Jean (1981). *Les récits de voyages et de pèlerinages* (Turnhout : Brepols).
- Segre, Cesare (2008). « Chi ha scritto il *Milione* ? », in Silvia Conte, ed., *I viaggi del Milione: Itinerari testuali, vettori di trasmissione e metamorfosi del Devisement du monde di Marco Polo e Rustichello da Pisa nella pluralità delle attestazioni, Venezia, 6-8 ottobre 2005* (Roma : Tiellemmedia), 6-15.





# **L'exotisme dans le *Devisement du monde*, en particulier dans le « Livre d'Inde »**

Dominique Boutet (1949-2021)

Le sujet que nous nous proposons d'aborder n'est pas sans poser de sérieux problèmes – des problèmes qui en font précisément l'intérêt.

Peut-on parler d'exotisme au Moyen Âge et appliquer ce concept à sa littérature ? L'exotisme est un concept fondamentalement littéraire et pictural apparu au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, et dont la charge symbolique est précisément liée à la littérature et aux conditions historiques de ce siècle-là. Et comment pourrait-on définir plus largement l'exotisme, en-deçà et au-delà de cette littérature qui le porte, en France, de Châteaubriand à Victor Segalen en passant par Pierre Loti ? De très nombreux travaux s'y sont essayés, dont les plus récents s'inspirent du courant des études dites postcoloniales et cherchent parfois à l'appliquer aux récits médiévaux (le livre de Simon Gaunt sur Marco Polo constitue à cet égard une mise au point importante). Aux yeux d'Anaïs Fléchet, « l'exotisme apparaît dans le champ historique comme un concept mou, souvent évoqué à propos de l'analyse des discours sur l'autre, des imaginaires et des relations internationales, mais rarement étudié de manière systématique ». <sup>1</sup> Et Thomas Tanase, évoquant les contacts établis entre Occidentaux et Tartares au cours du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, s'interroge : « Est-on fondé à utiliser le terme d'« exotisme » pour caractériser les descriptions de l'Asie rédigées pendant le siècle et demi où cette rencontre se déroula (1250-1400) ? ». <sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Fléchet (2008), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Tanase (2008), 37.

Cependant les médiévistes eux-mêmes ont parlé d'exotisme ; un colloque a même été organisé à Lille et publié en 2008 sous le titre interrogatif : *Un exotisme littéraire médiéval ?*,<sup>3</sup> mais on remarque que Marco Polo n'y était pas représenté, ni aucun des récits de voyage en Extrême-Orient. Jacques Le Goff décrivait l'océan Indien comme un « horizon onirique », « l'exotisme de l'Occident médiéval, le lieu de ses rêves et de ses dévouements », « l'*hortus conclusus* d'un Paradis mêlé de ravissements et de cauchemars ». <sup>4</sup> Tous ces chercheurs avaient évidemment en tête à la fois les représentations encyclopédiques héritées de Pline (*via* Solin et Isidore de Séville) et celles que véhiculaient les traditions gravitant autour du *Roman d'Alexandre*, remontant elles aussi à l'antiquité. Selon Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas, dans la littérature de fiction qui s'inspire des récits de voyage « l'exotisme littéraire médiéval est avant tout un jeu de l'imagination, générateur de descriptions et de fictions »<sup>5</sup> ; la « constante » des descriptions et fictions exotiques médiévales serait « de renvoyer l'auteur et son public à leur propre identité, qu'elles contribuent à révéler, conforter ou défendre ». <sup>6</sup> On serait spontanément enclin à identifier l'exotisme, ou l'effet d'exotisme, avec ce que les textes appellent la « merveille » ; mais cette même chercheuse s'interroge : « La présence de la merveille rendrait-elle impossible tout élément d'exotisme ? ». <sup>7</sup> Pour Paul Zumthor, l'homme du Moyen Âge ignorerait l'exotisme : « L'homme du Moyen Âge ne cesse d'être tenté par les séductions du dehors, spatial ou temporel ; mais il y résiste, par effroi ou par gêne ». <sup>8</sup>

Selon Francis Afférgan, en revanche, au Moyen Âge « à la place de l'altérité se substitue celle de l'imaginaire sous la triple figure du merveilleux / prodigieux, du monstrueux et de l'animalité ». <sup>9</sup> Et il distingue un peu plus loin, pour ce qu'il appelle *l'altérité lointaine*, « deux valeurs opératoires essentielles : le *lointain* lié à l'état de la géographie et de la

---

<sup>3</sup> Gaullier-Bougassas (2008).

<sup>4</sup> Le Goff (1970), 243-263 ; repris dans Le Goff (1977) and Le Goff (1999), 269, 279, 271.

<sup>5</sup> Gaullier-Bougassas (2008), 18.

<sup>6</sup> Gaullier-Bougassas (2008), 20.

<sup>7</sup> Gaullier-Bougassas (2008), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Zumthor (1993), 262.

<sup>9</sup> Afférgan (1987), 11.

cartographie [...], et le *merveilleux* sous ses deux valences fondamentales : le monstrueux d'une part, la bonté et la beauté paradisiaques d'autre part », qui sont la « double et contradictoire marque de l'exotisme ». <sup>10</sup> Altérité et exotisme vont de pair, et Francis Affergan parle d'« altérité exotique » à propos de différents auteurs, dont Marco Polo.

En revanche le comparatiste Jean-Marc Moura estime que l'exotisme n'apparaît qu'avec les « grandes découvertes » du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, époque où « la conception médiévale d'un monde connaissable, théologiquement fixé et circonscrit se trouve battue en brèche ; [...] Le réel va peu à peu se dépouiller de sa gangue de merveilleux, la représentation des peuples étrangers va progressivement se modifier et c'est dans des conditions culturelles nouvelles, dominées par le pragmatisme, que se développe l'exotisme littéraire ». <sup>11</sup>

Avant d'examiner la nature du regard porté par notre auteur-voyageur sur les terres que baigne l'océan Indien, il importe donc de définir ce que l'on entend par exotisme, et en particulier de préciser ses rapports avec les concepts d'altérité, d'ailleurs, et d'étrange – le statut de la *merveille* étant à cet égard manifestement ambigu.

Le dictionnaire de Littré définit l'exotique comme de l'étrange. Le dictionnaire Larousse donne quant à lui de l'exotisme deux définitions :

- « Caractère de ce qui évoque les mœurs, les habitants ou les paysages des pays lointains ».

- « Goût des choses exotiques ».

L'ATILF le définit d'une façon analogue, mais en ajoutant des précisions importantes :

- « A. Caractère de ce qui est exotique », la définition de l'adjectif « exotique » étant la suivante : « [En parlant de pers. ou de choses envisagées p. réf. au pays ou à la culture propre du locuteur] Qui est relatif, qui appartient à un pays étranger, généralement lointain ou peu connu ; qui a un caractère naturellement original dû à sa provenance ».

- « B. Goût pour ce qui est exotique ». (avec des citations évoquant l'ailleurs : les « goûts des départs et de l'ailleurs » : Malègue, *Augustin* ;

<sup>10</sup> Affergan (1987), 27.

<sup>11</sup> Moura (1992), 45-46.

« cet ailleurs que l'exotisme cherche au-delà des océans lointains », Ricœur, *Philosophie de la volonté*).

Enfin Jean-Marc Moura propose une définition qui introduit une notion nouvelle, qui va au-delà du simple « goût » : « D'une manière générale, on entendra donc par exotisme une *rêverie* qui s'attache à un *espace lointain* et se réalise dans une *écriture* ».

Si l'on définit l'exotisme comme ce qui relève d'une autre civilisation que celle du locuteur, et en particulier de pays lointains, alors le *Devisement du monde* de Marco Polo relève pleinement de ce concept.

Mais l'exotisme se définit aussi comme l'attrait qu'exerce l'Autre, comme la *recherche* d'un ailleurs ; selon André Gide, ce charme ne tient pas au fait que « la nature y soit plus belle, mais que tout nous y paraît neuf, nous surprend et se présente à notre œil dans une sorte de virginité » (Journal, 27 août 1935, cité dans le *Grand Robert de la langue française*). Cependant d'autres chercheurs introduisent volontiers la notion de « cliché » (l'exotisme repose en partie sur des idées toutes faites à propos d'un pays, des images stéréotypées) ; mais pour Thomas Tanase « si l'exotisme relève certes du préjugé et du cliché, encore faut-il que ceux-ci puissent se fixer sur une réalité géographique et humaine que l'on pare d'un quelconque attrait au regard du « chez-nous » ». <sup>12</sup> Marco Polo joue-t-il sur cet attrait ? Ce qu'il dit des terres de l'Océan indien est-il de nature à surprendre le lecteur occidental ? À l'inciter à la « rêverie » sur ces espaces lointains ? C'est toute la question du rapport entre le texte et les horizons d'attente de ses lecteurs occidentaux (essentiellement le savoir traditionnel transmis sur ces régions depuis l'antiquité) qui est ainsi posée, et que l'on s'attachera à examiner dans cette communication. Et Marco Polo lui-même a-t-il été surpris ? Le manifeste-t-il ? Comme on le voit, la question de l'exotisme dans le *Devisement du monde* dépasse largement les aspects thématiques (qu'est-ce qui, dans ce texte, est exotique et qu'est-ce qui ne l'est pas ?) : elle pose des problèmes de fond engageant à la fois l'histoire des mentalités et la nature de l'écriture (les rapports entre l'auteur et sa matière), donc la poétique d'un texte dont le caractère littéraire a pu être

---

<sup>12</sup> Tanase (2008), 37.

contesté (comme il l'a été pour la *Vie de Saint Louis* de Joinville). Jean-François Staszak, pour qui l'exotisme se fonde sur la conjonction du lointain et du bizarre, a rappelé qu'il « n'est [...] jamais un fait ni la caractéristique d'un objet : il n'est qu'un point de vue, un discours, un ensemble de valeurs et de représentations à propos de quelque chose, quelque part ou quelqu'un. Parler d'exotisme, c'est moins analyser un objet que le discours d'un sujet à son endroit. La question « qu'est-ce qui est exotique ? » est en ce sens seconde par rapport à la question « pour qui ? »<sup>13</sup>. Et il tient à préciser un peu plus loin que « tout ce qui est lointain et bizarre ne tombe pas dans cette catégorie [= celle de l'exotisme] : encore faut-il qu'on puisse l'apprécier d'une certaine façon. L'intérêt ou même la fascination ne suffisent pas. [...] N'est exotique qu'une étrangeté mesurée, acceptable, appréhendable. Domesticable et domestiquée. L'exotisme est aimable, il ne doit pas faire peur ou interroger ».<sup>14</sup> De même pour Anaïs Fléchet « L'exotisme procède non d'une altérité radicale, mais d'un va-et-vient entre l'étranger et le familier ».<sup>15</sup>

Alvaro Barbieri a consacré quelques pages à la question de l'exotisme chez Marco Polo (« Marco Polo e l'esotico »<sup>16</sup>) ; il y propose de définir l'exotique comme du *difforme*, comme quelque chose qui n'a pas de correspondant exact, voire même aucun homologue, en Occident. L'abondance et l'hypertrophie en sont des constituants importants. Il constate une grande différence de traitement entre la partie consacrée aux Mongols et celle qui traite de l'Inde.

Simon Gaunt a récemment montré que notre auteur s'écartait du schéma binaire caractéristique du moyen Âge, qui opposait *nous* et *les autres* selon une logique du Bien et du Mal, du chrétien et du non-chrétien, du civilisé et du sauvage identifiés respectivement à l'Européen et au non-européen, asiatique ou africain<sup>17</sup> ; un schéma qui, à la suite de Pline, plaçait des peuples étranges, a-humains ou dont l'humanité demandait à être discutée, dans divers lieux d'Asie et surtout dans les îles situées aux confins du

---

<sup>13</sup> Staszak (2008), 8.

<sup>14</sup> Staszak (2008), 14.

<sup>15</sup> Fléchet (2008), 17.

<sup>16</sup> Barbieri (2004), 159-167.

<sup>17</sup> Gaunt (2013), 165, 172, 178, 181.

monde, et qui est matérialisé dans des mappemondes comme celle d'Ebtorf ou, contemporaine de Marco Polo, celle d'Hereford. Selon ce critique, il conviendrait, à propos du *Devisement du monde*, de remplacer le concept d'altérité par celui de diversité, en raison précisément de ce changement de perspective opéré par le sujet, qui ôte à l'Occidental la position de centre. Or le terme même d'exotisme oppose étymologiquement le centre et l'extérieur : son emploi est-il alors pertinent ? Il est notable que le Grand Khan lui-même, dont la position est politiquement centrale, est décentré par rapport aux populations de son empire, lesquelles sont exotiques pour lui autant qu'elles le sont pour Marco Polo. En témoigne le chap. 15, où l'empereur mongol déclare souhaiter « apprendre du neuf et les curiosités des diverses contrées » (« les nouvelles choses et les manières des diverses contrees », chap. 15), tâche dans laquelle Marco va exceller.

Il est par ailleurs certain que Marco Polo pense aux Européens qui envisageraient de se rendre dans ces terres extrême-orientales : il donne ainsi des renseignements sur la dangerosité de certaines populations, leur mode d'alimentation, leurs traits de mœurs, bien entendu leur religion, etc., et surtout il prend soin d'indiquer les distances et les directions – ce que ne font pas les encyclopédies. Ce qu'il retrace, c'est un itinéraire, mais un itinéraire partiellement déconnecté de l'expérience personnelle du sujet qui écrit (ou qui dicte) dans la mesure où est employé le tour impersonnel « on » ; comme le notait justement Michèle Guéret-Laferté, ces formules (du type « quant l'on se part de ... ») évoquent « aussi bien l'expérience faite que toute expérience future et donne à voir les actes qui composent le voyage comme pouvant être indéfiniment rejoués ».<sup>18</sup>

Pour se pencher sur la question de l'exotisme du *Devisement du monde*, on peut prendre pour point de départ cette remarque de Thomas Tanase : « [...] la part, si réduite, de fantastique que contenait le récit du Vénitien a fini par prendre le dessus et par devenir l'essentiel de ce qui a rendu célèbre le *Livre des Merveilles* ». <sup>19</sup> Cela voudrait-il dire que l'exotisme de ce texte (s'il y en a !) est un phénomène de pure réception (et de réception à distance dans le temps) et non un phénomène d'écriture ?

---

<sup>18</sup> Guéret-Laferté (1994), 81.

<sup>19</sup> Tanase (2008), 44.

Le premier chapitre du « Livre d'Inde » peut donner une première indication, surtout si on le confronte à l'enluminure célèbre qui est censée l'illustrer dans le ms. de la Bodleian Library, *B2*. Le narrateur déclare commencer « a entrer en Ynde pour vous conter toutes les merveilles qui y sont » (version française, chap. 157), mais il débute aussitôt par la description des navires qui sillonnent l'océan Indien pour leurs activités commerciales, trompant ainsi l'attente de lecteurs pour qui l'Inde est avant tout un réceptacle de monstres semi-humains, comme en témoigne l'enluminure de *B2*. Ce chapitre est entièrement technique et ne saurait prêter au rêve ni susciter un quelconque attrait. La merveille ne se manifeste qu'au chapitre suivant, avec la description du palais du « seigneur » de Sypangu, entièrement couvert et pavé d'or, qui exerce sur Marco Polo une véritable fascination alors même qu'il n'en parle que par ouï-dire puisqu'il n'est pas allé au Japon – et que ce palais est peut-être tout simplement fantasmé (aucun témoignage n'en a été conservé). Il fait en tout cas écho au palais du Grand Khan à Cambaluc, longuement décrit au chap. 83, dont la grande salle, les chambres et même le toit étaient également recouverts d'or, d'argent et de peintures et dont l'une des merveilles était le « Mont Vert », colline artificielle couverte de lapis-lazuli et couronnée par un palais également vert. Nous avons là des exemples caractéristiques d'un exotisme défini comme distance dans la similitude, comme étrangeté « mesurable », « domesticable », une comparaison implicite étant possible avec les palais des souverains occidentaux (l'actuel palais des Doges, par exemple, est postérieur de quelques décennies au séjour de Marco Polo en Chine, et sa décoration l'est encore davantage !). L'exotisme tient ici au fait que la merveille est sous le signe de la démesure : démesure de la surface occupée, du nombre des bâtiments, de la richesse des matériaux, mais aussi démesure dans l'ordre de l'imagination, qui combine tous les ordres (l'humain, l'animal et le végétal) pour produire un espace naturel entièrement recomposé par l'homme grâce à la subtilité de l'art : un art ici bien concret, constatable *de visu* puisque Marco Polo l'a vu, qui sublime en quelque sorte les descriptions des romans d'Antiquité – *Enéas* (Carthage, tombeau de Camille), *Troie* (chambre d'Hélène) ou *Alexandre* (palais de Porus) – où l'art était celui de l'écrivain et n'était donc que de l'ordre de la fiction.



L'exotisme du palais de Cambaluc peut se définir comme la rencontre entre la réalité et un imaginaire littéraire ; une réalité que Marco Polo caractérise ainsi au chap. 174, à propos du royaume de Quilon, en Inde, dans le Kerala : « Chez eux, tout est différent de chez nous, plus beau et meilleur » (« Il ont toutes choses devisees aus nostres, qui sont plus belles et meillours »).

La critique a déjà abondamment souligné combien le portrait laudatif de Koubilai et de son empire pouvait aller contre l'horizon d'attente d'Occidentaux marqués par le souvenir des incursions mongoles de la première moitié du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle : nous n'y revenons pas.

L'autre horizon d'attente pré-défini est évidemment l'Inde et les îles de l'océan Indien. Jacques Le Goff en a dégagé les lignes principales : richesses et rareté, exubérance et transgression des lois de la nature, rêve d'infini et d'absolu, mythes du paradis terrestre et de l'âge d'or païen. On a vu qu'au regard de cet horizon chargé d'exotisme, le début du « Livre d'Inde » est d'emblée ambigu : tendu entre *merveille* (dans la rubrique) et construction navale. Cependant Marco Polo mentionne très vite la présence et l'abondance des îles situées dans l'Océan périphérique, qui font partie de l'horizon d'attente encyclopédique. Mais là encore il joue avec cet horizon de façon ambiguë. Dès le début du chap. 157 il tient à parler des navires « en quoi les marchent vont en viennent par les illes d'Ynde », ce qui revient à détruire le mythe des îles océanes peuplées uniquement de monstres sauvages : elles appartiennent au monde économique, et sont donc reliées à la civilisation. La fin du chapitre insiste sur cette idée : « Or vous ai devisees les nez qui vont et qui viennent avec les marchans et les marchandises par la grant mer oceane d'Ynde et par les ylles d'Ynde ». Autrement dit, l'étrangeté des îles d'Inde est une étrangeté maîtrisable, domesticable : elle n'est pas incompatible avec le développement d'un sentiment d'exotisme. Au chap. 160 Marco Polo les déclare même comptabilisables : selon les marins qui sillonnent la mer de Chine, elles sont au nombre de 7449, et ils le savent d'expérience. Un peu plus loin, il explique que cette mer, comme la « mer d'Inde », fait partie de la « mer Océane », de l'Océan qui fait le tour de la Terre, mais qu'elle a son nom propre comme la « mer d'Ingleterre » : le lointain, l'inconnu, est ainsi ramené à du familier, dans ce mouvement de va-et-vient qui, selon Anaïs Fléchet,

caractérise l'exotisme. Toutefois la volonté d'expliquer, caractéristique de l'écriture de Marco Polo, réduit ce qu'on peut appeler l'effet de rêve que susciterait la reprise de l'imaginaire des encyclopédies.

Il en va de même pour cet autre aspect de l'imaginaire : la richesse prodigieuse de l'Orient et sa luxuriance, telle qu'elle se décrivait dans la *Lettre du Prêtre Jean*. Le chap. 160 détaille cette richesse : arbres « bon et de grant odour » comme le bois d'aloès, poivre blanc et noir en abondance, etc. : « si que ce est moult merveilleuse chose des richesses qui en ces ylls sont de toutes choses, et d'or, et de pierres, et de pelles, et de toutes autres manieres d'espiceries ». Mais quelques lignes plus loin le texte évoque les difficultés du trajet et déclare ne pas en dire plus, « pour ce que trop sont desvoiables lieux, et pour ce aussi que le dit mesire Marc Pol n'i fu pas » : l'attrait exotique se trouve ainsi battu en brèche, à la fois dans ses aspects concrets (« desvoiables lieux ») et au regard de l'authenticité des faits, qui n'est pas garantie par l'expérience vécue du voyageur – qui ne tient ce savoir que de tiers, même si ce sont des marchands chinois de Çayton en de Cinsay, donc des sources *a priori* fiables.

La façon dont Marco Polo présente et décrit le bouddhisme nous semble témoigner des mêmes ambiguïtés, en soi comme au regard de la notion d'exotisme. La description des représentations des dieux (des « ydres ») occupe tout le début du chap. 160 : têtes d'animaux ou têtes multiples, multiples bras, que les bouddhistes justifient par la seule tradition. Cette étrangeté présentée comme injustifiée pourrait être de nature à susciter la curiosité du fait de son exotisme ; mais le narrateur s'empresse de combattre cette éventuelle curiosité : « Et sachiez que li fait de ces ydres si sont tant de deableries que ce n'est pas bon que il soit escrit en nostre livre, pour ce que trop seroit mauvaise chose a oïr. Et pour ce vous lairons a conter de ces ydres, et vous conterons des autres choses ». Et pour ajouter encore à l'effet de répulsion, le paragraphe suivant évoque le cannibalisme que ces populations pratiquent à l'égard des ennemis qu'ils capturent et qui ne peuvent payer de rançon. Si, comme le pense Jean-François Staszak, « l'exotisme est aimable, il ne doit pas faire peur ou interroger », il ne saurait y en avoir ici. Cependant la critique a unanimement souligné la

fascination de Marco Polo pour la personne du Bouddha (encore, tout récemment, Simon Gaunt<sup>20</sup>), dont il n'hésite pas à dire que « s'il eust esté crestiens, il eust esté uns granz sainz avecques Nostre Seigneur Jhesu Crist a la bonne vie et honneste que il mena » (chap. 168) : on songe à ce vers célèbre de la *Chanson de Roland* au sujet de l'émir Baligant : « Deus ! quel baron, s'ouïst crestientet ! » (v. 3164). Le récit de cette vie a par ailleurs inspiré, en Occident, l'histoire de Barlaam et Josaphat, qui figure dans la *Légende dorée* et a fait l'objet d'un poème en langue vulgaire au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle : voilà de quoi réduire l'étrangeté du bouddhisme, le rendre familier et, par certains côtés, le rendre compatible avec la religion chrétienne – autrement dit lui conférer un exotisme acceptable, « domesticable ».

Le procédé inverse est illustré, par exemple, dans l'épisode sur les corsaires de l'ouest de l'Inde, aux chap. 177 à 179. Le monde méditerranéen connaissait depuis l'Antiquité la pratique de la piraterie, qu'elle fût individuelle ou commanditée par des États. Ces deux types se rencontrent en Inde (il y a des *corsaus* commandités par le roi du Tanambruta, chap. 179) : cela ne saurait déstabiliser un lecteur occidental ; en revanche les détails donnés par Marco Polo sont de nature à créer un écart dans lequel peut s'insérer l'exotisme : sur la côte de Malabar (chap. 177), les *corsaus* ont une stratégie quasi militaire (ils opèrent en flottilles pour drainer tout l'espace maritime du secteur), tandis que ceux de Gazarat « font une mauvaistié » épouvantable, qui consiste à faire boire aux marchands qu'ils saisissent un laxatif qui leur fait évacuer les pierres précieuses et les perles qu'ils ont avalées dans l'espoir de les préserver du pillage. Marco Polo ajoute dans sa présentation une forme d'humour cynique en rapportant les propos de ces pirates : « Alez encore gaaignier », disent-ils aux marchands, « que par aventure il sera encore nostres ! » (chap. 177). On a ainsi du familier dé-familiarisé par l'insistance sur une dangerosité accrue et par cette forme d'humour plutôt inattendue.

Mais à côté de ces présentations ambiguës, exotiques par leur ambiguïté même, Marco Polo n'hésite pas à détruire quelques mythes qui pouvaient avoir, pour les Occidentaux, l'attrait de l'exotisme.

---

<sup>20</sup> Gaunt (2013), 95.

C'est le cas bien connu du mythe occidental de la licorne, au chap. 165. On sait que Marco Polo décrit un animal « unicorne » qui n'est autre que le rhinocéros de Sumatra. Mais non seulement il déclare que cette bête ne se laisse pas prendre au sein d'une vierge, mais encore il la dépeint comme « moult laide beste a veoir », sorte de mixte d'éléphant et de buffle dont la tête fait penser à celle du sanglier : le rêve d'élégance (auquel sacrifie le miniaturiste du ms. BnF, fr 2810 !) se transforme en repoussoir. Le narrateur procède d'une façon analogue à propos des « petits hommes d'Inde », qui se vendent embaumés en Europe : ce sont en réalité de petits singes apprêtés pour ressembler à des hommes : la merveille exotique est alors réduite au statut d'artefact destiné à tromper.

Le griffon faisait partie des traditions sur l'Orient, aussi bien dans les encyclopédies que dans la littérature, en particulier autour de l'histoire d'Alexandre. Marco Polo confirme son existence (chap. 185), mais de la même façon que la licorne : il s'agit d'un oiseau gigantesque, mais il n'est pas mi-aigle, mi-lion ; la merveille ne réside plus dans l'hybridation, mais seulement dans la taille de l'animal ; d'autre part il ne confirme tout cela que par ouï-dire, n'étant pas allé lui-même du côté de Mogadiscio et de Zanzibar, trop au sud par rapport à son itinéraire ; enfin les détails qu'il donne sur les difficultés d'accès (un courant marin pose de gros problèmes pour le retour) ne sont pas de nature à susciter le désir d'y aller. On peut noter que l'*Image du monde* de Gossouin de Mez situait les griffons dans l'île de Taprobane : or non seulement Marco Polo les situe ailleurs (bien plus au sud), mais encore il ne fait aucune mention de cette île mythique qui faisait sans nul doute partie de l'horizon d'attente exotique de ses contemporains (horizon que Jean de Mandeville, en revanche, ne manquera pas de satisfaire). Là encore, la préoccupation de Marco Polo est d'une autre nature.

Même si le terme de *merveille* (et sa famille) ne recouvre pas la totalité des manifestations d'un exotisme littéraire, l'examen de son emploi dans le « Livre d'Inde » peut donner quelques indications. Il apparaît 17 fois (hors rubriques et *explicit*), dont deux sous la forme « n'est pas merveille » ou son contraire (au sens de : « ce n'est pas surprenant », chap. 169, vs « il

est surprenant », chap. 172), dans les contextes suivants : annonce de l'entrée en Inde avec ses merveilles (chap. 157), le palais du seigneur du Japon et sa richesse (2 occ., chap. 158), la pierre cousue au bras des guerriers japonais (chap. 159), les richesses merveilleuses des îles (chap. 160), les arbres à farine de Sumatra (chap. 165), l'absence de bons chevaux en Inde (chap. 169), la chaleur excessive (*ibid.*), l'abondance de serpents et de vermines (chap. 171), la récolte des diamants grâce aux aigles (chap. 171), l'abondance de marécages dans la région du Cap Comorin (chap. 175), enfin trois occurrences à propos de Caidu (ses prouesses, chap. 193), de la force de sa fille (chap. 193) et du trésor d'Abaga, le khan des Tartares du Levant (chap. 194b). Les situations sont donc variées, avec un certain accent sur la richesse et sur ce qui peut être considéré comme des curiosités. Mais on peut s'étonner que le terme n'apparaisse pas à propos du cannibalisme, de la religion, du Pic d'Adam, ou, surtout, des traits de mœurs des Hindous auxquels Marco Polo consacre pourtant des développements considérables. Quant à l'adjectif « devisez » (au sens de « différent », signe d'exotisme), il apparaît fort peu : quatre occurrences pertinentes, à propos des fruits (îles Andaman, chap. 167), des oiseaux et autres bêtes (Maabar, chap. 169), des poules mais aussi de « toutes choses » (Colium, chap. 174), et des denrées alimentaires en Abyssinie chap. 187). Enfin, l'adjectif « étrange », également marqueur d'exotisme, apparaît six fois, pour qualifier des animaux (des bêtes sauvages, chap. 185 et 187 ; des singes, chap. 187), des fruits (Colium, chap. 174), mais également la disparition de l'étoile polaire sur l'équateur (chap. 165). La terminologie de l'exotisme occupe donc une place réduite dans l'écriture de cette partie du *Devisement du monde*.

Le « Livre d'Inde » regorge néanmoins de notations exotiques, susceptibles d'exercer un attrait lié soit à la curiosité, soit à des images de plaisir : beauté et odeur des arbres, productions agricoles et alimentaires étranges (l'arbre à farine, l'arbre à vin ...), pierres exceptionnelles (rubis, diamants) ... Encore faut-il examiner sous quelles modalités d'écriture elles sont présentées.

Beaucoup de ces productions présentent un intérêt supérieur pour le monde du commerce : épices, perles et pierres précieuses, camphre, bois

exotiques comme le bois de brésil, encens en particulier. Ce sont celles sur lesquelles Marco Polo propose des développements plus importants. Mais le plus souvent ce ne sont que des termes au sein d'une énumération plus ou moins hétéroclite : ainsi, à propos de Ceylan (chap. 168), « Il n'ont nul blé, mais ris et succeman dont il font huile, et vivent de char et de let et de ris, et si ont vin de ces arbres que je vous ai dit autrefois. Et si ont assez de brezil le meilleur du monde ». Seule l'adjonction de termes laudatifs, voire de superlatifs, ou la qualification de « merveille », peuvent susciter le désir du lecteur, voire le porter au rêve ; ce sont des notations très fugitives, dont seul le martèlement, de chapitre en chapitre, peut produire l'attrait caractéristique de l'exotisme. La perspective commerciale domine assez souvent, comme par exemple au chap. 177 (royaume de Malabar) : « Il y a grant quantité de poivre et de gingembre et de kanelle et de nois d'Ynde et de turbic, et si y a moult de tres biaux bouguerans. Les nés qui viennent du levant leur apportent arain que il mettent en la nef et leur portent dras a or et cendaus et dras de soie et soie et or et argent, giroflez et autres espiceries aussi. Et leur vendent et achatent de ce que il ont, si que l'epicerie grosse qui ist de ce royaume et va a la province du Manzi et vers levant si se consomme en ces parties [...] ».

Dans le domaine alimentaire, en marge des possibilités commerciales, il y a l'étrangeté des arbres à vin et des arbres à pain. Or cette étrangeté se trouve « domestiquée » dans la mesure où Marco Polo explique de façon détaillée comment ce « vin » est recueilli et comment ce « pain » est fabriqué : ce sont alors les produits d'une véritable technique, comme peut l'être, quoique d'une façon différente, la fabrication du vin et du pain en Occident.

La critique a maintes fois souligné la qualité anthropologique du regard porté par Marco Polo, son intérêt pour les mœurs et en particulier les usages funéraires. Nous ne retiendrons que deux exemples : le passage célèbre du chap. 165 où est décrit le cannibalisme funéraire de populations de Sumatra (la « Petite Jana »), et l'énumération des codes sociaux des Hindous.

Marco Polo distingue nettement deux formes de cannibalisme : le cannibalisme alimentaire des « hommes bestiaux qui mengoient les hommes » (chap. 165), pour qui la chair humaine est la meilleure du monde (chap. 160), et le cannibalisme funéraire qu'il présente d'une façon beaucoup plus

nuancée moins comme un signe de sauvagerie que comme un fait de civilisation exotique : il explique en effet qu'ils en sucent totalement les os afin d'éviter la multiplication de vers qui mourraient lorsqu'ils n'auraient plus rien à manger, « et de la mort de ces vermes dient que l'âme du mort seroit chargée » (chap. 165) ; cependant cette même population consomme également les étrangers qui ne peuvent payer de rançon, « si que ce est une moult mauvaise chose et perilleuse » (chap. 165). L'ambiguïté est donc nette quant à son statut, et l'horreur, facteur de répulsion, fait de l'étrangeté une altérité non domesticable, aux antipodes de l'attrait de l'exotisme qui perce par ailleurs dans l'évocation positive, dans le même chapitre, de l'arbre à farine ou de la culture du bois de brésil.

Les sociétés de l'Inde font l'objet d'abondants développements dans les chap. 169 et 172 de la version française, au-delà des pratiques religieuses proprement dites. C'est en particulier le cas du culte du bœuf, du respect de toute vie (animale et végétale), et de la nudité : des développements dont la matière relève au plus haut point de l'exotisme. Mais le traitement qu'en fait Marco Polo invite-t-il à aller dans ce sens ?

La vénération pour le bœuf est rapportée de façon neutre, comme n'importe quelle information, sans aucune valorisation ou dévalorisation particulière, en distinguant seulement les *govys* qui acceptent de consommer sa chair s'il est mort de sa belle mort (chap. 169).

Le respect des Hindous pour toutes les formes de vie, la pratique de la nudité et la sexualité relèvent d'une philosophie autant que de la religion. Amorçées dans le chap. 169, ces questions sont plus amplement développées au chap. 172 (sur la province du Lar). Les termes employés sont positifs (insistance sur le refus de commettre des péchés, et en particulier de la luxure, simplicité des mœurs, etc.), et le narrateur prend soin de déléguer souvent la parole à ces brahmanes pour justifier ces croyances et ces comportements. Ainsi c'est parce qu'ils ignorent la luxure qu'ils ne voient aucun mal à ne pas cacher leur « vilain membre ». Une harmonie unit ainsi toute la Création, de la terre-mère aux végétaux et aux animaux jusqu'à l'homme, car, comme le dira Victor Hugo dans son poème *Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre* où il fait d'ailleurs référence à l'Inde), « tout est plein d'âmes ». Mais malgré cela le chapitre se clôt sur un jugement totalement

contradictoire avec cette présentation : « Et il sont si creueulz et si parfais ydolastres que ce est deablie » (chap. 172), jugement qui semble se fonder sur la pratique de la crémation relatée aussitôt après. La distance nécessaire est ainsi rétablie, mais globalement, du fait même de son expression au travers d'un raisonnement, l'altérité n'est pas radicale, et l'on a bien ce « va-et-vient entre l'étranger et le familier » caractéristique de l'exotisme selon Anaïs Fléchet.

On voit donc que l'écriture du *Devisement du monde*, et spécialement du « Livre d'Inde », entretient un rapport complexe avec la notion, moderne, d'exotisme. On y perçoit une tension entre étonnement, attraction et répulsion pour l'ailleurs extrême-oriental. Si l'exotisme repose sur un assemblage de clichés, il faut reconnaître que Marco Polo s'applique plutôt à détruire un certain nombre de ceux qui se trouvent dans les encyclopédies. Le registre est celui d'un savoir authentique, c'est-à-dire authentifié par l'expérience personnelle du voyageur, bien plus que celui d'un plaisir de l'altérité et de l'étrangeté. L'exotisme suppose un mixte de réalité et de fiction, un dépassement d'une réalité lointaine vers un imaginaire : ce n'est pas le cas du *Devisement du monde*, dont l'auteur cherche le plus souvent à expliquer, à rendre compte de façon intellectuelle, et donc intelligible, de l'étrangeté et de l'altérité – à l'opposé donc de la rêverie qui est caractéristique de l'exotisme. Cependant, en donnant des raisons rationnelles, Marco Polo familiarise l'étrange, le domestique, et du même coup rend possible un attrait qui favorise l'émergence de l'exotisme. Mais celui-ci, manifestement, ne procède pas d'une volonté spécifique de l'auteur : il se présente plutôt comme un effet collatéral.

## Références

- Affergan, Francis (1987). *Exotisme et altérité : Essai sur les fondements d'une critique de l'anthropologie* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France).
- Barbieri, Alvaro (2004). *Dal viaggio al libro : Studi sul Milione* (Verona : Edizioni Fiorini Verona).
- Fléchet, Anaïs (2008). « L'exotisme comme objet d'histoire », *Hypothèses : Travaux de l'École doctorale d'Histoire*, 1 : 15-26.



- Gaullier-Bougassas, Catherine, ed. (2008). *Un exotisme littéraire médiéval ? Actes du colloque du Centre d'Études Médiévales et Dialectales de Lille 3 (6-7 octobre 2006)* (Villeneuve d'Ascq : Presses de l'Université Charles-de-Gaulle).
- Gaunt, Simon (2013). *Marco Polo's Le Devisement du monde : Narrative Voice, Language and Diversity* (Cambridge : D. S. Brewer).
- Guéret-Laferté, Michèle (1994). *Sur les routes de l'Empire Mongol : Ordre et rhétorique des relations de voyage aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles* (Paris : Champion).
- Le Goff, Jacques (1970). *L'Occident médiéval et l'Océan Indien : Un horizon onirique* (Firenze : Leo S. Olschki).
- Le Goff, Jacques (1977). *Pour un autre Moyen Âge : Temps, travail et culture en Occident, 18 essais* (Paris : Gallimard).
- Le Goff, Jacques (1999). *Un Autre Moyen Âge* (Paris : Gallimard).
- Ménard, Philippe, ed., (2001-2009). *Marco Polo : Le devisement du monde*, 6 tomes (Genève : Droz).
- Moura, Jean-Marc (1992). *Lire l'exotisme* (Paris : Dunod).
- Staszak, Jean-François (2008). « Qu'est-ce que l'exotisme ? », *Le Globe*, 148 : 7-30.
- Tanase, Thomas (2008). « Exotisme, merveilles et mission dans les récits des Frères mendiants (XIIIe-XIVe siècles) », *Hypothèses : Travaux de l'École doctorale d'Histoire*, 1 : 37-46. Available online <https://www.cairn.info/revue-hypotheses-2008-1-page-37.htm>.
- Zumthor, Paul (1993) [rééd. 2014]. *La mesure du monde : Représentation de l'espace au Moyen âge* (Paris : Seuil).

# Persia, a Strategical Place in the *Devisement du monde*: Order and Disorder in the Progress of the Narrative

Michèle Guéret-Laferté

When examining the beginning of the *Devisement du monde*, the attention we will cast over Persia strikes a remarkable chord with current news. As could be read in newspapers, the Chinese government, in order to promote its economic expansion towards Europe, has elaborated upon a grandiose project that aims to link China and Europe via road and rail. Now Iran occupies a privileged place in this project, so that we read the following prediction in an article from the French newspaper *Le Monde* dated the 8th of September 2017: “The Shanghai-Teheran soon will be a very popular railway line for both freight and passengers”<sup>1</sup>! When we go back to the era of Marco Polo, it was certainly Persia’s geographical position that contributed to the mediating role it played between the Mongols and the Europeans; notably when the Crusaders of the Holy Land hoped to form an alliance with the Mongols in the war waged against the Egyptians.<sup>2</sup> First and foremost, however, it is Persia’s position in the *Devisement du monde* which will be the subject of our attention in this article.

Call to mind that the Polo family adventure began as well as ended in Persia. The prologue indeed informs us that the war between the “Tartars

---

Translated by Emily Marianne Parnell. I wish to thank Phil Fitzpatrick for her critical reading of the final text.

<sup>1</sup> See the chronicle “International” of Alain Frachon in the second last page of *Le Monde*, 8 September 2017. Cf. also Frankopan (2000), 72-73.

<sup>2</sup> Spuler (1957), 121-132; Richard (2003), 57-69.

of the Ponent” and the “Tartars of the Levant” had constrained the movements of Marco’s father and uncle. Entirely occupied with their commercial affairs at the time of their first journey, they were obliged to travel further and further to the east of the Black Sea. They finally arrived in Bukhara, “Persia’s better city”.<sup>3</sup> There, they met a messenger from Hülegü, the Ilkhan of the “Tartars of the Levant”, who persuaded them to go as far as China to visit the Great Khan Qubilai. Only some thirty years later, whilst accompanying the Mongol princess Cocacin, betrothed to the recently widowed Ilkhan Arghun, did the three Polos manage to leave the court of the Great Khan and return to Europe.

However, the description of Persia interests us above all because of its place at the beginning of the narrative.<sup>4</sup> Marco Polo’s book can be assimilated to genres of contemporary works as diverse as merchant handbook, world description, anthology of marvels, historical chronicle, encyclopaedia or *miroir de princes*, so that we are faced with the arduous task of categorizing his book more precisely. To resolve this problem, we must pay attention to the composition of the work: chiefly because its synthesis was the result of a collaborative effort between Rustichello of Pisa and Marco Polo, the text often offers the reader the sensation of being present at the moment of its creation.<sup>5</sup> We can point out instances of trial and error or of hesitations in the initial shaping of the work, noticeably apparent to readers through the first section. So we want to single out this aspect in particular, attempting to reconstruct so to speak the making of the book at the time when its first chapters were crafted. We will consider the choices given to our two authors – and we will not try to really differentiate between them during this inquiry, even if there are chances that Rustichello may have played a prominent role in classifying the information gathered by Marco Polo. We will see the difficulties that they encountered and the solutions that they reached. Then, after having principally considered the text of the manuscript BnF Fr. 1116, we will go on to compare some of the

---

<sup>3</sup> “La cité estoit la melor que fust en toute Persie” (Eusebi (2010), 5).

<sup>4</sup> See the title given by Philippe Ménard to the first volume of his edition: *Départ des voyageurs et traversée de la Perse* (Chênerie, Guéret-Laferté and Ménard (2001)).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1977), 5-43.

versions so as to discern to what extent the variable choices for getting the material in order diverge or converge and whether they perhaps provide more information about the handwritten tradition of the *Devisement du monde*.

Let us enter into the *forge* of the book, to cite the word used by Jean Froissart, chronicler from the fourteenth century, to speak of his “work in progress”. Whether located specifically in Genoa prison, as the Prologue inform us, or elsewhere, wherever this *forge* may have been is of little importance! But when we delve into the moment of the creation of the book, it is a good idea to guard against any prejudicial tendencies that derive from dated presumptions. I will here rely notably upon the study conducted in my book *Sur les routes de l’empire mongol* which allowed me to compare several travel narratives from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Travellers at that time do not recount their journey as we do today, for a lot of reasons among which the principal one, highlighted by Michel Zink in the field of literature, is that subjectivity might have been only slowly implemented and asserted in the course of the thirteenth century.<sup>7</sup> In the field of chronicles as in that of travel or mission writing, the ‘I’ persona is not at the forefront of the scene. He essentially makes an appearance at appropriate moments so as to guarantee the testimony and confirm that what is reported is the truth as it has been seen or heard. It is significant that these specific expressions of assertion first appeared within the judicial sphere, more precisely in individual charters written in vernacular language, until later being employed by chroniclers and travellers.<sup>8</sup> Thus the narrative presents itself above all as an objective account, just following the *ordo materiae*. Yet it is also a narrative corroborated by “exhibits” in the legal sense of the term, principally an account of the travel, which precede or follow the descriptive text of the countries visited by the traveller. These selective testimonies sprinkle the content of general information in order to certify the overall validity: “That I saw with my own eyes”, or even, “As I heard it told by trustworthy people”.

---

<sup>6</sup> Guéret-Laferté (1994), see Part One “L’ordre de la relation”.

<sup>7</sup> Zink (1985), especially 10-23.

<sup>8</sup> Marchello-Nizia (1984), 13-25.

This is exactly what we find in the *Historia Mongalorum* by the Franciscan Giovanni di Pian di Carpine.<sup>9</sup> He wrote it on his return from Mongolia in order to give an account of the mission entrusted to him by Pope Innocent IV at the Council of Lyon in 1245. The text consists of eight chapters, which consider in succession, the setting and characteristics of the region, the Mongol way of life, the religion of the inhabitants, their history and their martial strategies. Only by the ninth and last chapter is the account of the journey of Giovanni di Pian di Carpine: he mentions the city and regions crossed and in particular the people he met; he takes care to name all these “witnesses” so as to guarantee that he really went there.

The *Devisement du monde*, written a half century later, presents some important points in common with the book of Pian di Carpine: a narrative of the journey separate from the content itself, but which this time appears at the beginning, in the prologue, and an objective account where the *persona* of the traveller rarely intervenes. Only when the need to back up the testimony makes itself felt, or the need to anchor the truth of the information in a robust formula of assertion, does Marco Polo then take on the first person narrative voice. We can give two examples of such statements: the first intervention during the description of “Ciampa” (Vietnam), to support the extraordinary information concerning the king who had 326 children at the time the Venetian passed through: “E si vos di que a les MCCLXXXV hi fui je, Marc Pol ...”<sup>10</sup> The second intervention intended to confirm the accuracy of the report on the city of Quinsai (in the Manzi, *id est* South China), which is inserted in his text, since he personally saw what is described there: “... selonc ce qe je, Marc Pol, vit puis apertement a mes iaux.”<sup>11</sup>

So the account of the journey that appears in the prologue clearly functions as an “exhibit”, similar to that of Pian di Carpine, since it provides the dates and places travelled at the time of the two successive journeys and gives particular mention of the two missions bestowed upon Maffeo and Niccolò: the first commissioned by the Great Khan for the pope, the

---

<sup>9</sup> Menestò (2017), 225-333.

<sup>10</sup> Eusebi (2010), 173.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

second in return from the pope for the Great Khan. These missions, well highlighted in the prologue, grant a status of authority to Marco's father and uncle that Guillaume de Rubrouck would so have wished to have during his own journey to Mongolia: the status of ambassador, which legitimizes their account. Yet a hesitancy about the plan of the narrative is already noticeable in the prologue, which is significant for the rest of the text: the narrative of the second journey, from Venice to China, is extremely brief and incomplete. After the mention of the detour by Saint-Jean d'Acre to see the recently elected pope, we are told nothing of the itinerary followed by the three Venetians; that is duly justified by the address of the narrator to his audience: "Et ce que il trovent en la voie ne voç firon mencion, et por ce qe noç le voç conteron en notre livre avant tout per ordre."<sup>12</sup>

What will be the order of the book? The text will be really objective and follow the *ordo materiae* like the account of Pian di Carpine, but its aim, as the original title indicates, was to *deviser*, that is to say to describe the world, even if, similarly to the Franciscan, the description of the Mongols and especially of the court of the Great Khan will constitute the core of the account and its focal point. As a matter of fact, two tendencies, clearly visible from the beginning and opposing one another in many respects, determine the organization of the text: one being the geographical presentation of the world, and the other the progression along the itinerary. We shall examine the first chapters in order to bring them to light.

As the titles of these chapters indicate ("Ci devise de la Petite Armenie", "Ci devise de la provence de Turcomanie", "Ci devise de la Grant Armenie"), the book intends to present one by one each region, town or kingdom, and to proceed step by step by setting them in relation with the following place. Let us read what is told about Greater Armenia:

Elle confine dever midi enver levant con uns roïames qui est apelés Mosul, ke sunt jens cristienç [...] des quelz voç en conterai enn'avant. Dever tramontane confines con Jorgiens, des quelz voç en parlerai encore avant.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> See *ibid.*, 11. Underlining by M. G.-L.

<sup>13</sup> Eusebi (2010), 18.

As we see, the text here is neatly planned, the writer being able to anticipate thanks to the *indications de régie*,<sup>14</sup> at the same time as the description endeavours to draw a map of the region. Just a little later, the transitional phrase that closes the chapter on Georgia retrieves these markers so as to then introduce the kingdom of Mossul:

Or voç avonç contés de les confin d'Armenie dever tramontane. Or voç volun conter de le autre confin qe sunt entre midi et levant.<sup>15</sup>

While advancing west to east, the narrator lists kingdoms, which constitute so many sequences, containing a wide array of information. It is exactly the approach adopted by the Armenian Hayton in the first part of the *Fleurs des histoires de la terre d'Orient*, dedicated to the description of Asia. The book was presented to the pope in 1307 and so is contemporary with the *Devisement*. The only difference is that Hayton himself progresses from east to west, leaving from Cathay (North China) to end in Armenia. Even so, this early style of presentation, characterizing all the first chapters of the *Devisement*, is going to evolve: a transformation that rightly takes place in the description of Persia. Let us reveal the evidence before reflecting on the reasons for this change.

The title of chapter XXX is modelled on the first chapters such as mentioned *supra*: “Ci comance de la grant provence de Perse”. However, the mention of the town of Sahweh triggers an anecdote about the Wise Men that stretches all the way to the next chapter (XXXI), in such a way that chapter XXXII is enlisted to restart the general presentation of the country: “Or sachiés que en Persie a VIII roïames, por ce qu’el est grandisme provence, et si le voç contrai por lor nom tuit.”<sup>16</sup> By listing these eight kingdoms, the narrator proceeds from the “beginning” of the country until the “exit” of Persia, situating each of them in relation to the others. However, the description has a tendency to become confused: initially because this list of kingdoms, that we could easily have believed to be exhaustive,

---

<sup>14</sup> Expression used by Georges Blin and Gérard Genette to designate this kind of narrator’s intervention (Genette (1972); reed. in Genette (2007), 267).

<sup>15</sup> Eusebi (2010), 19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

is not. Chapter XXXIV, for instance, then deals with the kingdom of Kerman which did not appear on the list. This vagueness comes particularly from the introduction of another method of organizing the material, which is going to dictate all that follows: it is that of an impersonal itinerary which enables passage from one place to another. The first occurrence of the new formula surfaces in the chapter dedicated to the city of Yazd:

Et quant l'en s'en part de ceste tiere por aler avant, il chevache VII jornee toute plaine et n'i a for que en trois leus habitasion [...]. Et a chief de ceste VII jornee, se treuve un roiaime que est apellé Crerman.<sup>17</sup>

Then we again meet the formula twice in the following chapter dedicated to the kingdom of Kerman and it will be used frequently through the rest of the book, in particular to open or conclude a sequence. What is the advantage of this process? Instead of sweeping over areas, it establishes a linear progression and consequently frames descriptions within a dynamic structure that, with the succession of places, mimes the movement of the traveller, furthering the realistic illusion. Thanks to this invention, which takes place so to speak on the way, the text finds its tempo and its rhythm.

We can ask to what extent the description of Persia instigated the introduction of this change. For a start, the text suggests that the limits of this *grandisme provençe* are not easy to define. What criteria should we use to draw up its borders? It is possible to consider the expanse according to the authority of the Ilkhan and to adopt a political criterion, as is suggested by what is said in the sequence dedicated to the city of Balkh:

Et si sachiés qe jusque a ceste cité dure la tere dou sire des Tartars do Levant et a ceste ville sunt le confin de Persie, entre grec et levant.<sup>18</sup>

But it is strange that Tabriz, where Hülegü (the *sire des Tartars du Levant*) had set his capital in 1265, was not part of it. This is the same for Baghdad, which was conquered by Hülegü himself in 1258. This imprecision is also sustained by the numerous references to Alexander the Great that can be found in these chapters; however, his conquest of the Persian kingdom of

<sup>17</sup> Eusebi (2010), 29-30. Underlining by M. G.-L.

<sup>18</sup> See *ibid.*, 40.



Darius presented some frontiers which did not correspond with the Mongol Ilkhanate.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the composition of the impersonal itinerary cannot avoid raising questions about its relation to the actual route followed by the Polos during the course of their second journey. We saw that the prologue economized on its layout by reiterating the fact that the book would unveil everything. However, from the first chapter associated with Lesser Armenia, excepting the mention of Laias, which effectively was their point of departure, from then on nothing allows us to plot their route. Would it now be the case that the manner of organization has become linear? As already mentioned, the new formula which frames the structure is characterized by its impersonal form. We can only place it in relation to references, recurrent in these first chapters, to the movement of merchants, notably the Venetian and Genoese: in Laias, on the Caspian Sea, from Baghdad to Basra, in Tabriz.<sup>20</sup> Just as the merchants met up with caravans and rarely travelled alone in these regions, so Marco Polo tends to mix into the international community of his peers. It is even possible that the consideration of these movements of merchants and goods had inspired the writer (Rustichello?) to use the transitional formula literally derived from the itinerary.

But even if the formula must principally be seen in its rhetorical function, as giving order and dynamic to the narrative, in its first occurrences, it inevitably leads us to question its relation with the actual itinerary of the Polos. The route indicated from Yazd is indeed very problematic: why does it descend south and reach the Persian Gulf at Ormuz if it is only to then go back again towards the north of Persia and the Khorasan to rejoin the continental route of the Silk Road? We could be tempted to reply that the geographical presentation sweeps Persia from north to south, broadening

---

<sup>19</sup> In the prologue, Boukhara is presented as “la meilleure cité de Perse”, even though it was part of the land of Chagatai, Hülegü’s uncle.

<sup>20</sup> For Laias see in Eusebi (2010), p. 16 (“... et les mercans de Venese et de Jene et de toutes pars hi vinent et l’acatent. Et tous homes et mercans ke vuelent aler en fraterre prenent lor voie de ceste ville”), for the Caspian See p. 19 (“... et novelemant les marchians de Jene najerent por cel mer ...”), for Baghdad p. 20 (“... et hi alent et vienent les mercaant con lor mercandies”), and for Tabriz p. 26 (“... et iluech vienent maint mercaant latin por acater de cheles mercandies que hi venent des estranges païs”).

the perspective as it had been done previously for Baghdad where the indication of the waterway by the river of Tigris allowed “mercaant con lor mercandies” to reach the “Indian Sea”. But the situation here is different because we follow a precise itinerary: after having reached the far south, we backtrack and pass again via Kerman “... por ce que en les contrés dont je voç voil conter ne se puet aler se no da ceste cité de Creman.”<sup>21</sup> The constraints of a real travel route seem to exert an effect here and I am inclined to think that Stanislao Franchi is right, as does Philippe Ménard too.<sup>22</sup> From Kerman, located at 1800 metres altitude, as far as the coast with its hot climate and humidity, details abound on the variations to landscape, climate and vegetation. These details denote a direct travel experience; such a hypothesis is strengthened by the mention of Polo’s capture by the Caraunas in the area surrounding Comadi, despite our knowledge of the Venetian’s characteristically strong discretion regarding his adventures. Moreover, the repetitive use of the terms *clinee*, *descendant*, *descendu* to describe the route between Kerman and Ormuz prompts the notion that, in contrast to the hypothesis adopted by some,<sup>23</sup> the experience of this route here mentioned derives from the journey to China, and not from their definitive homecoming to Europe where from Ormuz they return to Tabriz and then Venice.

Thus, we see how from the sequence dedicated to Persia, the text abandons the geographical presentation *stricto sensu* to arrange itself according to two axes: one, a horizontal or syntagmatic axis, which registers the movements of the traveller, being essentially progressive and ensuring the dynamism of the text. The second is a vertical or paradigmatic axis where relevant information is divulged that relates to the traveller’s current location: it takes the form of descriptive characteristics or mini-narratives whose subject turns to an anecdote or an historical event. This second axis is essentially digressive. These two axes constitute the framework of all the travel account structured on the itinerary, but the specificity of Polo’s

---

<sup>21</sup> Eusebi (2010), 34.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Chênerie, Guéret-Laferté and Ménard (2001), 208. In this note, Philippe Ménard refers to Franchi (1941), especially 51-70.

<sup>23</sup> Heers (1983), 144-147; Racine (2012), 130-131.

text resides in the progression's impersonal expression, capable of including the Polos route as well as the common routes linking one place to another, which are at the same time rhetorical processes of transition from one sequence to the next. The dynamism thus established is so useful that the long descriptive sequence dedicated to the deeds of the Great Khan will even include reports on his warring or hunting trips to enliven several chapters.

It is time to tackle our second point: to what extent the other versions of the *Devisement du monde* are sensitive to this change, which is so neatly spotted in F in the chapters dedicated to Persia? We shall select just two aspects to consider: the specifically geographical presentation, representative of the beginning of the book, and the insertion of anecdotes. We have not tackled this question until now but it assumes new importance when considering decisions faced by the writer who had to insert anecdotes into the itinerary structure.

On the subject of the first aspect, let us remark how the titles given to the first chapters tend to adopt signs of the geographical setting in order to enlighten this kind of information. Such as in the French version, for instance chapter XXIII: "Ci dit le XXIII chapitre du royaume de Mausul qui est a ce confine entre midi et levant."<sup>24</sup> But it is particularly in Z (the main source of the version given by Ramusio) that we find this kind of information that had disappeared from the versions of group A.<sup>25</sup> Let us consider two examples, the first for Lesser Armenia:

Cuius regni Armenie Minoris confines hii sunt: ab uno latere versus meridiem est Terra Promisionis, quam retinent sarraceni; a latere tramontene sunt Turcomani, qui vocantur Caramani; a levante et greco est Turchia, Chayseria et Sevastio et multe alie civitates, que omnia subdita sunt Tartaris; versus occidentem est mare, per quod navigatur ad partes christianorum.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Compare to F: "Ci devise dou roiaume de Mosul" (Eusebi (2010), 19).

<sup>25</sup> For a clarifying view of the tradition of the *Devisement*, see Gadrat-Ouerfelli (2015), especially Part One "La tradition textuelle du *Devisement du monde*", 13-111.

<sup>26</sup> Barbieri (1998), 6-8.

The second example concerns Georgia as bordered by two seas, the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea:

Et predicta provincia duo equora prospicit, quorum unum vocatur Mare Maius, quod est a latere tramontane, alterum vero Abaco, versus orientem, quod durat in suo circuitu per duo milia VIII miliarium et est tanquam stagnum, quia non miscetur cum aliquo mari.<sup>27</sup>

The accuracy of such information confirms the hypothesis that the original intention of our two authors was more the writing of a geographical treatise, even if the underlying progression of the description was clearly oriented from west to east. We saw how the abandon of this model and the resort to a progression according to the itinerary occurred very precisely in F in the chapter dedicated to Yazd. Is that also the case for the other versions? Let us compare this passage in the main versions of the *Devisement*:

Fr: “Et quant l’en se part de ceste cité pour aler avant, si chevauche l’en .VII. journees tout de plain et n’i a que en .III. lieux habitacion [...]. Et au chief de ces .VII. journees de plain, si trueve on un royaume qui est moult biaux, qui est appelez Creman.”<sup>28</sup>

TA<sup>2</sup>: “Quando l’uomo si parte di questa terra per andare inanzi, cavalca .VII. giornate tutto piano; e non v’à abita[zione] se no in tre luoghi [...]. Di capo di queste .VII. giornate àe uno reame ch’à nome Creman.”<sup>29</sup>

VA<sup>3</sup>: “E quando l’omo se parte de queste zità per andar inanzi, el se chavalcha sete zornate tuto per piano e non se trova abitazion se non in tre luogi [...]. E in chavo de sete zornate se trova un regniame che s’apella Chrerina.”<sup>30</sup>

P: “Ultra Iasdi ad dietas VII versus Cermam non est habitacio.” Note that the first occurrence of the formula derived from the itinerary is here abbreviated, but it becomes more developed in the following

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 12-14.

<sup>28</sup> Chênerie, Guéret-Laferté and Ménard (2001), 155.

<sup>29</sup> Bertolucci Pizzorusso (1994), 46.

<sup>30</sup> Barbieri and Andreose (1999), 132.

chapter dedicated to Kerman: “De Crermam itur ad planiciem per dietas VII [...]. Post VII dietas invenitur descensus magnus ...”<sup>31</sup>

Z: these phrases are omitted.

R: “E quando l’uomo si parte da questa città per andar più oltre, cavalca otto giornate per via piana [...]. E nel fine delle dette otto giornate, s’arriva ad un regno che si chiama Chiermain.”<sup>32</sup>

Note that the majority of copyists have assimilated the change taking place in the organization of material and have faithfully recreated it. Z represents the only exception; however, even if the phrases concerning the itinerary are omitted in the chapter on Yazd as in the following, the copyist seems to perceive its importance since the beginning of chapter 13 opens with a description of the journey and the number of days it took. Ramusio for his part perfectly re-establishes the rhythm of the original formula, perhaps thanks to a better manuscript of version Z, while Pipino’s Latin has a tendency to shorten it.<sup>33</sup>

The last point that we shall approach regards the insertion of anecdotes within the framework of the itinerary. When the story is clearly located, the task appears easy. It should be the case for the story of the Old Man of the Mountain and his Assassins, which takes place at Alamut. However, we can notice that this story, which occupies three chapters in F, is related just before “the issue of Persia”, despite Alamut’s proximity to Kazvin, which was situated “at the beginning of Persia”.<sup>34</sup> Let us read the transitional phrase which concludes the anecdote and allows to go back to the journey narrative:

Et quant l’en se part de cest castiaus, l’en chevauche por biaux plain et por bele vallee et por belle costeres [...]. Et cest contree durent bien VI

<sup>31</sup> Prášek (1902), 23-24.

<sup>32</sup> Milanesi (1978-1988), vol. 3, 103.

<sup>33</sup> On the importance of Z<sup>1</sup> (codex Ghisi, now lost) for the version established by Ramusio, see Burgio (ed.), (2011), especially introduction by Giuseppe Mascherpa, XXII-XXV, and Serena Fornasiero, XLIII-XLV.

<sup>34</sup> “Le primer roïames, ce est dou commencement, a nom Casum; ...” (Eusebi (2010), 28).

journees [...]. Et quant l'en a chavauchés VI jornee, cel che je vos ai contés, adunc treuve l'en une cité qui est apellé Sopurgan.<sup>35</sup>

The formula derived from the itinerary here unveils an essentially rhetorical function. It is quite sure that Polo did not go to Alamut. Moreover the time of six days indicated to go from Alamut to Shebargan is very insufficient to cover such a distance.<sup>36</sup>

The task of narrating the story of the miracle of moving the mountain is less straightforward. This is a legendary story, an event that has a variable date according to the versions, and though it allegedly takes place “between Baghdad and Mosul”,<sup>37</sup> is devoid of any precise spatial anchorage. Nor is the story told between the two successive chapters on Mosul and Baghdad (respectively 24 and 25). Already, especially in F, we pick up a problem in the order of chapters, aggravated by the interventions of the rubricator. The transitional phrase which concludes the chapter on Baghdad and its takeover by Hülegü is as follows:

Or voç diron de Touris et bien est il voir que je voç poroi ben avoir dit de lor fait et de lor costumes, mes por ce ke seroit trop longaine matiere, voç ai abrivés mon dir; et por ce voç conteron autres couses grant et merveiose, si con voç pori oïr.<sup>38</sup>

Then comes the chapter on Tabriz (25), while the narrative of the miracle occupies chapters 26 to 29. For his edition of F, Mario Eusebi chose to correct that order and to place the story just after the chapter on Baghdad, reporting the description of Tabriz in chapter 29. However, if we compare with the principal versions that we have already considered, we observe the following disparity:

---

<sup>35</sup> Eusebi (2010), 39-40.

<sup>36</sup> Boivin, Harf-Lancner and Mathey-Maille (2003), 51. However, the reader associates naturally the castle here mentioned (“cest castiaus”) with Alamut.

<sup>37</sup> With the exception of the version P edited by Prašek where the miracle is situated “inter Thaurisium et Baldachum” (Prašek (1902), 21).

<sup>38</sup> Eusebi (2010), 21.

Order Baghdad / Tabriz / Story of the miracle: TA, VA, P

Order Baghdad / Story of the miracle / Tabriz: Fr, Z, R

That is an awkward problem for whomever has to edit the text! We prefer not to opt for the first or the second possibility of ordering the text, but instead it is interesting to mention the ingenious solution found by Ramusio: he decides to reinforce the coherence of the passage by regrouping the narrative of the death of the Caliph and that of the moving of the mountain in one chapter. He then connects them by a phrase of his own invention where he declares that the Caliph was in this way punished by God for the cruelty that he had previously inflicted on the Christians.

If that disparity in order according to the various versions interests me, it is because in my opinion it reveals a hesitancy resulting from what to do when starting to put everything into writing. How to distribute the narrative content of the paradigmatic axis? Surely there is far more liberty in placing the narrative content here or there than there is for the descriptive features unique to a specific place; these features only demand consideration over their order of positioning within the sequence. One real advantage to the presentation of the information collected by the traveller throughout the itinerary is the opportunity to ground it with spatial anchorage: it is there precisely that the traveller had seen or heard what he then reports. Nevertheless, as for the formula, which allows passage from one sequence to another, the writer wants to create a tempo by alternating between description and narrative.

So to conclude: The originality of the *Devisement du monde* is based upon a mixed model, employed so as to architecturally summarize the plenitude of information gathered by the traveller, skilfully combining the *ordo materiae* and the order of the journey and alternating description with stories. We saw how the innovation of the transitional formula inspired from the itinerary appears in the sequences dedicated to Persia: there the travel account finds its guiding principle; the reference to the itinerary bestows unity and an organizational standard upon the text. On the one hand, the impersonal formula extends a welcome to any potential traveller, including the reader. On the other hand, it marks out the three constituent

routes in the book that give significance and identity to the Venetian. It defines indeed three groups of travellers in which the individual Marco Polo comes to assimilate himself: the Italian merchants (corresponding with the first section of the book, *id est* the journey from Venice to China), the messengers of the Great Khan (corresponding with the second section: the various trips through the vast Mongol empire),<sup>39</sup> and finally the passengers aboard Chinese ships (corresponding with the third section: journey of return and description of India).<sup>40</sup> We saw how the dynamism generated by such a rhetorical device had generally been well considered by the main versions of the book. In any case, Italo Calvino himself knew how to seize this guiding principle when he decided to begin with these words the account of his trips made by Marco Polo to Kublai Khan in *Le città invisibili*: “Partendosi di là e andando tre giornate verso levante, l’uomo si trova a Diomira, una città con sessanta cupole d’argento ...”

## References

- Barbieri, Alvaro, ed. (1998). *Milione: Redazione latina del manoscritto Z, versione italiana a fronte* (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo / Ugo Guanda).
- Barbieri, Alvaro; Andreose, Alvisè, eds. (1999). *Il «Milione» veneto: ms. CM 211 della Biblioteca Civica di Padova* (Venezia: Marsilio).
- Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Valeria (1977). “Enunciazione e produzione del testo nel «Milione»”, *Studi mediolatini e volgari*, 25: 5-43.
- Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Valeria, ed. (1994). *Milione: Versione toscana del Trecento* (Milano: Adelphi Edizioni).
- Boivin, Jeanne Marie; Harf-Lancner, Laurence; Mathey-Maille Laurence, eds. (2003). *Le devisement du monde, Tome 2: Traversée de l’Afghanistan et entrée en Chine* (Genève: Librairie Droz S.A.).

---

<sup>39</sup> “Et sachiés qe quant l’en se part de Canbalu, por toutes les voies qe je voç ai contés, et il est alés XXV miles, adonc le mesajes dou Grant Sire ...” (Eusebi (2010), 102).

<sup>40</sup> “... e comenceron a entrer in Yndie ... e noç comenceron tot primermant de les nes es queles les mercaant vont et vient en Endie.” (Eusebi (2010), 166).



- Burgio, Eugenio, ed. (2011). *Giovanni Battista Ramusio 'editor' del 'Milione': Trattamento del testo e manipolazione dei modelli; Atti del seminario di ricerca (Venezia, 9-10 settembre 2010)* (Roma and Padova: Editrice Antenore, MMXI).
- Chênerie, Marie-Luce; Guéret-Laferté; Ménard, Philippe, eds. (2001). *Le devise-ment du monde, Tome 1: Départ des voyageurs et traversée de la Perse* (Genève: Librairie Droz S.A.).
- Eusebi, Mario, ed. (2010). *Il manoscritto della Bibliothèque nationale de France Fr. 1116, I. Testo* (Roma and Padova: Editrice Antenore).
- Franchi, Stanislao (1941). *L'itinerario di Marco Polo in Persia* (Torino: Tipografia Collegio Artigianelli).
- Frankopan, Peter (author); Villeneuve Guillaume (transl.) (2000), *Les nouvelles routes de la soie: L'émergence d'un nouveau monde*, trad. Guillaume Villeneuve, Paris, Flammarion, 2020, p. 72-73.
- Gadrat-Ouerfelli, Christine (2015). *Lire Marco Polo au Moyen Âge: Traduction, diffusion et réception du Devisement du monde* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Genette, Gérard (1972). *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil).
- Genette, Gérard (2007). *Discours du récit: Essais de méthode* (Paris: Seuil).
- Guéret-Laferté, Michèle (1994). *Sur les routes de l'empire mongol: Ordre et rhétorique des relations de voyage aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles* (Paris: Honoré Champion).
- Heers, Jacques (1983). *Marco Polo* (Paris: Fayard).
- Marchello-Nizia, Christiane (1984). "L'historien et son prologue: Forme littéraire et stratégies discursives", in Daniel Poirion, ed. *La chronologie et l'histoire au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne), 13-25.
- Menestò, Enrico (2017). "Historia Mongalorum", in Maria Cristiana Lungarotti and Enrico Menestò, eds. *Storia dei Mongoli* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo), 225-333.
- Milanesi, Marica, ed. (1978-1988). *Navigazioni e viaggi* (Torino: Einaudi).
- Prášek, Justin V. (1902). *Marka Pavlova z Benátek Milion: Dle jediného rukopisu spolu s příslušným základem latinským* (Prag: Nákladem České Akademie Císaře Františka Josefa pro Vědy, Slovesnost a Umění).
- Racine, Pierre (2012). *Marco Polo et ses voyages* (Paris: Perrin).
- Richard, Jean (2003). "D'Algidaï à Gazan: La continuité d'une politique franque chez les Mongols d'Iran", in Jean Richard, *Francs et Orientaux dans le monde des croisades* (Aldershot: Ashgate), 57-69.

Spuler, B. (1957). "La situation de l'Iran à l'époque de Marco Polo", in Étienne Balasz, ed. *Oriente Poliano: Studi e conferenze tenute all'Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente in occasione del VII centenario della nascita di Marco Polo, 1254-1954* (Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente), 121-132.

Zink, Michel (1985). *La subjectivité littéraire* (Paris, P.U.F.).



# **Marco Polo's Reports and the World He Witnessed**



# Marco Polo's Description on "Nestorians" and other Christian Groups in Yuan China

LI TANG

## 1. Syriac Christianity in China: Introduction

The earliest known official introduction of Christianity into China dates back to the year 635 during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) when Bishop Aluoben<sup>1</sup> 阿羅本, a high church official from Sasanian Persia (224-651) received an official welcome from the minister of the Tang court in Chang'an (present-day Xi'an) in 635. His arrival was recorded in the Sino-Syriac inscription of the Xi'an Stele dated 781. The historical information contained in the inscription, such as the Syriac clergy names, suggests that Aluoben came from the Church of the East in Persia, a church of the Syriac tradition but commonly known by its misnomer "the Nestorian Church". Therefore, during the Chinese Tang dynasty, it was the Syriac monks, diplomats, merchants and artisans travelling along the ancient Silk Road from Mesopotamia to China who contributed to the spread of Syriac Christianity in China. From the triumphant arrival of the Syriac Bishop Aluoben in Chang'an in 635 to the establishment of churches and monasteries throughout the Tang-Empire, Syriac Christianity enjoyed imperial support and flourished in China for about 210 years until its decline towards the end of the ninth century, when Emperor Wuzong issued an imperial edict in 845,<sup>2</sup> which suppressed all practices of foreign religions in China. It was not until

---

<sup>1</sup> Formerly transcribed as Alopen. The present article adopts the Chinese *Pinyin* system for transcribing Chinese words.

<sup>2</sup> See *Jiu Tang shu*, vol. 18.

the Mongol-Yuan period (13th-14th centuries) that the revival of Syriac Christianity in China was again made possible.

The Church of the East (commonly known as the Nestorian Church) itself does not possess much information on its missions in China. However, archaeological discoveries as well as Chinese and non-Chinese sporadic written records have thus far testified to the diffusion of Syriac Christianity in two historical eras of China: namely, the Tang (618-907) and the Yuan (1279-1368) dynasties. Sources for the study of Syriac Christianity in these two separate epochs demonstrate different characteristics. The chronology of Syriac Christianity during the Tang period can be reconstructed almost solely through the information provided by the eighth-century Xi'an Inscription (*Daqin jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei* 大秦景教流行中國碑), supplemented by the ninth-century Luoyang Inscription and other Chinese "Nestorian" manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang in the early twentieth century.

For the Mongol period available sources are more plentiful than those of the Tang period, but they are rather fragmentary. These sources include: hundreds of small archaeological evidences in the form of short epitaphs; sporadic mentioning of "Nestorian" Christians in Chinese (e.g. in *Yuan shi* 元史 [History of the Yuan Dynasty]), Syriac (e.g. *History of Rabban Sauma*),<sup>3</sup> Persian (e.g. Rashid al-Din, 1247-1318),<sup>4</sup> medieval European travel accounts (e.g. by Marco Polo, the Franciscans etc.)<sup>5</sup> and others. However, there are gaps in our knowledge about the history of Syriac Christianity in China. Therefore, the present task is not to recreate the past, but rather to examine the historical fragments of the past and to make use of them even if there are limitations.

---

<sup>3</sup> For translations in French, see Chabot (1893, 1894) and Bedjan (2007). An English translation was made by Montgomery (1966). See also a relatively recent work in Italian by Borbone (2000). A German translation was published by Toepel (2008).

<sup>4</sup> See Thackston (1998-1999).

<sup>5</sup> Descriptions by Franciscan travellers to the East include especially that of William of Rubruck, John of Montecorvino and others. See Van den Wyngaert (1929).

## 2. Gap between Tang and Yuan

There is almost a 300-year gap between the two epochs of the Tang and Yuan, during which traces of Christianity either from the Church of the East itself or from Chinese official sources were scarcely documented. What happened to these Christians after the Tang Dynasty? In general, Chinese historical records from the Five Dynasties to the Song Dynasty (10th-12th centuries) are silent about things related to Jingjiao 景教 (Nestorianism).

Towards the end of the tenth century, Syriac churches became almost extinct in China. A record from the Muslim writer Ibn al-Nadim (?- 995/988)<sup>6</sup> can offer a few glimpses of Syriac Christianity in tenth-century China. Ibn Al-Nadim described that he met a Najrānī monk at Dār al-Rūm<sup>7</sup> behind the church in Bagdad in 980. This monk, according to Ibn al-Nadim, came back from China in the year 377 AH (987/988 AD), after being sent together with other five Christian men by the [Nestorian] Catholicos to China several years earlier. However, the monk returned to Bagdad with one of the five men after six years. According to the monk's narrative to Ibn Al-Nadim, there used to be Christians in the land of China, but they had disappeared for "various reasons",<sup>8</sup> so that only one man remained in the entire country, and the church they had there had also been destroyed.<sup>9</sup> As the monk was sent to China in the late tenth century, his account seemed to suggest that there was still a church there during the Song period.

## 3. Bridging the Gap with Marco Polo's Account

How can Marco Polo's account help to bridge our knowledge gap of the period between the Tang and Yuan Dynasties? In his *Le devisement du monde*, Marco Polo as a diligent observer and traveler, not only laid out

---

<sup>6</sup> Dodge (1970), vol. 2, 836-837.

<sup>7</sup> The place where al-Nadim met the monk was Dār al-Rūm ("The Court of the Greeks") behind the Church. It was used to designate the Christian quarter of Baghdad on the East Bank. See Dodge (1970), vol. 2, 837.

<sup>8</sup> It is not clear what these "various reasons" (*bi-ashāb*), referred to. See Dodge (1970), vol. 2, 837, note 41.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 837-838.



his travel routes, but also described the religious communities in cities along them, especially the “Nestorian” Christian diaspora in China and along the Silk Road. With his description, the mapping of the Christian communities in thirteenth-century China is made possible.

### 3.1. Locating the Christian Communities

Given the historical records available and, in addition, the archaeological discoveries in recent years, it is possible to locate the Christian diaspora in northwest China, in the land of the Tangut<sup>10</sup> and in southeast China especially for the second half of the thirteenth century. Marco Polo’s *Le devisement du monde* is particularly helpful in providing the toponyms of Christian communities along the Silk Road in China, especially in the Tangut area.<sup>11</sup>

According to Marco Polo’s description, Christian diaspora existed in several cities and towns in northwest China, especially within the former realm of the Tangut Empire (1038-1227). His account provides clues about the existence of the Christian communities in northwest China after the Tang Dynasty. The following is a list of cities with such communities as described by Marco Polo in his travel report, together with some other historical traces of Christianity there.

#### *Cascar* (*Kashgar* 喀什)

Cascar, i.e., today’s Kashgar (at the western end of today’s China) was described by Marco Polo as a kingdom, which was, during the thirteenth

---

<sup>10</sup> The Tangut territory covers today’s Ningxia, parts of Inner Mongolia, Gansu, Northern Shaanxi and Qinghai. The Hexi Corridor was within its territory. Therefore, the land of the Tangut formed an integral part of the Silk Road.

<sup>11</sup> There are many surviving copies of Marco Polo’s description of the world, however, this paper uses mainly three editions for reference: the critical editions of *Le devisement du monde* under the direction by Philippe Ménard (2001-2009); Moule and Pelliot’s integrate English version (1938) of passages originating from various manuscripts under the title *Marco Polo; The Description of the World* together with the Latin volume of the Toledo Latin Text Z, and Henry Yule’s translated and commented text (1903) *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*. The fifteenth-century Toledo Latin Z manuscript discovered in 1932 contains some extra information on Christians in Uighuristan and Fugiu (Fuzhou) that is not documented in the Franco-Italian F rendering.

century, subject to the Great Khan. The majority of its inhabitants worshipped Mohammed's religion and lived by trade and handicraft. According to Marco Polo, Turks who were Nestorian Christians had their own churches<sup>12</sup> and there were also Christians who observed the Greek rule.<sup>13</sup> The Turks referred to by Marco Polo were either Uighurs or other Turkic-speaking groups in western part of China. Marco Polo must have recognised their ethnic identity by their facial features and language. The sentence on the Christians who observe the Greek rule is not contained in the F text but in Moule-Pelliot's version. This piece of information on the Greek liturgy may suggest that there may have been also Melkite Christians in the area.

Christianity must have reached Kashgar before the twelfth century, because it was during the twelfth century when Catholicos Elias III (reigned 1176-1190) headed the Church of the East, two Kashgar metropolitans named Johannes and Sabrisho<sup>c</sup> were known to have resided there.<sup>14</sup> This suggests that Kashgar had such a sizable "Nestorian" Christian population that a metropolitan bishop was appointed to minister them.

#### *Yarcan (Yarkant 葉爾羌)*

Yarcan, i.e., today's Yarkant corresponds to the ancient county of Shache 莎車. During the Yuan period, it was within the Chagatai Khanate ruled by Kaidu 海都 (c. 1235-1301). Marco Polo found that the majority of its inhabitants followed the rule of Mohammed but there was also a small number of Nestorians and Jacobites.<sup>15</sup> The Jacobites belonged to the West Syrian Church. This information on the Jacobites sheds light on Christians of another Syriac tradition, who had likewise reached China.

#### *Jvguristan<sup>16</sup> / Uiguristan*

The Latin Z manuscript contains a unique passage on Jvguristan, which other manuscripts lack. Jvguristan, which was the land of the Uighurs,

<sup>12</sup> Boivin et al. (2003), 10; Yule (1903), 182.

<sup>13</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 143.

<sup>14</sup> Fiey (1993), 101.

<sup>15</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 146; Boivin et al. (2003), 12.

<sup>16</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 156; vol. 2 (Latin text), xx.

comes after the description of the city of Camul (Hami 哈密). The passage describes the land of the Uighurs as being a large province subject to the Great Khan. Among its many cities, the main city is Carahoço (in today's Turfan area).<sup>17</sup> Turfan has yielded many multi-lingual Christian, Manichean and Buddhist manuscripts of medieval times. Marco Polo's description of its inhabitants provides corroborating evidence of its religious diversity. He categorized the inhabitants of the city into three religious groups: Idol-worshippers, Nestorian Christians, and Saracens. But Christians very often intermarry with idolaters (*xpistiani cum ydolatrix sepius matrimonio coniunguntur*)<sup>18</sup> who were but learned.

Interestingly, the passage does not mention any Manicheans, for Manichaeism was the dominant religion during the Uighur Kingdom of Qoço (9th-12th centuries). Could this indicate that by the thirteenth century Manichaeism had declined in Turfan?

*Saciou / Shazhou* 沙洲 (*Dunhuang* 敦煌)

Shazhou (west of present-day Dunhuang area) was a military outpost of Tang and Song China and an ancient town on the Silk Road linking China's interior to the Western Regions. In the year 786 when Tang-China was still suffering from the aftermath of the An Lushan Rebellion, the Tibetans seized Shazhou, which was then a prefecture of Tang, and began to exercise their rule over it. It was not until 848 that Shazhou's local rulers recaptured their town from the Tibetans and afterwards pledged their loyalty to the Tang court. In 1036 the city fell to the Tangut who took control of it and ruled it until of the Mongol conquest of the city in 1227. The Yuan government re-established Shazhou which was subsequently subordinated to the administrative zone of Suzhou 肅州 (near today's Jiuquan 酒泉), i.e. Succiu in Marco Polo's description.

As Marco Polo passed through Shazhou in 1271, he found most of the inhabitants to be idolaters (Buddhists), but there were also some Turks who were Nestorian Christians and some Saracens.<sup>19</sup> According to Marco Polo,

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 156; vol. 2 (Latin text), xx.

<sup>19</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 150-151; Boivin et al. (2003), 16.

the idolaters had a tongue of their own<sup>20</sup> which could be the Tangut language.

### *Ghinghin Talas*

Ghinghin Talas was a province described by Marco Polo as lying between Camul (Hami 哈密) and Suzhou 肅州, most probably in the proximity of today's Chijinbao 赤金堡 area. According to Marco Polo's description, in this province, there were idolaters, Saracens and "some Turks who follow the law of Nestorian Christians<sup>21</sup> and Jacobites.<sup>22</sup> The Jacobites belonged to the West Syriac Christian tradition whereas the Nestorians followed the East Syriac tradition. This is another piece of information on the Jacobites in China, whom Marco Polo designated as Turks, but did not give further explanation. Marco Polo mentioned that the area belonged to Tangut province. This description about Ghinghin Talas is not contained in the Toledo Latin Z manuscript.

### *Succiu / Suzhou* 肅州

Succiu / Suzhou, as described by Marco Polo, was a ten-day ride towards the Sun-rising and the Greek Wind (towards northeast)<sup>23</sup> from Ghinghin Talas.<sup>24</sup> It was one of the cities in the Tangut area near today's Jiuquan, Gansu province. Some Nestorian Christians lived there,<sup>25</sup> but Marco Polo did not mention their ethnic origin. Succiu is not mentioned in the Latin Z manuscript.

### *Camciu / Ganzhou* 甘州

Camciu / Ganzhou is another major city in the Tangut region. The people had their own language (most probably Tangut).<sup>26</sup> Camciu is mentioned in the Latin Z manuscript after Jvghuristan and followed by Caracoron. It corresponds to today's Zhangye 張掖. According to Marco Polo, there

<sup>20</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 151.

<sup>21</sup> Boivin et al. (2003), 17-18; Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 156; vol. 2 (Latin text), xx.

<sup>22</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 156.

<sup>23</sup> Marco Polo often used "The Greek Wind" or "Sun-rising" to refer to the direction "Northeast" and "East". See explanations in Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 55.

<sup>24</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 158.

<sup>25</sup> Boivin et al. (2003), 21.

<sup>26</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 154.

were some Christians there, who had three large beautiful churches. The idolaters in the city constituted the majority and they had beautiful monasteries and abbeys.<sup>27</sup> The number and size of the churches and monasteries suggest that many merchants and farmers lived in Camciu because it was a rich trade hub along the Silk Road with rice production.

A “Temple of the Cross” (a name used in the Yuan period to refer to Syriac Christian Churches) in the Ganzhou Circuit 甘州路 (east of today’s Jinta County 金塔縣 near Jiuquan, Gansu province) existed at the time of Kublai Khan. When the mother of Kublai Khan Sorkaktani Beki passed away in 1252, a Christian funeral service was conducted in the “Temple of the Cross” in Ganzhou. Kublai Khan offered prayers and sacrifice there for his mother who was a “Nestorian” Christian.<sup>28</sup>

*Erçina / Ejina 額濟納, Khara Khoto*

Erçina lies a twelve-day ride journey from Ganzhou. It was at the head of the desert of sand towards tramontaine<sup>29</sup> (north) and was part of the province of Tangut. It served as the frontier fortress of the Tangut Empire. During the Mongol-Yuan period, the area was named Yijina Circuit 亦集乃路. Marco Polo did not explicitly mention any Christians there, but said that the whole city was inhabited by idolaters. In the early twentieth century, Syriac Christian fragments were discovered in Khara Khoto by the Russian expedition team.

*Caracoron*<sup>30</sup>

The Latin Z manuscript<sup>31</sup> places Caracoron after Camptio / Camciu and calls it an ancient Tartar place. It mentions that there are some Turkic Christians following the Nestorian law<sup>32</sup> and Mahometi (Muslims) living there. The Franco-Italian text differs from the Z text on this point. It mentions that the people of Caracoron pay tax to Prester John, called Ung Khan

<sup>27</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 158; Boivin et al. (2003), 22.

<sup>28</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 38. See also Tang (2006), 354.

<sup>29</sup> Marco Polo used his own terms for the direction: Tramontaine – North; Greek Wind – North-east; Sunrising / Levant – East; Mestre – Northwest; Ponent – West, etc.

<sup>30</sup> “Catatoron” in the Early French rendering. See Boivin et al. (2003), 24.

<sup>31</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 2 (Latin text), xxi-xxii.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

in their own tongue.<sup>33</sup> Ung Khan was the head of the Kerait people who were known to be Nestorian Christians in medieval sources from the eleventh to the fourteenth century. Marco Polo seemed to mix him up with a contemporary legendary figure known to the West as Presbyter John who was believed to be a Christian king in the East.

Caracoron is a variant spelling of Caracorum (Qaraqorum, Halahelin 哈喇和林) which had served as the Mongol capital city during Chinggis Khan's time until Kublai Khan abandoned it and made Dadu the capital of the Yuan Dynasty in 1260. Thirteenth century Franciscan travelers to the East, such as John of Plano Carpini (c. 1185-1252) and William of Rubruck (c. 1220-1293), had visited the city. Qaraqorum, a Turkic word meaning "black boulder"<sup>34</sup> was a town inhabited by Turkic tribes in medieval times. As Marco Polo describes, "the city indeed is surrounded with a strong mound",<sup>35</sup> and outside there was a big castle with a beautiful palace in it where the Tartar ruler dwelt.<sup>36</sup> The description of the city provides clear clues that Caracoron was the Mongol capital Qaraqorum.

Since Qaraqorum lies in the middle of Mongolia and does not seem to follow Polo's travel route after Succiu, it is obvious that the passage on Caracoron as well as the following passages on Chinggis Khan, the Tartars and Prester John were inserted in the narrative.

#### *Ergiuul or Erguiul / Liangzhou* 凉州

The Kingdom of Ergiuul was a five-day journey from Camciu / Ganzhou. Ergiuul, also known in Chinese as Liangzhou, was also the capital city of the Kingdom that belonged to the Tangut province. It corresponds to present-day Wuwei 武威 in Gansu Province. From the Han to the Tang Dynasty, Liangzhou served as a strategic hub along the Silk Road for China. During the Tang Dynasty (618-907), not only many Sogdian merchants resided in Liangzhou but also a large number of Uighur and other ethnic groups migrated there. Among the ancient Sogdian letters discovered in

<sup>33</sup> Boivin et al. (2003), 24.

<sup>34</sup> See Pelliot's discussion on the origin of the word "Karakorum" in Pelliot (1959), 166.

<sup>35</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 161.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Dunhuang, one of the letters was sent by a Sogdian from Guzang 姑臧<sup>37</sup> which is another name for Wuwei, named after the Guzang Mountain near the city. In 764 when Tang Daizong ruled, Liangzhou came under Tibetan occupation, which subsequently helped the spread of Lama Buddhism in this area. In the early Song period, it bore the name Xiliangfu 西涼府, but it was still ruled by Tibetans. In the sixth year of Song Tiansheng reign-period (1028), the Tangut captured the city and ruled it until 1226 when the Mongols conquered Liangzhou.

Liangzhou became a multi-ethnic centre at the western end of the Hexi Corridor. This is why by the time when Marco Polo reached Liangzhou, which he called Ergiuul, a Mongol name for Wuwei,<sup>38</sup> he saw three religious groups: Nestorian Christians, Saracens and idolaters.<sup>39</sup> He also found that the people in the region were of mixed origin, including Turks and many Nestorian Christians.<sup>40</sup>

*Silingiu, Sinjiu*<sup>41</sup> / *Xiningzhou* 西寧州

Silingiu as written in the Z manuscript appears as Sinjiu in other manuscripts. It was a town within the kingdom of Erguiul and was part of Tangut province. It was on the way leading to Cathay in the east. The name was identified by many as Xiningzhou 西寧州.<sup>42</sup> Xiningzhou, located in today's Ledu 樂都 near Xining 西寧, was formerly called Shanzhou 鄯州 from the Northern Wei to the Tang Dynasty. During the Song Dynasty, in 1105, its name was changed to Xiningzhou.<sup>43</sup> This may explain why the name Singiu which is phonetically close to Shanzhou, appears in some manuscripts of Polo's description. Interestingly enough, in the Z text, it is

<sup>37</sup> Grenet et al. (1998), 93, 98.

<sup>38</sup> Boivin et al. (2003), 75.

<sup>39</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 179; cf. vol.2, xxii; Boivin et al. (2003), 38.

<sup>40</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 179.

<sup>41</sup> Not mentioned in the Early French rendering in Boivin et al. (2003).

<sup>42</sup> See discussion on the name Silingiu in Pelliot (1963), 832.

<sup>43</sup> *Song shi*, ch. 19, 宋史本紀: [崇寧]三年…五月…甲申, 改鄯州為西寧州… (On the *jiashen* day of the fifth month of the third year [of the Chongning reign-period], [the name] Shanzhou was changed to Xiningzhou.)

called Silingiu which is the contemporary name of the place. In Polo's account it is mentioned that in Silingiu there were some Nestorian Christians.<sup>44</sup>

*Egrigaia, Calacian / Ningxia* 寧夏, *Helanshan* 賀蘭山

Egrigaia, as Paul Pelliot put it, "is the Mongol form of the Hsi-Hsia [Xi Xia] name of Ning-hsia [Ningxia]".<sup>45</sup> Polo described it to be a province with many cities and castles, located within the Tangut area. According to Marco Polo, in its capital city Calacian there were idol worshippers and three Nestorian churches (*tres ecclesie xpistriatorum nestoriam legem sectantium ...*)<sup>46</sup> and the F text describes the churches as beautiful.<sup>47</sup>

Pelliot, agreeing with Palladius' proposal, believed that Calacian is the phonetic transcription of the Chinese name for the Mountain Helanshan 賀蘭山, a mountain range in north-western China, whose Mongol form is Alashan 阿拉善.<sup>48</sup> Alashan / Alxa League is one of the Leagues or Prefectures in today's Inner Mongolia. The Russian Sinologist Palladius (1817-1878) believed that Calacian / Calachan was a variant of the Tangut name Halachar which can be identified with the name of the residence of the Tangut kings.<sup>49</sup>

*Tenduc / Tiande* 天德

The Tenduc province corresponds to the Ordos area in today's Inner Mongolia near the great bend of the Yellow River. The name derives from the Chinese name Tiande 天德, which was the name for the military post of the Tiande Army (Tiandejun 天德軍) during the Tang Dynasty. During the thirteenth century, the area was inhabited by the Ongut and the Mongols.<sup>50</sup> According to Marco Polo, some in Tenduc were Turkic Nestorian Christians.<sup>51</sup> And the king of Tenduc was a Christian, with his Christian name

<sup>44</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 179; cf. *ibid.*, vol. 2 (Latin text), xxii.

<sup>45</sup> Pelliot (1959), 132.

<sup>46</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 2 (Latin text), xxii; vol. 1, 181.

<sup>47</sup> Boivin et al. (2003), 40.

<sup>48</sup> Pelliot (1959), 132-133.

<sup>49</sup> Palladius (1876), 19-20.

<sup>50</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 2 (Latin text), xxii-xxiii.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii.



“George”.<sup>52</sup> Marco Polo seems to have mixed up King George of the Ongut tribe with the medieval legendary figure of Presbyter John who was believed by some Europeans to be a Christian king ruling in the East. However, King George of the Ongut (died 1298), known in Chinese sources as Kuolijisi 闊里吉斯, was a real person who was attested in medieval Chinese, Latin and Syriac sources.<sup>53</sup>

From Tenduc, riding in the direction of Cathay, Marco Polo also found cities and castles on his way and he saw idol worshippers and some Turkic Nestorian Christians who were all subjects of the Great Khan.<sup>54</sup>

#### *Cambaluc / Dadu* 大都

As a corrupt form of the Turkic word “Khan-baliq” meaning “the Khan’s city”, Cambaluc refers to the capital of Yuan-China and corresponds to present-day Beijing. The Latin Z text describes that Christians, Saracens, Cathayans,<sup>55</sup> astrologers and diviners in Cambaluc exercised their skills in reading the course of stars and planets in front of the Great Khan who provided them with food and clothing every year.

Sunt itaque in ciuitate cambalu inter xpistianos saracenos & cathaycos circa .v.<sup>m</sup> astrologi & diuinatores quibus magnus can quolibet ano prouideri facit de uictu & uestitu ueluti pauperibus supradictis qui continue inciuitate eorum arte utuntur.<sup>56</sup>

Thus there are, in the city of Khanbaliq, in the midst of Christians, Saracens and Cathayans about 5,000 astrologers and soothsayers for whom the Great Khan, in every year, provides with (makes provision of) food and clothing just as to the poor mentioned (above), who continually employ their skill in the city.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., xxii-xxiii; cf. Boivin et al. (2003), 41.

<sup>53</sup> For a detailed description of the Chinese, Latin and Syriac sources on King George, see Tang (2016).

<sup>54</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 2 (Latin text), xxiii.

<sup>55</sup> Although the word “Cathayans” derives from “Kitan”, a medieval people in North China, it is most likely that Marco Polo in the given context identified them according to the Buddhist religion the majority of them practised. Thus “Cathayans” in this particular case meant to be Buddhists.

<sup>56</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 2 (Latin text), xxiv.

<sup>57</sup> Translation by the author of this article.

Kublai Khan returned to Cambaluc in winter as well as during Easter. Easter was an important season for religious festivities in Kublai Khan's palace. When it arrived, the Khan summoned all the Christians to come to him, and he applied incense to the book of the four gospels and kissed it. He asked all the barons and lords who were present to do the same during Easter and Nativity.<sup>58</sup> According to Marco Polo, although the Khan respected Moses, Mohammed and Shakyamuni, he held the Christian faith to be truer and better and encouraged Christians to carry the cross before them.<sup>59</sup> During his birthday celebration, the Khan also called upon all religious priests, idolaters (Buddhists), Saracens, Christians and others to pray to their respective gods for his health.<sup>60</sup>

The Mongol Khan family was known to have strong "Nestorian" Christian connections. When the two Polo brothers first visited Kublai Khan in his palace, they found that the Khan was very much interested in how the Christian princes ruled Europe as well as the affairs of Christians, Latin cardinals and the Roman Church.<sup>61</sup> Kublai Khan also requested the Polo brothers to ask the Pope to send him one hundred wise men of learning in the Christian religion and doctrine. At the same time, they should also bring the oil of the lamp which burns at the sepulchre of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem,<sup>62</sup> because the mother of the Khan was a Christian and wanted to have it.<sup>63</sup>

*Cacionfu / Hezhongfu* 河中府

Our next city is Cacionfu which is today's Puzhouzhen 蒲州鎮 of Yongjixian 永濟縣 in Shanxi province. It is located in the middle reaches of the Yellow River which was the "Caramoran", the "Black Water" in Polo's description, thus its Chinese name Hezhongfu (Cacionfu) meaning

---

<sup>58</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 201; Faucon et al. (2004), 79.

<sup>59</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 202.

<sup>60</sup> Faucon et al. (2004), 79; Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 222.

<sup>61</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 77.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

“the town in the middle reaches of the river”. The Z manuscript mentions some Turkic Nestorian Christians<sup>64</sup> and Saracens in the city.

*Quengianfu / Jingzhaofu* 京兆府

Quengianfu was an eight-day journey west of Cacionfu and was a place where mulberry trees grew. It was located in an area where several cities of merchants engaged in silk production. Quengianfu was identified with Jingzhaofu 京兆府,<sup>65</sup> referring to ancient Xi’an 西安. Some Turkic Nestorian Christians and Saracens lived there. It used to be a kingdom itself, with a lord called Mangalay (Manggela 忙哥刺).<sup>66</sup> Mangalay (1249-1280) was the third son of Kublai and his wife was Chabi. He was made Prince of Anxi in the 9th year of the Zhiyuan reign-period (1272).<sup>67</sup> He had Jingzhaofu as his territory.

*Paughin / Baoying* 寶應

Paughin was located in the province of Mangi<sup>68</sup> in southeast China. It is a county within today’s Yangzhou, in Jiangsu province. During the Yuan period, some Turkic Nestorian Christians lived there by trade and craft<sup>69</sup> and they had a church, as reported by Marco Polo.

Marco Polo did not mention any Christian presence in Yangiu/Yangzhou, although he claimed that he ruled this noble city for three years under the command of the great Khan.<sup>70</sup> However, in 1981, a trilingual (Chinese, Turkic and Syriac) tombstone inscription of a Nestorian Christian woman Elizabeth was unearthed in Yangzhou. Elizabeth, who was the wife of a Hindu from Dadu, the capital, died in 1371 at the age of 33.<sup>71</sup> As Paughin/Baoying which was part of the greater Yangzhou area had Christians, this

<sup>64</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 2 (Latin text), xxvi; vol. 1, 263.

<sup>65</sup> Pelliot (1963), 813-814.

<sup>66</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 263, 264; vol. 2 (Latin text), xxvii.

<sup>67</sup> *Xin Yuan shi*, ch. 114.

<sup>68</sup> Mangi: Manzi 蠻子, also known as Nanren 南人, referring to people from the south, to be exact, from the Southern Song Dynasty. Mongolic: Nangkiyas / Nangkiyad; Arabic: ماچين Māṣīn / Machin; Latin: Mangi.

<sup>69</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 314.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>71</sup> See discussions by Niu Ruji and Geng Shimin in Malek and Hofrichter (2006), 232-233 and 243-255, respectively.

tombstone inscription supports Polo's description of Christian presence in the Baoying-Yangzhou area.

*Cinghianfu / Zhenjiangfu* 鎮江府

Cinghianfu, that is, Zhengjiang in today's Jiangsu province, is a city south of Yangzhou on the southern bank of the Yangtze River. It was a place of great commercial importance. Polo reported that there were two churches of Nestorian Christians in the year 1278.<sup>72</sup> He spoke of a certain baron Mar Sargis who was a Nestorian Christian and governor of Zhenjiangfu. According to Marco Polo, Mar Sargis dwelt for three years there and had the above-mentioned two churches built.<sup>73</sup> This Mar Sargis is also mentioned in the fourteenth-century local gazetteer of Zhengjiang, *Zhishun Zhenjiang zhi* 至順鎮江志 (Records of Zhenjiang of the Zhishun Reign-period [1330-1333]).<sup>74</sup> The gazetteer not only described this Mar Sargis who had six monasteries built in Zhenjiang and one in Hangzhou, but also provides figures of the Christian population in Zhenjiang.<sup>75</sup>

*Ciangiu / Changzhou* 常州

Ciangiu is present day Changzhou, southeast of Zhenjiang. Polo reported that the Alans, who were Christians, were sent to attack the city but they were all killed.<sup>76</sup> These medieval Alans should belong to the Byzantine Orthodox Church.

*Quinsay / Xingzai* 行在 (*Hangzhou* 杭州)

Quinsay is the phonetic transcription of Xingzai. The name Xiangzai or Xingzaisuo means the place where the Son of Heaven resides [temporarily].<sup>77</sup> The Xingzai of the Southern Song Dynasty was Lin'an 臨安, i.e. Hangzhou. Quinsay was called by many medieval travellers the "city of paradise" on earth. Marco Polo called it a city of commerce and crafts and

<sup>72</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 323.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> For a description of Christians in Zhenjiang during the years of the Zhishun reign-period of the Yuan Dynasty see Tang (2011), 115-116.

<sup>75</sup> Yu Xilu (1999), 90-92.

<sup>76</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 324.

<sup>77</sup> See *Shiji*, ch. 111: 天子自謂所居曰行在所.

he saw a beautiful Nestorian Church there.<sup>78</sup> As described in the *Zhishun Zhenjiang zhi* (Records of Zhenjiang of the Zhishun Reign-period [1330-1333]), Mar Sargis began to build monasteries in the early 1280s. One of the seven monasteries he built was in Hangzhou, and it was called “Yangyi humula<sup>79</sup> Dapuxing si” 樣宜忽木刺大普興寺” and located near the Jianqiao Gate 薦橋門 in Hangzhou.<sup>80</sup> It is not clear whether this new monastery was the same “church” which Marco Polo saw when he was in Hangzhou.

#### *Fugiu / Fuzhou* 福州

Fugiu is the capital city Fuzhou of today’s Fujian Province. The Latin Z text has a long chapter on Christians in Fugiu. There, Marco Polo mentioned an interesting group of Christians who had the books of the Psalters and who claimed that their religion was handed down by their ancestors seven hundred years earlier. As they had been without teaching, they were ignorant of the main doctrine, except for that in their worship hall or temple they had three figures painted, which represented three of the seventy apostles.<sup>81</sup> According to Pelliot, these Christians were actually Manicheans.<sup>82</sup> In the provinces of Mangi, an area south of the Yangtze River in southeast China, there were, according to Marco Polo, more than seven hundred thousand families that followed the Christian rule.<sup>83</sup>

#### *Caraçan, Caragian / Daliguo* 大理國

Caragian is believed to be the Kingdom of Dali in north-western Yunnan province, which was conquered by Kublai Khan in 1253. Marco Polo called it Caraçan or Caragian. It may be a combination of *cara / kara* and *gian / xian* 縣? *Kara / cara* is a Turco-Mongolic word meaning “black”. This may correspond to the south-western people of China being called

<sup>78</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 339-340.

<sup>79</sup> *Yangyi* is a phonetic translation of the Turkic word *yāngi* meaning “new”. *Humula* is a Syriac loanword for monastery (*umra*). See Yu Xilu (1999), 365-366, or <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=324486&remap=gb>, vol. 9, section 51.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Tang (2011), 137.

<sup>81</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 350.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

Wuman 烏蠻, the "black barbarians".<sup>84</sup> In 1274 it became Yunnan province of the Yuan Dynasty. People of Central Asian origins, especially Hui Muslims, began to settle down there. That is why Marco Polo saw Muslims and Turkic Nestorian Christians in Caraçan.<sup>85</sup>

### 3.2. Events Related to Christians

#### *The Naiyan / Noyan Rebellion*

Naiyan 乃顏<sup>86</sup> was a nephew of the Great Khan Kublai, Marco Polo's report erroneously reversed the uncle-nephew relationship. Naiyan plotted with Kaidu against Kublai Khan and was regarded as a traitor. Although Rashid al-Din and the *Yuan shi* (History of the Yuan)<sup>87</sup> both mentioned this rebellion, Marco Polo gave a more detailed account of it, especially on the cross worn by Naiyan's soldiers. Marco Polo also stated that Naiyan was a baptized Christian and that in the battle against Kublai he had the Cross of Christ on his standard for his badge. However, this did not help him because he rebelled against his lord master Kublai Khan:

Et sachiez vraiment que Naian estoit crestiens baptiziés et portoit en s'enseigne la croiz, mais il ne li valut riens pour ce qui'il aloit contre son seignour a grant tort, quar il estoit homs au Grant Caam et devoit sa terre tenir de lui, si comme tuit si ancestre avoient fait.<sup>88</sup>

Naiyan, a relative of Kublai was caught and then killed, but all his horsemen remained alive and among them were many Christians who surrendered to the Great Khan.<sup>89</sup> Naiyan's men came from four provinces, Ciorcia, Cauli, Barscol and Sichingtingiu, among them were Christians, but also people of other religions such as Jews, Saracens, idolaters and many who did not believe in God and who mocked at the Christians.<sup>90</sup> When news of the mockery reached the royal palace, Kublai Khan was said

---

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Vogel (2013), 232.

<sup>85</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 2 (Latin text), xxxi: Caraçan "aliqui xpistiani turchi nestorinj".

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Moule (1957), 193-199.

<sup>87</sup> *Yuan shi*, ch. 11, 世祖本紀.

<sup>88</sup> Faucon et al. (2004), 64.

<sup>89</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 199.

<sup>90</sup> Faucon et al. (2004), 65; cf. Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 200.

to have supported the Christians by stating that Naiyan had been disloyal and treacherous whereas God was righteous and thus did not help Naiyan. And he also remarked that the Cross was good. Kublai's words pleased the Christians before him, while the Saracens, after hearing what Kublai Khan had said about the Cross, stopped mocking at Christians.<sup>91</sup>

### *Prester John and King George*

The legend of Prester John was a fabulous story told in medieval Europe about a Christian priestly king in the Orient. Medieval European travelers to the Far East, such as John of Plano Carpini, William of Rubruck and Marco Polo all mistakenly linked this legendary figure with some rulers of Christian tribes in the East. On one occasion in Marco Polo's report, he mistook Prester John for the head of the Kerait tribe, the Wang / Ong Khan, of Chinggis Khan's time,<sup>92</sup> and on another occasion, he asserted that the contemporary King George of the Ongut was the sixth lord after the great Prester John.<sup>93</sup> Tenduc was described to be a place inhabited by the descendants of Prester John.<sup>94</sup>

### **3.3. A Wider Christian Network**

From Mesopotamia via the overland Silk Road to Central Asia and China and from China via the maritime Silk Road to South Asia and back to Europe, Marco Polo's travel itinerary and the Christian communities he described along the way can help us map the geographic network of thirteenth-century Nestorian Christian communities along the Silk Roads. Thanks to Polo's description, it is possible to see the spread of Syrian ("Nestorian") Christianity not only in Chinese commercial cities and towns during the Yuan Dynasty but also in a wider geographic area connected by the Silk Roads from interior China to Central Asia, India and Western Asia.

Samarkand served as the centre for the eastward missionary expansion of the Church of the East during the thirteenth century, as it lies between the patriarchal seat in Bagdad and other dioceses in Central Asia and China.

---

<sup>91</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 201.

<sup>92</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 181; vol. 2 (Latin text), lxxiii.

<sup>93</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 182; vol. 2 (Latin text), xxiii.

<sup>94</sup> Boivin et al. (2003), 41.

According to Marco Polo, the people of Samarkand were Christians and Saracens (Muslims).<sup>95</sup> It also had a noble round church in honour of St. John the Baptist. Polo recorded a conflictive event, namely, that Christians took a beautiful square marble stone from a building belonging to the Saracens and set it up as a support of a column of marble in the middle of the church, which was the pillar holding up the whole roof of the church which was round.<sup>96</sup> The Saracens were displeased, but kept silent because the Lord of the city was a Christian. This lord was, according to Marco Polo, Chagatai, one of the sons of Chinggis Khan.<sup>97</sup> A passage in a fourteenth-century Chinese local gazetteer of Zhenjiang also provides a reference to Samarkand as the homeland for many Christians in Yuan China.<sup>98</sup>

Apart from Nestorian Christians, Marco Polo noticed other Christian groups along the Silk Road, such as in Archingan in Greater Armenia / Erzingan. Polo stated that the Kingdom of Archingan had an archbishop that ruled over the Christians and who was the metropolitan of that province.<sup>99</sup> In Georgia, there were Christians who observed the Greek rule.

Mesopotamia was the main Centre for both East and West Syriac Churches. In the thirteenth century Marco Polo saw in Mosul a great number of Nestorian, Jacobite<sup>100</sup> and Armenian Christians who dwelt there. The Nestorians and Jacobites were called heretics by the Latin Church. The Patriarch whom they called "Jatolic", ordained archbishops, bishops and abbots, prelates and priests and sent them to preach in India, Catai and Baudac and to all the places with Christians.<sup>101</sup> In the Kurdish mountains near Mosul there lived a people called Curd (Kurd) "who are Nestorian and Jacobite Christians and one part of them are Saracens who worship Mahomet."<sup>102</sup> By the same token Baudac (Bagdad) was described as a great

---

<sup>95</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 179; cf. vol. 2 (Latin text), xxii.

<sup>96</sup> For a similar event described in a fourteenth-century Chinese source, cf. Yu Xilu (1999), vol. 3, 365.

<sup>97</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 144-145; Boivin et al. (2003), 10-11; Yule and Cordier (1903), 183-184.

<sup>98</sup> See footnote 96.

<sup>99</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 96.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.



noble city of science and philosophy where Jews, Christians and Saracens lived. Among them, Polo mentioned Nestorian as well as Jacobite and Armenian Christians.<sup>103</sup> In Tauris (Tabriz in today's Iran), Marco Polo saw Christians of many 'sects', among them Nestorian, Jacobite, Georgian and Persian Christians. The Saracens were described as harming the Christians and other people who did not follow their law.<sup>104</sup> Polo also saw a Carmelite Monastery of the Blessed Barsamo near the border of Tauris.

Along the maritime Silk Road, Marco Polo landed in India. In Collum / Kolam in the province of Maabar (Malabar coast), he described a large population of Christians, Nestorians, Saracens and Jews living there.<sup>105</sup> These Christian communities of the Syriac traditions have survived to this day.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

Palladius pointed out that Marco Polo, when describing places, spoke of a state of things already past his time, but still preserved in the popular memory.<sup>106</sup> Even though the Venetian's travelogue sometimes describes customs and histories that happened before his time and information gets tangled in some places, it is still possible to reconstruct a consistent picture. As Marco Polo on his travel route paid particular attention to the religious communities along the Silk Road and described the Nestorian communities, we can obtain a fair impression of the spread of Christianity along the Silk Road and especially in China during the thirteenth century.

Marco Polo's description can help us to reach the conclusion that "Nestorian" Christian communities from Mesopotamia to Central Asia had not been wiped out after the conquest of Islam and were still widespread along the Silk Road under the Mongol rule during the thirteenth century. They flourished especially in Yuan China. This is corroborated by another European traveler, William of Rubruck, who had travelled to the Mongol capital Karakorum in 1254. Rubruck reported that Nestorians and Saracens

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 100-105.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 104-105.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 414.

<sup>106</sup> Palladius (1876), 19.

lived among other locals all the way from Central Asia to Cathay (north China).<sup>107</sup>

## References

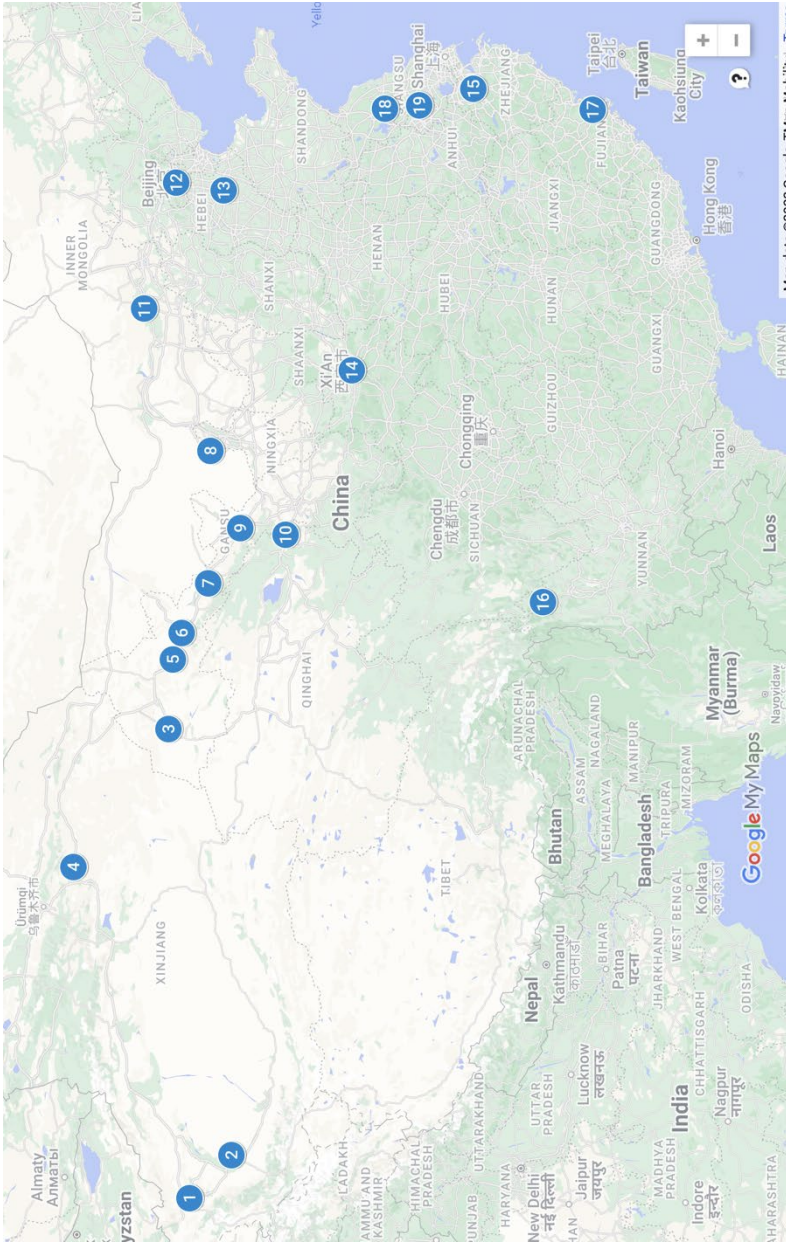
- Atwood, Christopher P. (2016). "Marco Polo's Sino-Mongolian Toponyms, with Special Attention to the Transcription of the Character *zhou* 州", in Xu Zhongwen 徐忠文, Rong Xinjiang 荣新江, et al., eds. *Make Boluo, Yangzhou, sichou zhi lu* 马可·波罗, 扬州, 丝绸之路 (Marco Polo—Yangzhou—The Silk Road) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe), 57-86.
- Bedjan, Paul (2007), *The History of Mar Jab-Alaha and Rabban Sauma. Histoire de Mar Jab-Alha, Patriarch, et de Raban Sauma* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press).
- Blanchard, Joël; Quereuil, Michel, eds. (2005). *Le devisement du monde: Edition critique publiée sous la direction de Philippe Ménéard, Tome IV: Voyages à travers la Chine*, in Ménéard et al. (Genève: Droz).
- Boivin, Jeanne-Marie; Harf-Lancner, Laurence; Mathey-Maille, Laurence, eds. (2003). *Le devisement du monde, Tome II: Traversée de l'Afghanistan et entrée en Chine*, in Ménéard et al., eds. (Genève: Droz).
- Borbone, Pier Giorgio (2000). *Storia di Mar Yahballaha e di Rabban Sauma: Un orientale in Occidente ai tempi di Marco Polo* (Torino: S. Zamorani).
- Chabot, Jean Baptiste (1893, 1894). "Histoire du patriarche *Mar Jabalaha III* et du moine Rabban Çauma", *Revue de l'Orient Latin*, 1: 567-610; 2: 73-143, 235-304.
- Crane, Robert (1957). "News of the Profession", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 17.1: 173-192.
- Dodge, Bayard, ed. (1970). *The Fihrist of Ibn al-Nadim: A Tenth Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Faucon, Jean-Claude; Quérueil, Danielle; Santucci, Monique, eds. (2004). *Marco Polo: Le devisement du monde, Tome III: L'empereur Khoubilai Khan*, in Ménéard et al., eds. (Genève: Droz).
- Fiey, Jean Maurice (1993). *Pour un Oriens Christianus Novus: Répertoire des Diocèse Syriaques Orientaux et Occidentaux* (Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag).
- Flügel, Gustav, ed. (1872). *Kitab al-Fihrist mit Anmerkungen* (Leipzig: Verlag von F.C.W. Vogel).

---

<sup>107</sup> Rockhill (1900), 157.

- Grenet, Frantz; Sims-Williams, Nicholas; de la Vaissiere, Etienne (1998). "The Sogdian Ancient Letter V", *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, 12: 91-104. Available under <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/24049096.pdf> (last accessed 2019/10/05).
- Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Old [History] Records of the Tang [Dynasty]), by Liu Xu 劉煦, 945.
- Malek, Roman; Hofrichter, Peter, eds. (2006). *Jingjiao: The Church of the East in China and Central Asia* (St. Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica).
- Ménard, Philippe, et al., eds. (2001-2009). *Marco Polo; Le devisement du monde: Édition critique publiée sous la direction de Philippe Ménard* (Genève: Droz).
- Montgomery, James A. (1966). *The History of Yaballaha III, Nestorian Patriarch and of his Vicar Bar Sauma, Mongol Ambassador to the Frankish Courts at the End of the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927; repr. New York: Octagon Books).
- Moule, Arthur C. (1957). *Quinsai with Other Notes on Marco Polo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Moule, Arthur C.; Pelliot, Paul, eds. (1938). *Marco Polo; The Description of the World*, 2 vols. (London: George Routledge & Sons).
- Palladius (1876). "Elucidations of Marco Polo's Travels in North-China Drawn from Chinese Sources", *Journal of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 10: 1-54.
- Pelliot, Paul (1959). *Notes on Marco Polo I: Ouvrage Posthume* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale).
- Pelliot, Paul (1963). *Notes on Marco Polo II: Ouvrage Posthume* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale).
- Rockhill, William Woodville, ed. (1900). *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World 1253-55, as Narrated by Himself, with Two Accounts of the Earlier Journey of John of Pian de Carpine* (London: The Hakluyt Society).
- Rong Xinjiang 荣新江 (2001). *Zhonggu Zhongguo yu wailai wenming* 中古中国与外来文明 (Medieval China and Foreign Civilisations) (Beijing: Shenghuo, Dushu, Xinzhi sanlian shudian).
- Shiji* 史記 (Records of the [Grand] Scribe), by Sima Tan 司馬談 and Sima Qian 司馬遷, c. 90 BC. Available under [http://www.guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/shiji/sj\\_111.htm](http://www.guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/shiji/sj_111.htm) (last accessed 2019/11/21).
- Song shi* 宋史 (History of the Song [Dynasty]), by Tuotuo (Toktaga) 脫脫 and Ouyang Xuan 歐陽玄, c. 1345.

- Sturton, Stephen D. (1945). "The Site of the Nestorian Monastery at Hangchow", *The Asiatic Review*, 82-85.
- Tang Li (2006). "Sorkaktani Beki: A Prominent Nestorian Woman at the Mongol Court", in Roman Malek ed. *Jingjiao: The Church of the East in China and Central Asia*. (St. Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2006), 349-355.
- Tang Li (2011). *East Syriac Christianity in Mongol-Yuan China (12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Centuries)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag).
- Tang Li (2016). "The Öngüt 'Nestorian' King George in Medieval Chinese, Latin and Syriac Sources", in Dietmar W. Winkler, ed. *Syrische Studien: Beiträge zum 8. Deutschen Syrologen-Symposium in Salzburg 2014* (Münster: Lit Verlag), 227-243.
- Thackston, Wheeler M. (1998-1999). *Rashiduddin Fazlullah's Jami'u't-Tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles [by Rashīd al-Dīn], A History of the Mongols* (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations).
- Toepel, Alexander, ed. (2008). *Die Mönche des Kublai Khan: Die Reise der Pilger Mar Yahballaha und Rabban Sauma nach Europa* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft).
- Van den Wyngaert, Anastasius, ed. (1929). *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 1, *Itinera et relationes Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV* (Quaracchi-Firenze: Collegium S. Bonaventurae).
- Vogel, Hans Ulrich (2013). *Marco Polo Was in China: New Evidence from Currencies, Salts and Revenues* (Leiden: Brill).
- Xin Yuan shi* 新元史 (New History of the Yuan [Dynasty]), by Ke Shaomin 柯劭忞, 1890-1920.
- Yu Xilu 余希魯 (1999). *Zhishun Zhenjiang zhi* 至順鎮江志 (Records of Zhenjiang of the Zhishun Reign-period [1330-1333]), vol. 3, reprint (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe), or <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=324486&remap=gb> (last accessed 2019/11/21).
- Yuan shi* 元史 (History of the Yuan [Dynasty]), by Song Lian 宋濂, c. 1370.
- Yule, Henry, ed. (1903). *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East* (London: J. Murray).



Map 1. Nestorian Christian Communities in Cities and Towns along the Overland Silk Road and in Yuan China

*Notes:*

Although Marco Polo described most of the cities where he saw Christians, there were places, however, such as Quanzhou (Zayton) and Zhenjiang, where he does not mention Christian communities, but which can be testified by other evidence. Moreover, some place names in Polo's report cannot be confidently identified. Therefore, the map can only present a preliminary outline.

1. Cascar (Kashgar), Kashi 喀什
2. Yarcan (Yarkand, Ye'erqiang 葉爾羌), Shache 莎車
3. Saciou (Shazhou 沙州), west of Dunhuang 敦煌
4. Carahoço (Kalahezhuo 喀刺和卓), in Turfan (Tulufan 吐魯番) area
5. Ghinghin Talas (Chitinzhen 赤金鎮)
6. Succiu (Suzhou 肅州), near Jiuquan 酒泉
7. Camciu (Ganzhou 甘州), Zhangye 張掖
8. Egrigaia, Calacian (Ningxia 寧夏, Helanshan 賀蘭山), Alashan 阿拉善
9. Kingdom of Ergiuul, Erguiul (Liangzhou 涼州), Wuwei 武威
10. Silingiu (Xiningzhou 西寧州), near Xining 西寧
11. Tenduc Province (Tiande 天德)
12. Cambaluc (Dadu 大都), Beijing
13. Cacionfu (Hezhongfu 河中府), Puzhouzhen 蒲州鎮 of Yongjixian 永濟縣
14. Quengianfu (Jingzhaofu 京兆府), Xi'an 西安
15. Quinsai (Xingzai 行在), Hangzhou 杭州
16. Caraçan, Caragian (Daliguo 大理國), north-western Yunnan province
17. Fugiu (Fuzhou 福州), Fuzhou 福州
18. Baughin (Baoying 寶應), within Yangzhou 揚州
19. Cinghianfu (Zhenjiang 鎮江)



# Two Mongolian Toponyms in Marco Polo's Account: The Green Mound and Cacciar Modun

DANG Baohai

## 1. The Green Mound and Köke Ayula

Marco Polo introduces an artificial hill in the imperial palace of Qubilai Qaan in Canbaluc (i.e. Dadu 大都, now Beijing). Here I quote the related text from chap. 84, “Here the Great Khan’s palace is described” in Prof. Kinoshita’s new translation of BNF fr. 1116:

I also tell you that about a crossbow shot’s length north of the Palace, he had a hill (that is, a mound) built—a good hundred paces high and more than a mile around. This mound is full of and covered with trees that never lose their leaves, but are always green. I tell you that whenever someone told the great lord about a beautiful tree, he had it taken up with all its roots and a lot of earth and had it carried to this mound by elephant. He didn’t hesitate to do this [even] if the tree he wanted was large; in this way the most beautiful trees were found there. I tell you that the great lord had this mound covered with azure rocks that are very green. As the trees are all green, and the mound is all green, you see nothing except green things; therefore, it is called the Green Mound. Atop of the mound, in the middle of the summit, there is a large and beautiful palace that is completely green. I tell you that this mound, trees, and palace are beautiful to look at; everybody who sees them has happiness and joy: this is why the great lord built them: to have this beautiful vista and to give him comfort and solace.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Kinoshita (2016), 75.



The name for this hill in Yule's edition is the Green Mount.<sup>2</sup> In Moule's translation, it is the Green Hill.<sup>3</sup> Hereafter, I chose the name "Green Mound" for discussion, because the hill, as it could be shown below, is not so big.

Yule suggests this Green Mound was perhaps Jingshan 景山 (Court Mountain). It is also called Wansuishan 萬歲山 (Ten Thousand Year Mount), or Meishan 煤山 (Coal Mount). But Yule admits, whether this is Qubilai's "Green Mound" does not seem to be quite certain.<sup>4</sup>

Bretschneider was the first to provide the correct identification that this hill is called Qionghuadao 瓊花島 (Viburnum Island) at the time of the Jin (1115-1234); in 1271 it received the name of Wansuishan; it is about 100 feet in height, now in Beihai 北海 lake of Beijing inner city, and is the only hill mentioned by Chinese writers of the Mongol time when referring to the palace grounds. Bretschneider argues that Marco Polo's handsome palace on the top of the Green Mound is the same as the Guanghandian Palace 廣寒殿 in Tao Zongyi's 陶宗儀 *Nancun chuogeng lu* 南村輟耕錄 (Records of Nancun [i.e. Tao Zongyi] while Ceasing Farm Work), which was published in 1366.<sup>5</sup>

Pelliot's note on "Green Hill" adds more information:

"Mount Vers" has been clearly identified; it is not the Ching-shan or Mei-shan, but what is known now as the Pai-t'a [白塔], "White Pagoda", on account of the *stūpa* erected on it in the 17th cent. [...] This artificial hill was called 瓊花島 Ch'iung-hua-tao, "Hortensia Island", under the Chin. According to T'ao Tsung-I, Qubilai prescribed in 1262 to have it put in order, [...], the name was changed to 萬歲山 Wan-suishan in 1271.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, Pelliot was aware that the mound was also called Wansuishan in the Yuan period. Comparing the mound's name of Marco Polo and its Chinese names indicated above, we can see that no name in Chinese is the same as

---

<sup>2</sup> Yule (1903), vol. 1, 365.

<sup>3</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938/1976), 211.

<sup>4</sup> Yule (1903), vol. 1, 370-372.

<sup>5</sup> Bretschneider (1876), 35-42; Yule (1903), vol. 1, 372.

<sup>6</sup> Pelliot (1963), 739-741.

Polo's. Where does this name, "Green Mound", come from? Did Wanshoushan or Qionghuadao really have such a name in the thirteenth century?

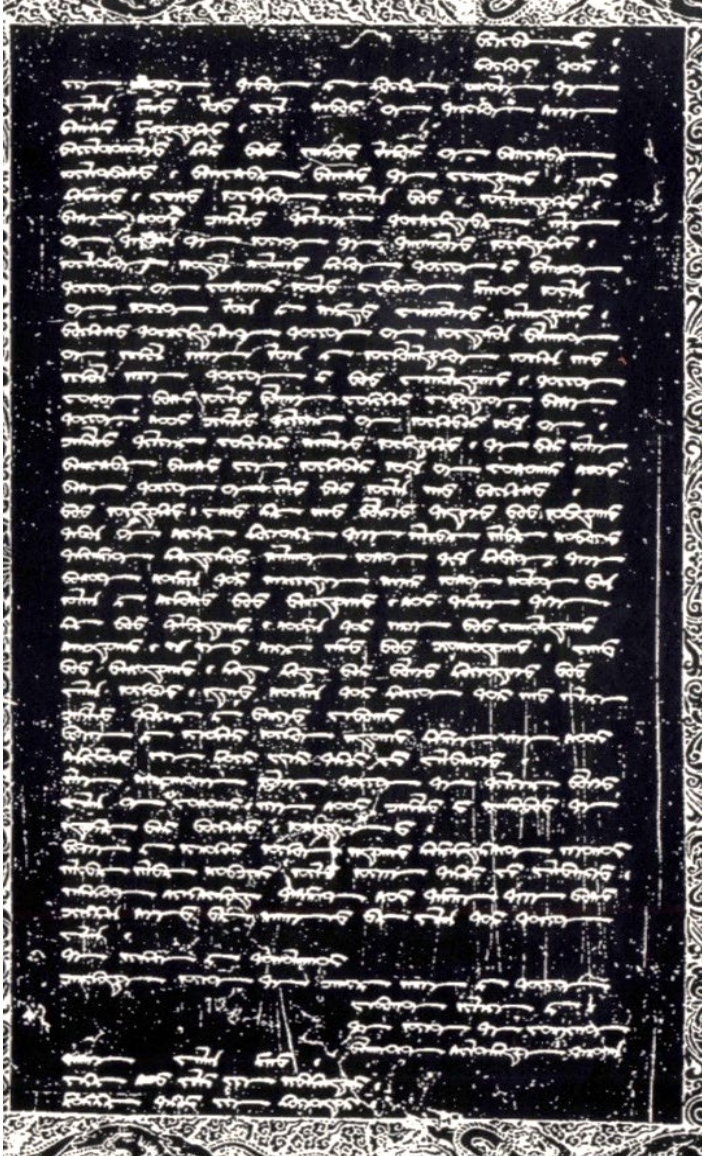


Figure 1: The Mongolian Part of Qubilai's Edict in 1268  
Source: *Zhongguo Shaojinsi*: Beike juan, 84.

長生天底氣力要  
 大福廣說助裏  
 皇帝聖可城裏裏村子裏邊管花亦每根底官人每根底過在  
 便臣每根底軍官每根底軍人每根底和尚每根底民戶  
 每根底宜論底  
 聖旨  
 成吉思皇帝  
 合罕皇帝聖旨裏和尚也里可溫先王答失蠻命地稅角稅外  
 不揀甚麼差發休着者告  
 天俺每根底稅寺者廢道來如今依着先前  
 聖旨體例裏建貢長老但屬河南府管底衆多和尚每根底做  
 提領依着  
 釋迦牟尼佛道子裏寺  
 天俺每根底興寺視寺廢道更前長老提領底把着持誦底  
 聖旨興來這底每底寺院裏房舍裏使臣休安下者不揀是誰  
 倚氣力休住坐者倉糧休頓放者不揀甚麼休放者寺院  
 裏休新公事者鋪馬底應休拿者除地稅角稅外但屬寺院  
 院底田地水土竹草園林碾磨解典磨浴房底舖席每根  
 底底舖舖每根底探那善處差發探程休與者探那善  
 處休刀弄扯拽要者又和尚每不揀有是呵漢事可付那善  
 合思巴八合失底言語裏誑底體創裏蕭長老提領依  
 體例裏休別了依理行路者又俗人和尚每根底休歸新底  
 者和尚共俗人一處拆毀底言語有可奪付來底和尚每  
 底頭兒城子裏底官人每一處同共理問歸新者和尚體  
 制裏不行底不公事做底說謊做賊底和尚每就子達魯  
 花亦官人每根底分付與者又這蕭長老提領特奪付來  
 廢道沒體例底公事休行者行可  
 合思巴八合失報底說者怎生問當道不是  
 合思巴八合失識者  
 自俺每底  
 龍紀年正月二十五日壽山兒裏有的時分寫來

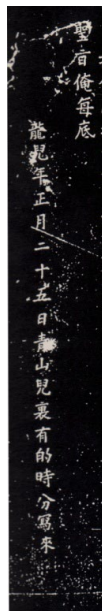
Figure 2: The Chinese Part of Qubilai's Edict of 1268

Source: Zhongguo Shaolinsi: Beike juan, 85.

Around 1982, a great stele was unearthed in the yard of the Shaolinsi Temple 少林寺 in Henan Province. It was erected in the 1st year Yanyou 延祐 (1314).<sup>7</sup> Four inscriptions of Mongolian-Chinese bilingual edicts, which can be dated back to 1253, 1261, 1268 and 1312, are carved on the stele.<sup>8</sup> The third one, written in Uighur-Mongolian and Chinese, was given to this temple by Qubilai Qaan in the Year of the Dragon (Figures 1 and 2).



**Figure 3: Lines 46-49 in Mongolian of Qubilai's Edict of 1268**



**Figure 4: Lines 31-33 in Chinese of Qubilai's Edict of 1268**

Japanese and Chinese scholars dated this edict back to the 5th year Zhiyuan 至元 (1268), which is the Chinese lunar year *wuchen* 戊辰, a year of the dragon.<sup>9</sup> Like all such kind of Mongolian royal edicts, the date and place

<sup>7</sup> Wang Xuebao (1988), 2; Daobu and Zhaonasitu (1993), 1-3.

<sup>8</sup> Nakamura and Matsukawa (1993), 2-7; Daobu and Zhaonasitu (1993), 1-3.

<sup>9</sup> Nakamura and Matsukawa (1993), 6; Daobu and Zhaonasitu (1994), 32.

of this edict were written at the end. For the Mongolian part, these are the lines from 46 to 49. The Latin transcription reads as follows: (46) *jrlg manu luu jil qabur un terigün sara* (47) *yin qorin tabun a köke ayula da* (48) *büküi dür* (49) *bičibei*. It means: “This Edict of Ours, on the 25th day of the 1st month of spring in the Year of the Dragon, when staying at the Green Mound, [we] wrote [it].” According to the Mongolian dating method, the 1st month of spring is the 1st month of the lunar year.

The corresponding translation in Chinese is from line 31 to line 32 of the Chinese part. It reads: 聖旨俺每底。龍兒年正月二十五日青山兒裏有的時分寫來。 It likewise means: “This Edict of Ours, on the 25th day of the 1st month of the Dragon Year, when staying at the Green Mound, [we] wrote [it].” Thus, the Chinese part is an accurate translation of the Mongolian original text.<sup>10</sup>

The Mongolian words, *köke ayula*, mean green hill or green mound. Köke is green or blue; *ayula* is hill or mound. The meaning of the Chinese words Qingshan'er 青山兒 is the same as the Mongolian. For the location of this Köke Ayula/Qingshan'er, neither Chinese nor Japanese scholars, who studied the inscriptions, have given an accurate location.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear that the edict was promulgated by Qubilai Qaan in the 1st month, the 5th year Zhiyuan (1268). If we know the activities of Qubilai at that time, we could find some useful clue to the location of this hill. Unfortunately, in the “History of the Yuan [Dynasty]” (*Yuanshi* 元史, hereafter YS), no record related to Qubilai's activities in this month is given. We only know that in this year Qubilai came back to Zhongdu 中都 (later the name changed to Dadu) from Shangdu 上都 (in today's Zhenglanqi 正藍旗 of Inner Mongolia) in the 9th month. Because Qubilai returned to Zhongdu from Shangdu in the 9th month last year, there is no doubt that in 1268 Qubilai went to Shangdu from Zhongdu.<sup>12</sup>

When did Qubilai go to Shangdu in this Dragon Year? We can only speculate about the time based on Qubilai's general timetable before and after this year. It is well known that Qubilai started the system for Yuan

<sup>10</sup> Nakamura and Matsukawa (1993), 41-48; Daobu and Zhaonasitu (1994), 33-34.

<sup>11</sup> Nakamura and Matsukawa (1993), 81; Daobu and Zhaonasitu (1994), 37.

<sup>12</sup> YS, *juan* 6, 119, 116.

emperors to leave Zhongdu in spring, staying the whole summer in Shangdu, and then to return to Zhongdu in autumn. The origin of this system appears in the years of the Zhongtong 中統 reign-period (1260-1264), when Qubilai had a residential city for the summer built in Kaiping 開平 in Inner Mongolia. In the 4th year Zhiyuan, its name was changed as Shangdu. Every year, with the exception of those when he was in war with other Mongolian princes, Qubilai always left Yanjing 燕京 (name changed to Zhongdu in the 1st year Zhiyuan, 1265) in spring, proceeded to Kaiping, and then returned to Yanjing in autumn to overwinter there. Such trips were repeated year after year throughout the whole life of Qubilai.

According to YS, we can provide the following timetable for Qubilai's travels between Yanjing (later Zhongdu) and Kaiping (later Shangdu) from the 1st year Zhongtong to the 10th year Zhiyuan:

**Table 1: Schedule of Qubilai Qaan's Annual Tours between Zhongdu and Shangdu**

Source: YS, *juan* 4 to 8.

Year of reign-period	AD	Departure time from Zhongdu to Shangdu (Chinese month)	Return from Shangdu to Zhongdu (Chinese month)
1st year Zhongtong	1260	3rd	12th
2nd year Zhongtong	1261	2nd	12th
3rd year Zhongtong	1262	no data	no data
4th year Zhongtong	1263	2nd	8th
1st year Zhiyuan	1264	2nd	9th
2nd year Zhiyuan	1265	2nd	8th
3rd year Zhiyuan	1266	2nd	9th
4th year Zhiyuan	1267	2nd	9th
5th year Zhiyuan	1268	no data	9th
6th year Zhiyuan	1269	no data	9th
7th year Zhiyuan	1270	3rd	10th
8th year Zhiyuan	1271	3rd	8th
9th year Zhiyuan	1272	2nd	8th
10th year Zhiyuan	1273	3rd	9th [8th] <sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> According to the study of Chen Dezhi, Qubilai came back to Dadu on the day *guiyou* (i.e. 24th day) of the 8th month. See Chen Dezhi (2008), 59-61.

From these travel dates of the fourteen years listed above, we can see that, in general, the earliest time that Qubilai left Zhongdu was in the 2nd month, sometimes later in the 3rd month, but he never set off in the 1st month. According to this pattern, we can be rather sure that in the 1st month of the 5th year Zhiyuan, i.e. the Dragon Year of the Shaolinsi edict, Qubilai had not left Zhongdu.

Where did Qubilai live in Zhongdu during the years from 1260 to 1273? Zhongdu was the old capital of the Jin dynasty. After the Mongol-Jin war and the ensuing social unrest, it was greatly destroyed. Large buildings, including palaces, were ruined during these conflicts, and public facilities were seriously damaged.<sup>14</sup> Qubilai stayed at Zhongdu every winter unless he had to leave for campaigns. However, he did not live in the center of Zhongdu city, but in its outskirts. In winter of the 9th year of Möngke Qaan (1259), Qubilai came to Yanjing and settled down in a close suburban place. In the 1st year Zhongtong, he left to fight against his young brother Ariq Böke, and when he came back from the front after having defeated him, he also lived in a suburban place close to Yanjing.<sup>15</sup> This location was Wanning Palace 萬寧宮, a palace of the Jin emperors for temporary residence, which was in the north-east of Yanjing. It had been built by emperor Shizong 世宗 (r. 1161-1190) of the Jin<sup>16</sup> and was located near a big lake called Taiyechi 太液池. The lake, also named Jishuitan 積水潭, was so large that in the Yuan period it was called Haizi 海子, or, literally, “big lake like a sea”.<sup>17</sup> In the middle of this lake, there was an artificial mound or island, with the name Qionghuadao. Around the lake and on the mound, large buildings and parks had been set up during the Jin dynasty, when the whole area became an important garden palace of Jin emperors.<sup>18</sup> When Qubilai came to Yanjing and faced the ruined city, he did not want to live in it, but preferred the area of Taiyechi and Qionghuadao for staying there during the winter season. In order to improve living conditions, Qubilai ordered

---

<sup>14</sup> Chen Gaohua (1982), 24-27, 32-33.

<sup>15</sup> YS, *juan* 4, 63, 68.

<sup>16</sup> *Jinshi*, *juan* 24, 573.

<sup>17</sup> YS, *juan* 58, 1347.

<sup>18</sup> Chen Gaohua (1982), 17-18.

the Qionghuadao to be rebuilt.<sup>19</sup> Several palaces and halls were set up on the restored island, such as Guanghandian, Biandian 便殿 (Convenience Hall) etc., for the daily life of Qubilai and his family and for conducting state affairs.

We can find many records of the activities that Qubilai performed on Qionghuadao Island in autumn, winter and spring,<sup>20</sup> such as the following selected entries: In the 10th month of the 1st year Zhiyuan, Wonjong (Yuanzong 元宗, r. 1259-1274), king of Korea, bade Qubilai his farewell at Wanshoushan Hall.<sup>21</sup> In the 12th month the same year, a big jade jar was put up in the Guanghandian Hall on top of Qionghuadao.<sup>22</sup> In the 4th month of the 3rd year Zhiyuan, a precious bed was set up in the Guanghandian.<sup>23</sup> In the same year, three hundred Korean soldiers, led by general Hong Kun-sang (Hong Junxiang 洪君祥; d. 1309), together with other soldiers, rebuilt Wanshoushan.<sup>24</sup> In the 9th month of the 4th year Zhiyuan, a jade hall was installed in Guanghandian.<sup>25</sup> In the 6th year Zhiyuan, Qubilai watched the court musical and ritual performances at Convenience Hall (Biandian 便殿) of Wanshoushan.<sup>26</sup> In the 3rd month of the 10th year Zhiyuan, Qubilai came to Guanghandian and sent high officials to bestow jade books as well as seals of jade and gold to his empress and crown prince.<sup>27</sup> In the same year, on the 18th day of the 9th month, in the bathroom at the foot of Wanshoushan Hill, Jamal al-Dīn, an official of the Bureau of the Imperial Secretariat (*mishujian* 秘書監) submitted a report to Qubilai, who had just returned from Shangdu.<sup>28</sup>

In the Dragon Year, 1268, the great palaces of Dadu, the new capital of Qubilai, were still in construction. Hence, we can conclude that in that year Qubilai lived in palaces near Qionghuadao, that is, the Köke Ayula /

<sup>19</sup> *Nancun chuogeng lu*, *juan* 21, 255 and *juan* 1, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Chen Gaohua (1982), 33.

<sup>21</sup> *Gaolishi*, *juan* 26, 521.

<sup>22</sup> YS, *juan* 6, 109.

<sup>23</sup> YS, *juan* 6, 110.

<sup>24</sup> YS, *juan* 154, biography of Hong Junxiang (Hong Kun-sang), 3631.

<sup>25</sup> YS, *juan* 6, 115.

<sup>26</sup> YS, *juan* 67, 1665.

<sup>27</sup> YS, *juan* 8, 148.

<sup>28</sup> *Mishujian zhi*, *juan* 1, 31.



Qingshan'er in the edict of the Shaolinsi Temple. Indeed, this area was his living place not only in that year but during the whole period from 1260 to 1273.

Besides the edict of Shaolinsi, there is another edict that was written at the same place. Only the Chinese translation of this edict has come down to us. With date and place mentioned as usual at the end of the edict, it reads as follows: 聖旨俺的。羊兒年二月二十六日青山子根底有時分寫來。(This Edict of Ours, on the 26th day of the 2nd month of the Sheep Year, when staying at the Green Mound, [we] wrote [it].)<sup>29</sup> The toponym Qingshanzi 青山子 is somewhat different with Qingshan'er 青山兒, but their meaning is the same. *Qing* 青 is green, and *shanzi* 山子 or *shan'er* 山兒 means small hill.

According to the studies of the Japanese scholar Sugiyama Masa'aki, the Sheep Year in this edict is the 8th year Zhiyuan (1271).<sup>30</sup> From related records in YS we know that later in the 3rd month of this year Qubilai set off from Zhongdu to Shangdu. So the Green Mound mentioned in this edict is the same place as that in the edict of Shaolinsi. Both of them refer to Qionghuadao. Hence, Marco Polo's Green Mound is the same one as Köke Ayula in Mongolian and Qingshan'er or Qingshanzi in Chinese. These toponyms in Chinese and European languages come from the Mongolian name, which is the original one. Moreover, apart from Marco Polo, also Odorico de Pordenone (c. 1286-1331) described the Green Mound of Dadu:

And within the enclosure of the great palace there hath been a hill thrown up on which another palace is built, the most beautiful in the whole world. And this whole hill is planted over with trees, wherefrom it hath the name of the *Green Mount*. And at the side of this hill hath been formed a lake [more than a mile round], and a most beautiful bridge built across it. And on this lake there be such multitudes of wild-geese and ducks and swans, that it is something to wonder at; so that

---

<sup>29</sup> *Miaoxue dianli*, juan 1, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Sugiyama (1991/2004), 493.

there is no need for that lord to go from home when he wisheth for sport. ...<sup>31</sup>

Another author providing relevant information is Ibn al-‘Umarī (1301-1349), a Mamluk Egyptian historian, who mentions in his book *Köke Aḡula* with its Turkic name, *Kūk Tāq*:

Die dortige Herrscherresidenz ist *Hān Bāliq*. Sie besteht aus zwei Städten, einer alten und einer neuen. Letztere wurde von *Daidū*, einem ihrer Fürsten (*mulūk*) erbaut und nach ihm benannt. In ihrem Zentrum liegt der Palast des Großkhans (*qān kabīr*), ein gewaltiges Kastell mit Namen *Kūk Tāq*, was auf Mongolisch ‘Grünes Schloß’ bedeutet; denn ‘Schloß’ heißt bei ihnen *tāq* und ‘grün’ *kūk* (*köke*), im Gegensatz zum Türkischen, wo *kūk* (die Bezeichnung für) ‘blau’ ist. Außen wird der Khan-Palast von den Wohnsitzen der Emire umschlossen.<sup>32</sup>

Ibn al-‘Umarī was never in China, but had obtained information about *Kūk Tāq* from his friend, a merchant from Samarqand, with the name *Samarqandi*.<sup>33</sup>

Both *Odorico* and Ibn al-‘Umarī mention the *Köke Aḡula* with its name translated into Latin and Turkic, respectively. However, comparing with *Marco Polo’s* text, their descriptions are very simple. In addition, *Marco Polo’s* account on *Köke Aḡula* is about thirty years earlier than those of *Odorico* and Ibn al-‘Umarī.

## 2. Cacciar Modun and Ha-hei-yi-mo

In chap. 94, “Here the way the Great Khan goes hunting for beasts and birds is described” of *Marco Polo’s Description of the World*, a great hunting place of *Qubilai Qaan* is introduced. The following is an excerpt from *Kinoshita’s* translation:

When the great lord has stayed in the city I named for you above for three months—this was December, January, and February—then he

<sup>31</sup> Yule (1866), 128-129.

<sup>32</sup> Lech (1968), 110. For the Arabian text, see *ibid.*, 28, lines 10-17.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

leaves this city in the month of March and went south to the Ocean Sea, two days' journey away. He takes some 10,000 falconers with him, carrying a good 500 gyrfalcons, peregrine falcons, and saker falcons in great numbers; they also carry a great quantity of goshawks for hunting along the river; [...] When the great lord travels this road I have told you about before, to the Ocean Sea, you can see on this road many beautiful sites for hunting animals and birds; there is no pleasure in the world as worthy. [...] When he has gone so far as to come to a place called Cacciar Modun, there he finds his tent and the tents of his sons, barons, and mistresses: more than 10,000, very beautiful and costly. [...] In the way you have heard, the great lord remains in this place until around Easter of the resurrection. When he has remained as long as you have heard, then he leaves there with all his people and returns straight to the city of Khanbaliq on the same path by which he came, hunting and birding the whole time, with great pleasure and joy.<sup>34</sup>

Yule, spelling Cacciar Modun as Cachar Modun, denies the arguments of Marsden and Pauthier, who identify this place with Tchakiri Mondou (or Moudon), which lies in the extreme east of Manchuria. This would be more than 900 miles in a straight line from Beijing, so that the mere journey thither and back would have taken Qublai's retinue something like six months. Yule opines that this name is probably Mongolian, and that Katzar means "land", or "region" and Modun "wood" or "tree". He adduces the toponym Modun Khotan ("wood-ville") in the region north of the eastern extremity of the Great Wall as indicated in Jesuit maps.<sup>35</sup>

From a note of Cordier, we know that Captain Gill argued that the Qaan must have set off south-east from Beijing and enjoyed some of his hawking not far from there, before he travelled to Cacciar Modun, wherever that may have been. Cordier also tells us that Palladius identified Cacciar Modun with Hexiwu 河西務, but Cordier disagrees with Palladius' argument

---

<sup>34</sup> Kinoshita (2016), 82-85. For other translations, see Yule (1903), vol. 1, 402-406; Moule and Pelliot (1938/1976), 229-234.

<sup>35</sup> Yule (1903), vol. 1, 408.

because the location of Hexiwu would not match.<sup>36</sup> Pelliot, however, remarks in his *Notes on Marco Polo* that Palladius' identification with Hexiwu is very near the mark geographically and is moreover supported by YS.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, Pelliot gives a long explanation on this place. First, he chooses the most acceptable writing form of this toponym, Caccia Modun. His argument is as follows:

... the *-r* in the reading "Cacciar modun" of Polo's mss. being the same erroneous final *-r* as in "Succiur", "Bettalar", etc.; in any case, the double *cc* seems to indicate that the first element really contains *-qc-* (for the value of *-cc* and for the wrong addition of a final *r*; see "Succiu"). Such a name as *yaqča-modun* is so natural that it occurs elsewhere.<sup>38</sup>

This original form in Mongolian, *yaqča mudun* (= *yaqča-modun*), means "the lone tree". For the location of Cacciar Modun, Pelliot provides a concrete suggestion:

We know from YS (II, 5 *a*; 12, I *a*; 13, 5 *b*) that in 1281, 1282 and 1285, Qubilai went to Liu-lin 柳林, but this was much nearer than the commentators have supposed. Liu-lin, the Willow Forest, was in the district of 灑州 Kuo-chou, a district abolished under the Manchu dynasty, the seat of which was 45 *li* to the south of T'ung-chou (the well-known place of that name east of Peking). After the hunt of 1281, Qubilai ordered a *hsing-kung* or temporary residence to be built there (cf. the *Ti-ming ta-tz'u-tien*, ed. 1931, 633). This is the residence of "Caccia modun" described by Polo.<sup>39</sup>

Pelliot tried to find Chinese name for this place in documents of the Yuan period. Already in 1920 he had told Cordier that "Cacciar modun" (as most mss. give it) was probably Ha-ch'a-mu-tun 哈察木敦 (hereafter, I use its pinyin spelling, Hachamudun) of YS, 100, 2a.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Yule (1903), vol. 1, 408.

<sup>37</sup> Pelliot (1959), 118.

<sup>38</sup> Pelliot (1959), 117.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-117; Cordier (1920), 70.

Charignon opposed Pelliot's interpretation, first because Hachamudun is in a list headed by Qara-mürän, which means, in his words, "north of the Yellow River at the great bend of the Ordos", and secondly because the name in YS may have been the name of a man as well as that of a place.<sup>41</sup> In his *Notes on Marco Polo*, Pelliot defends his position:

... I take it as being very likely that the two names Ha-ch'a-mu-tun and "Caccia modun" are identical, even if we had to do with two different places. But I do not think that the places are different ...<sup>42</sup>

Pelliot believes, moreover, that the two royal pastures *hičetü* 希徹禿 and *yaqča modun* 哈察木敦 that are mentioned together in YS are referring to two royal hunting grounds near Dadu, that is, *hičetü* (mong. "the place of willows") or Liulin (chin. "willow forest") on the one hand and *yaqča modun* or Caccia Modun ("the lone tree"), on the other hand.

Pelliot is right to dismiss Charignon's second objection by stating that the names of *hičetü* and *yaqča modun* in YS are the names of places, not of two men. However, Charignon's first remark is correct, namely, that both *hičetü* and *yaqča modun* are in a list headed by Qara-mürän, i.e. the Yellow River. In YS, a large number of pastures of the Yuan dynasty are listed and divided into fourteen groups, and the third group refers indeed to the region of Qara-mürän. Here I quote the original record about the pastures around Qara-mürän from YS, with the two place names discussed by Pelliot and Charignon underlined:

(塔) [哈]刺木連等處御位下：阿失溫忽都地八都兒。希徹禿地吉兒鱒。哈察木敦。火石腦兒哈塔、咬羅海牙、撒的。換撒里真按赤哈答。須知忽都哈刺赤別乞。軍腦兒哈刺赤火羅思。玉龍鞬徹。雲內州拙里牙赤昌罕。察罕腦兒欠昔思。棠樹兒安魯罕。石頭山禿忽魯。牙不罕你里溫脫脫木兒。開成路黑水河不花。<sup>43</sup>

The list begins with **Talamulian** 塔刺木連; Pelliot agrees with Charignon that the name really intended is **Halamulian** 哈刺木連, i.e. Qara-mürän. In

<sup>41</sup> Pelliot (1959), 117.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> YS, *juan* 100, 2555-2556.

Pelliot's view, however, because these toponyms are listed under the title "royal demesnes of Qara-mürän and other places", not all of them are necessarily in the region of the Yellow River. He writes:

I think that Charignon is wrong again when he says that Ha-ch'a-mu-tun is out of the question here because it was, according to him, somewhere north of the Ordos. Most of the names of the list in which Ha-ch'a-mu-tun appears are still unidentified, and, amongst them, the Čayan-nōr might be supposed to be the Čayan-nōr of the Ordos just as well as the Čayan-nōr which lay west of Shang-tu (see "Ciagannor"). But the Gün-nōr, or Deep Lake, is almost certainly the place where Mongka sometimes resided, and which is named in *YS* (3, 2 *b*; 3, 3 *b*) under 1253 and 1257 (cf. also *TP*, 1904, 380; Waley, *Travels of an Alchemist*, 31; *Tōyō gaku hō*, XII, 103; Yanai, 388-389, 676); it was situated in Upper Mongolia. There have also been several Qara-mörän (see "Caramoran"). So we cannot say that all the names of the list refer to the Ordos region.<sup>44</sup>

To this I would like to object that in the region of the Yellow River there must have been some deep lakes which could be named as Gün-nor. Gün-nor as a toponym has little individuality, and cannot be limited to have been applied only to the place where Mōngke sometimes resided in Upper Mongolia. Similar to this, there exist two different Čayan-nors, which are mentioned by Pelliot himself. Moreover, several toponyms listed together with the two places under discussion here could be exactly identified with locations near the Qara-mürän, the Yellow River. For example, Yunneizhou 雲內州 is the Left Banner of Tümed, Inner Mongolia, situated north of the Yellow River, and Čayan-nor can be located in the Ushin Banner of the Ordos, south of the Yellow River.<sup>45</sup> Kaicheng Prefecture 開成路 is Guyuan 固原 in Ningxia, and it is south of the Yellow River. Its Black Water River (Heishuihe 黑水河) flows into the Clear Water River (Qingshuihe 清水河), a branch of the Yellow River.<sup>46</sup> So, most probably,

<sup>44</sup> Pelliot (1959), 118.

<sup>45</sup> Zhou Qingshu (1978/2001), 274-275.

<sup>46</sup> *Jiajing Guyuanzhou zhi* (1532/1985), 5.

other places in the third group of the list were not far from the Yellow River either.<sup>47</sup>

Pelliot continues arguing that *hičētū* or Xichetu 希徹禿 and *yaqča modun* or Hachamudun 哈察木敦 were just the places where Qubilai Qaan undertook his spring hunting. He writes:

As to Ha-tch'a-mu-tun, it comes immediately after 希徹禿 Hsi-ch'ê-t'u; I have not met this name elsewhere, but it is clearly Hičätü, which means "the Place of Willows" (from Hičäsün, written Mong. *ičäsün*; on *hičäsün*, cf. *JA*, 1925, I, 217). It is very likely that we have here the Mongol name of Liu-lin or Willow Forest, and "Caccia modun" being in the Willow Forest, it is practically certain that Ha-ch'a-mu-tun, named along with Hičätü, is really identical with Polo's "Caccia modun".

Pelliot correctly explains the original forms and meanings of *hičētū* and *yaqča modun*, but the locations he provides are not acceptable. Pelliot suggests that *hičētū* was in the district of Huozhou 灤州 or, in Pelliot's transliteration "Kuo-chou", but he neglects that in the same chapter of YS the pasture of Huozhou is listed in the eighth, and not in the third group, and this together with the pasture at Hexiwu 河西務, which Pelliot believes to have been very near to the Caccia Modun of Marco Polo. Other pastures not far from Beijing are included in this eighth group, like Yongping 永平, Laotingxian 樂亭縣 and Xianghe 香河. The administrative center of Yongping is Lulong County 盧龍縣 of Hebei Province. Laoting and Xianghe are two counties of Hebei, with the same names nowadays. All the royal pastures of this eighth group are listed below, with the relevant toponyms underlined:

左手永平等處御位下：永平地哈刺赤千戶六十。樂亭地拙里牙赤、阿都赤、答刺赤迷里迷失，亦兒哥赤馬某撒兒答。香河按赤定住、亦馬赤速哥鐵木兒。河西務愛牙赤孛羅鯁。灤州哈刺赤脫忽察。桃花島青昔寶赤赤班等。

<sup>47</sup> Zhou Qingshu (1978/2001), 275.

If *hičētü* or Xichetu and *yaqča modun* or Hachamudun had been in the same Beijing area as Hexiwu and Huozhou, it would be strange that they would not have been listed here in the eighth group, but in a different group belonging to the Yellow River basin. Hence, Pelliot's arguments are dubious in this respect.

In addition, similar to what I have argued above with respect to Gün-nor or Deep Lake, both *hičētü* and *yaqča modun* appear not to have been individual and unique toponyms. I found a record related to a *yaqča modun* or Hachamudun situated in Mongolia, though this might be the same *yaqča modun* mentioned in the YS list, not far from the Yellow River. It reads:

[The Daoist Wang Shouyan 王壽衍 (1273-1353)], following [his teacher] Master Chen [i.e. Chen Yigao 陳義高 (1255-1299)], went [from Hangzhou] to the Capital [*jingshi* 京師, i.e. Dadu]. In the year *yiyou* 乙酉 [22nd year Zhiyuan, 1286], they arrived at the Upper Capital [Shangdu 上京 in Inner Mongolia] and had an audience with Yuzong [裕宗, i.e. Zhenjin 真金, the son and crown prince of Qubilai Qaan] at the Eastern Palace [Donggong 東宮, i.e. the residence of the crown prince]. Master Chen followed Prince Liang [梁王, i.e. Gambala, the eldest son of Zhenjin] to the North, and Mr. Wang went together with them. They stopped at Hachamudun 哈察木敦, and then with all their energies rode through the northern deserts. In the year *bingxu* 丙戌 [23rd year Zhiyuan, 1287], they returned the Capital.<sup>48</sup>

Master Chen and his pupil departed together with Prince Liang from the Upper Capital and went from there north to Hachamudun. In the next year they came back to Dadu. It is clear that this Hachamudun was located in Mongolia, not to the south of Dadu as Polo's Caccia Modun. So we can deduct from this that the toponyms *hičētü* and *yaqča modun* were quite common place names, not limited only to the Xichetu and the Hachamudun in the region near the Yellow River.

Can we find a toponym in Yuan Chinese or Mongolian sources that is in agreement with Marco Polo's Caccia Modun? Decisive evidence in this

---

<sup>48</sup> Wang Zhongwen *gong wenji*, juan 16, biography of Taoist Mr. Wang, 285.



respect comes from two edicts of a Yuan emperor carved on a stele of the Lingyansi Temple 靈岩寺 in Changqing District 長清區, Jinan City, Shandong Province. At the bottom, a quarter of this stele is damaged so that a few Chinese characters of the second edict are lost. In late 1999, Chinese scholars published those two edicts for the first time.<sup>49</sup> Eight years later, in 2007, the Japanese scholar Funada Yoshiyuki studied these inscriptions again and published a more accurate version of the text.<sup>50</sup> The second edict was dedicated to Master (*zhanglao* 長老) Gui'an 桂庵 by the Yuan emperor Chengzong 成宗, Temür Qaan, in order to protect the privilege of this temple. As usual, at the end of edict, date and place of the promulgation of this edict are given. It reads: 羊兒年二月十三日, 哈黑义磨[...]. This phrase is not complete because the following text is damaged. The English translation is as follows: "On the 13th day of the 2nd month of the Sheep Year, at Haheiyimo [...]." For the Sheep Year, both Chinese and Japanese scholars date it back to the 1st year Yuanzhen 元貞 (1295) of emperor Chengzong.<sup>51</sup>

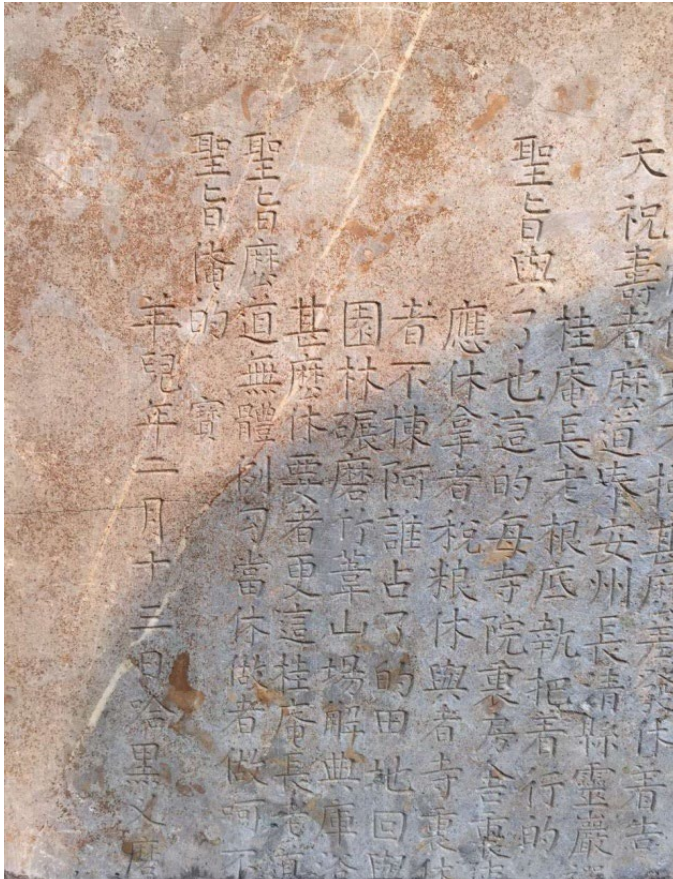
According to the conventions of Yuan edicts, Haheiyimo must be a toponym or a part of a toponym of the place where the edict was written. Because at the bottom Chinese characters are missing, we can only speculate about its location on the basis of related historical sources.

---

<sup>49</sup> Wang Rongyu et al. (1999), 106-107.

<sup>50</sup> Funada (2007), 6.

<sup>51</sup> Wang Rongyu et al. (1999), 107; Funada (2007), 14.



**Figure 5: Final Part in Chinese of Yuan Chengzong's Edict, 1295**

Source: Photograph of Li Xuemei 李雪梅.

In general, it was to Liulin 柳林, “willow forest,” where Yuan emperors went for hunting in the 2nd month of every year, that is March in Marco Polo’s reckoning. Liulin has also been mentioned in Pelliot’s *Notes on Marco Polo* as a hunting area of Qubilai Qaan, as we have seen above. The Sheep Year is the 1st year Yuanzhen, and according to YS emperor Chengzong went to Shangdu on the day *dingyou* 丁酉 of the 2nd month,<sup>52</sup> that is

<sup>52</sup> YS, *juan*18, 391.

the 22nd day in this Chinese month.<sup>53</sup> Except for unexpected events, all Yuan emperors carried out spring hunting in Liulin. The edict of the Lingyansi Temple was written on the 13th day of the 2nd month, one week before Chengzong left for Shangdu. From this we can infer that around that date emperor Chengzong must have hunted in the Liulin region and that, hence, the place Haheiyimo should be found around Liulin.

Furthermore, the Caccia Modun of Marco Polo and the Haheiyimo in the edict of the Lingyansi Temple can be identified as to be the same place, that is, a royal spring hunting location during the Yuan period. The original Mongolian toponym should read *yaqča modun*, transcribed on the stele in Chinese as Haheiyimo[...] 哈黑义磨[...], i.e., with one missing character at the end because of the damage of the stele. This character can be reconstructed as *dun* 敦, just like the last character of Hachamudun 哈察木敦, usually used to transcribe the last syllable of the Mongolian word *modun*. But also the third Chinese character, *cha* 叉, should be corrected. In ancient Chinese manuscripts *cha* 叉 is very easily miswritten as *yi* 义, the short form of the complex character *yi* 義. The character *cha* 叉 is used to transcribe the Mongolian syllable *ča* in *yaqča*. After these emending and correction, the place mentioned in the Lingyansi edict should be Haheichamo[dun] 哈黑叉磨[敦]. The second character *hei* 黑 is a transcription of the last consonant of the first syllable of *yaqča*. In Yuan time, the end consonant “q” is pronounced not like a guttural affricate “q”, but as a guttural fricative “h”. The Chinese Haiheichamo[dun] 哈黑叉磨[敦] perfectly agrees with the contemporary pronunciation of the Mongolian *yaqča modun*. Based on these considerations, we are able to reconstruct the last line of Lingyansi Edict in Mongolian. It would read: *qonin jil qabur un dumdadu sara yin arban yurban a yaqča modun da бүкүү дүр бицйеи*.” In English, this means: “On the 13th day of the 2nd month of the Sheep Year, staying at *yaqča modun*, [we] wrote [it].” Based on Marco Polo’s book, we know that in Caccia Modun there were great ordos (royal tents) of Qubilai and that it was the center for the royal spring hunting. And it

---

<sup>53</sup> Hong Jinfu (2004), 397.

was in *yaqča modun* in 1296, when emperor Chengzong stayed at the temporary imperial palace, that the edict for the Lingyansi Temple was written.

From this we can see that the Hachamudun 哈察木敦 of YS, first brought up by Pelliot, was not the same place as Marco Polo's Caccia Modun. Although they were similar in wording, they do not refer to the same place. Hachamudun was situated in Mongolia, most probably near the Yellow River, while Caccia Modun was not far from Canbaluc/Dadu. Haheichamodun, the toponym mentioned in the Lingyansi Temple edict, is the same place as Marco Polo's Caccia Modun. However, Caccia Modun is not the same place as Liulin, as the latter comprises a much larger area, while Caccia Modun constitutes only a small part of it. From the meanings of their names, "willow forest" versus "the lone tree", one can easily deduct this difference.

## Conclusion

Two toponyms in or near Canbaluc/Dadu recorded by Marco Polo in his *Travels* have their origin in Mongolian. The Green Mound is a translation from the Mongolian toponym *köke ayula*. It refers to Qionghuadao in Beihai Lake of Beijing inner city. Cacciar Modun or Caccia modun is a correct transcription of the Mongolian toponym *yaqča modun*, which means "the lone tree", and which was an important royal hunting place south of Beijing for the Yuan emperors' spring hawking. With the exception of the book of Marco Polo, the name for this place only exists in a – though not completely correct and complete – Chinese transcription, Haheichamo[dun] 哈黑叉磨[敦], in a 1296 edict of Yuan emperor Chengzong. Before the Lingyansi edict became known in 1999, Marco Polo was the only author in the world who in his account had mentioned *yaqča modun*, the royal hunting place of Yuan emperors, pointing to the uniqueness of his report.

## References

- Bretschneider, Emil (1876). *Archaeological and Historical Researches of Peking and Its Environs* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press; London: Trübner & Co.).
- Charignon, Antoine Joseph Henri (1926). *Le Livre de Marco Polo, citoyen de Venise, ...* (Pekin: Nachbaur).
- Chen Dezhi 陈得芝 (2008). “Du Gaoli Li Chengxiu Binwang lu: Yuwai Yuanshi shiliao zhaji zhi yi” 读高丽李承休《宾王录》——域外元史史料札记之一 (Reading Binwang rok of Yi Seunghyu from Goryeo – One of the Historical Notes on the History of the Yuan Dynasty in Foreign Countries), *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中华文史论丛, 2: 49-69.
- Chen Gaohua 陈高华 (1982). *Yuan Dadu* 元大都 (Dadu, [Capital] of the Yuan) (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe).
- Cordier, Henry (1920). *Ser Marco Polo: Notes and Addenda to Sir Henry Yule's Edition, Containing the Results of Recent Research and Discovery* (London: John Murray).
- Daobu 道布; Zhaonasitu 照那斯图 (1993). “Henan Dengfeng Shaolinsi chutu de Huihushi Mengguwen he Basibazi shengzhibei kaoshi” 河南登封少林寺出土的回鹘式蒙古文和八思巴字圣旨碑考释 (An Examination of the Imperial-Edict Stele Written in Uyghurian Mongolian and Phagspa Unearthed at the Shaolinsi Temple in Dengfeng, Henan), *Minzu yuwen* 民族语文, 5: 1-3.
- Daobu 道布; Zhaonasitu 照那斯图 (1994). “Henan Dengfeng Shaolinsi chutu de huihushi mengguwen he basibazi shengzhibei kaoshi (xu er)” 河南登封少林寺出土的回鹘式蒙古文和八思巴字圣旨碑考释(续二) (An Examination of the Imperial-Edict Stele Written in Uyghurian Mongolian and Phagspa Unearthed at the Shaolinsi Temple in Dengfeng, Henan (Continuation Two)), *Minzu yuwen* 民族语文, 1: 32-41.
- Funada Yoshiyuki 船田善之 (2007). “Mōbun chokuyakutai no tenkai: ‘Reiganji seishihi’ no jirei kenkyū” 蒙文直訳体の展開 — 「靈巖寺聖旨碑」の事例研究 (The Development of the Mongolian Literal Translation Form: A Case Study of the Imperial-Edict Stele of the Lingyansi Temple), *Nairiku Ajiashi kenkyū* 内陸アジア史研究, 22: 1-20.
- Gaolishi* [Goryeosa] 高麗史 (History of Goryeo), comp. by Zheng Linzhi (Chōng In-ji) 郑麟趾 (Seoul: Asea Munhwasa, 1972).
- Hong Jinfu 洪金富 (2004). *Liao Song Xia Jin Yuan wuchao rili* 遼宋夏金元五朝日曆 (A Calendar of the Five Dynasties Liao, Song, Xia, Jin, and Yuan) (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo).

- Jiajing Guyuanzhou zhi* 嘉靖固原州志 (Local Gazetteer for Guyuan Department of the Jiajing Reign-period), comp. by Yang Jing 楊經, 1532 (ed. Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1985).
- Jinshi* 金史 (History of the Jin [Dynasty]), comp. by Tuotuo 脫脫 et al. (ed. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975).
- Kinoshita, Sharon (2016). *Marco Polo: The Description of the World* (Indianapolis: Hackett Press).
- Lech, Klaus (1968). *Das Mongolische Weltreich: Al-'Umarī's Darstellung der mongolischen Reiche in seinem Werk 'Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār'* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz).
- Liaoshi* 遼史 (History of the Liao [Dynasty]), comp. by Tuotuo 脫脫 et al. (ed. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974).
- Mishujian zhi* 秘書監志 (Records of the Bureau of the Imperial Secretariat), comp. by Wang Shidian 王士點 and Shang Qiwen 商企翁 (ed. Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1992).
- Miaoxue dianli* 廟學典禮 (Regulations and Rites of Temple Academies), anonymous comp. (ed. Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1992).
- Moule, Arthur Christopher; Pelliot, Paul (1938/1976). *Marco Polo: The Description of the World* (London: G. Routledge, 1938; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1976).
- Nakamura Jun 中村淳; Matsukawa Takashi 松川節 (1993). "Shin hatsugen no Mō Kan gappeki Shōrinji seishihi" 新発見の蒙漢合璧少林寺聖旨碑 (The Newly Discovered Imperial-Edict Stele of the Shaolinsi Temple Combining Mongolian and Chinese), *Nairiku Ajia gengo no kenkyū* 内陸アジア言語の研究, 8: 1-92.
- Nancun chuogeng lu* 南村輟耕錄 (Records of Nancun [i.e. Tao Zongyi] while Ceasing Farm Work), comp. by Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (ed. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959).
- Pelliot, Paul (1959). *Notes on Marco Polo*, vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale).
- Pelliot, Paul (1963). *Notes on Marco Polo*, vol. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale).
- Sugiyama Masa'aki 杉山正明 (1990/2004). "Seikajin jusha Kō Chiyō no jitsuzō" 西夏人儒者高智耀の実像 (A Portrait of Gao Zhiyao, a Confucian of the Western Xia Dynasty), first published in Kawachi Yoshihiro 河内良弘, ed. *Shinchō chika no minzoku mondai to kokusai kankei* 清朝治下の民族問題と国際関係 (Ethnic Issues and International Relations under the Reign of the Qing Dynasty) (Kyōto: Kyōto daigaku bungakubu), in 2004 also published in Sugiyama Masa'aki, *Mongoru teikoku to Daigen Urusu* モンゴル帝国と大元ウルス

- (The Mongol Empire and Dai-ön Ulus) (Kyōto: Kyōto daigaku gakujutsu shuppankai), 490-507.
- Wang Rongyu 王荣玉 et al. (1999). *Lingyansi* 灵岩寺 (The Lingyansi Temple) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe).
- Wang Xuebao 王雪宝 (1988). “Shaolinsi chutu Yuan Ming da shibe” 少林寺出土元明大石碑 (Large Steles from the Yuan and Ming Periods Unearthed at the Shaolinsi Temple), *Zhongguo wenwubao* 中国文物报, July 1, 1988, 2nd page.
- Wang Zhongwen gong wenji* 王忠文公文集 (Collected Writings of Mr. Wang Zhongwen), comp. by Wang Yi 王祚 (ed. Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1998).
- YS, see *Yuanshi*.
- Yuanshi* 元史 (History of the Yuan [Dynasty]), comp. by Song Lian 宋濂 et al. (ed. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976).
- Yule, Henry (1866). *Cathay and the Way Thither, Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, Vol.1, *The Travels of Friar Odoric of Pordenone* (London: the Hakluyt Society).
- Yule, Henry (1903). *The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, 3rd edition (London: John Murray).
- Zhongguo Shaolinsi: Beike juan* 中国少林寺：碑刻卷 (The Shaolinsi Temple in China: Volume of Stele Inscriptions), comp. by Shi Yongxin 释永信 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005).
- Zhou Qingshu 周清澍 (1978/2001). “Cong Chahan Nao'er kan Yuandai de Yikezhaomeng diqu” 从察罕脑儿看元代的伊克昭盟地区 (The Yikezhaomeng Area during the Yuan Period as seen from Chahan Nur), *Neimenggu daxue xuebao* 内蒙古大学学报, 1978, no. 2; later, in 2001, also published in Zhou Qingshu, *Yuan Meng shi zha* 元蒙史札 (Notes on the History of Yuan and Mongolia (Huhehaote: Neimenggu daxue chubanshe), 271-289.

# On Some Designations Used in the *Description of the World* and the Political Attitude of Marco Polo<sup>1</sup>

LUO Wei<sup>2</sup>

In the time-honoured masterpiece *The Description of the World*, written by the great Venetian traveller of the Medieval Age, we can detect a rich treasure of records on the customs and folk culture of different regions of both Europe and Asia in the thirteenth century. They differ from one to another due to the complex and intricate history of copies and manuscripts made of Marco's account. Thanks to the efforts undertaken by academic experts, these records in different languages and different forms have been generally proven to be historically correct and credible.

*The Description of the World* is a masterpiece with perennial appeal and everlasting elucidation. It does not lack interesting reports which refresh people's mind. As a researcher on the history of the Yuan dynasty, the impression these records have left on me at the very outset of my studies is their close connection with historical materials written in Chinese language. Undoubtedly, Marco's records which can be accurately checked by corresponding historical Chinese sources have been discussed in manifold ways by preceding researchers. However, if these records are further examined, we shall not only have a complementary understanding of the history of the Yuan dynasty, but will also be in a better position to experience the atmosphere in which Marco Polo lived during his stay in China.

Moreover, this provides us also with an insight into the means by which Marco Polo obtained the information he transmitted to his readers.

---

<sup>1</sup> The writing of this paper has been supported by China's National Social Science Fund Project, "Research on Dong Family of Gaocheng in Yuan Dynasty" (Grant No.: 19FZSB039).

<sup>2</sup> Chinese Academy of Social Sciences 中国社会科学院古代史研究所.



As to these narrative records, several names and titles used by Marco Polo can be regarded as the most appropriate target for a further research breakthrough. As far as those expressions are concerned, previous scholars and experts have already undertaken numerous incisive and profound studies. In this paper, more relevant material will be presented and more information displayed, accompanied by analyses and reflections, so as to enrich the studies on Marco Polo with some new ideas and understandings, especially with respect to the political dimension of several names and terms recorded in Marco Polo's book. We will begin with the expression "kingdom" and the name of the city of Quinsai, then proceed to the names and titles of Liitan Sanggon and Baian Cingsan, and will close with a study of the titles Cenchu and Vanchu. It will be demonstrated that official and non-official Chinese sources not taken into consideration so far help us to elucidate some statements found in Marco Polo's book. It will also be made clear that Marco, even if he was close to the ruling Mongol elite, came into contact with, and adopted expressions hailing from, Han Chinese culture and that some of these terms even ran counter to the political language of the Yuan dynasty.

## 1. "Kingdom" and Quinsai (Xingzai 行在)

When Marco Polo travelled to different places in the course of his long journey on the Eurasian Continent, he made naturally use of certain names to call these various kinds of places. These designations are characterized by a unique historical context and thus also bear their own historical meaning. There are some toponyms that can reveal the political attitude of Marco Polo, the most obvious instances being "kingdom", and the designation Quinsai.

Quinsai (Xingzai 行在) basically means "temporary capital", and "kingdom" basically refers to an independent country. We can see that Marco Polo calls many independent political entities "kingdom". For example, he speaks of the "kingdoms" of Mien and Bangala. The title of the respective chapter is "How the Great Kaan conquers the kingdom of Mien and of Bangala". Marco narrates that:

Now it happened that the king of Mien and of Bangala in Indie who was a very powerful king both in lands and in treasure and in people; and this king was not subject to the great Kaan, but then not much time passes before the great Kaan conquers him and took from him both the kingdoms which I have named to you above; ...<sup>3</sup>

Actually, this statement corresponds to historical reality. Mien was independent from the emperor of Yuan or the Great Khan of the Mongols, but the Great Khan wanted to conquer it, as Marco Polo described. This kind of historical information is characteristic for Marco Polo's text.

But "kingdom" also alludes to different political situations in Marco Polo's text. When he travelled through some places in the Chinese hinterland under the rule of the Great Khan, he became acquainted with some other kind of "kingdoms". In the case of the Superior Prefecture of Taianfu 太原府, he calls it the "kingdom (*royaume*) of Taianfu".<sup>4</sup> Marco explains that "... then ... [one] finds a kingdom which is called Taianfu. And head of the province or realm is this city where we are come which is likewise called Taianfu, which is very large and beautiful."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Marco Polo calls the Superior Prefecture of Quengianfu (Jingzhaofu 京兆府) a "kingdom",<sup>6</sup> and tells about Caragian (Halazhang 哈刺章, located near modern Dali 大理, Yunnan) that: "When one has crossed this river aforesaid then one finds and enters into the province of Caragian which is so large and broad that there are in it actually seven separate kingdoms."<sup>7</sup>

But why did Marco choose to use the expressions "kingdom" to refer to territory under the suzerainty of the Yuan empire? I think that this resulted from his practical perception of the political structure of the Yuan empire. Most places which Marco Polo called "kingdom" were manorial estates of feudatory princes of the Mongols. For example, the area of Shanxi, where Taianfu belonged to, was the domain of Prince Jöči 朮赤 (c.

---

<sup>3</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), 286.

<sup>4</sup> For the French term, see Ménard, ed. (2001-2009), vol. 4, ch. 106 (Taianfu), 110 (Guengyafu), 117 (Caragian), 120 (Mien et Bangala).

<sup>5</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), 257.

<sup>6</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), 263.

<sup>7</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), 276.

1182-1227). Hence, Marco Polo must have noticed some differences in the way of administration and revenue collection compared to areas ruled by the Yuan court more directly. These places can hardly be regarded as independent political entities inside the Yuan empire, but from Polo's report we can learn that he himself had a somewhat special notion of these administrative units.

The most representative example of Marco's special perception of places is the famous city of Quinsai, identical with Hangzhou 杭州, Zhejiang. Former researchers have pointed out that the term Quinsai corresponds to the Chinese expression *xingzai* 行在. This means that Quinsai is actually not the name of a city in the geographical sense, but a political or administrative term which contains a special meaning. A standard explanation of this expression is "a place where the emperor stays and lives when he is travelling" (*tianzi waichu xunxiung juzhi zhi chu* 天子外出巡幸居止之處),<sup>8</sup> and has thus the meaning of "temporary capital" in the context of ancient China. Undoubtedly, Hangzhou was perceived as a "temporary capital" of the Southern Song dynasty from which it was hoped that northern China would eventually be reconquered, and was therefore called Xingzai (or Quinsai, in Marco's ears) during the Southern Song period.

Yet the fact that Marco Polo continued to call Hangzhou "Quinsai" in the early decades of the Yuan period is a remarkable phenomenon. In the political ethic of the Han Chinese, Hangzhou could no longer be called Xingzai (Quinsai) after the collapse of the Southern Song dynasty. The highly educated Han Chinese scholar-officials serving at the Yuan court of course knew about this ethical and political imperative, all the more so as right after the final defeat of the Southern Song dynasty the Yuan empire promulgated a decree to forbid the use of the designation of Xingzai (Quinsai) immediately:

[The Imperial Court] orders the Central Secretariat to instruct the central administration and the provinces that now, as the regions south of the Yangtze River have been pacified, the Song [dynasty] shall be

---

<sup>8</sup> Lü Zongli (2016), 400.

called “perished Song”, and [their] Temporary Capital [Quinsai] “Prefecture of Hang” (Hangzhou).

命中書省檄諭中外，江南既平，宋宜曰亡宋，行在宜曰杭州。<sup>9</sup>

However, in Marco Polo’s narrative, the name Quinsai is still used as the designation of the city of Hangzhou. This phenomenon can be explained in two ways. One is that Marco Polo was not familiar with the political and ethical dimensions of this term, as otherwise he wouldn’t have used this prohibited designation continually. Another explanation is that Marco Polo did not learn the name Quinsai from Han Chinese living under the rule of the Yuan Mongols, because these would hardly have told Marco to use this politically highly sensitive name. This point is similar to the situation of the designation Liitan Sangon discussed in the following chapter.

## 2. Liitan Sangon 李壇相公

Chapter 134 of Marco Polo’s book reads as follows:

In the 1272 year of the incarnation of Christ the great Kaan had sent a baron of his who had Liitan Sangon for name to go to this city and to this province that he should rule and guard and keep it safe. Moreover, he gives eighty thousand horsemen to this Liitan to keep this watch. And when this Liitan has stayed with all these people in this province awhile, then, seeing himself at the head of so many men and of so rich and fertile a land, growing proud and considering his ability to rule, he was infected with imaginations of treason and like a traitor he thinks of doing a very great disloyalty, and you shall hear what. He was speaking with all the wise men of all these cities and led them away with the deceitful proposal, and plans with them that they should rebel against the great Kaan.<sup>10</sup>

The record above is linked with an important historical event, the rebellion of Li Tan 李壇 (d. 1262) which took place at the beginning of the Yuan period. This event not only was a comparatively large-scale war, but also

<sup>9</sup> *Yuanshi*, ch. 9, 193.

<sup>10</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), 303.

had a profound impact on the political and military structure of the Yuan dynasty. In Marco Polo's narration, this crucial event was therefore duly described. As for Marco Polo's record, what attracted the attention of the author of this paper most is the name of Li Tan which is given as Liitan Sangon. Liitan is undoubtedly a transliteration of Li Tan, whereas Sangon suggests something else. According to Paul Pelliot's notes on Marco Polo, modern annotated editions of the book interpret the word *Sangon* as a foreign transliteration of the Chinese word for commander, *jiangjun* 將軍.<sup>11</sup> Modern Chinese renderings of Marco Polo's text treat this word in the same way. Zhang Xinglang's translation from 1925 directly puts it as *Li Tan Jiangjun* 李壇將軍, "Commander Li Tan",<sup>12</sup> a mode of interpretation also adopted in Feng Chengjun's 馮承鈞 translation of 1936.<sup>13</sup>

This issue, however, certainly needs clarification. In his *Notes on Marco Polo*, which was published posthumously, Pelliot presented a very elucidating explanation on the appellation Liitan Sangon:

**Liitan Sangon.** In Chinese 李壇相公 Li T'an *hsiang-kung* [in modern Pinyin transcription *xianggong*] (see « Sangon »). ... Li T'an's father, Li Ch'üan, had revolted against the Sung in 1221 and greatly helped Muqali in bringing Shan-tung [Shandong] under the Mongol rule. As a reward, Muqali, who was lieutenant-general in Northern China while Chinghiz-khan fought in the West, created for Li Ch'üan a governorship which included a great part of Shan-tung and the region to the south towards the Yang-tzū. Li Ch'üan died in 1231, and his son Li T'an succeeded him at the head of what was then called the « province of I-tu [Yidu] » (益都行省). This name was taken from Li T'an's provincial seat at I-tu, the modern Ch'ing-chou-fu in Shan-tung, far to the

<sup>11</sup> See Pelliot (1959-1973), vol. 2, 825, stating that on page 442 of Pauthier's edition, page 138 in the second volume of Yule's edition, page 425 of Giovanni Battista Ramusio's edition and page 444 of Benedetto's edition, all the annotators, except for page 12 in vol. 3 of Charignon's edition, explained the word *sāngün* as transliteration of the Chinese *chiang-chün* [*jiangjun*] 將軍. Cf., e.g., Yule and Cordier (1903), vol. 2, 138, noting that, just as Pauthier pointed out, Sangon refers to the Chinese *T'siang-kiun*, which means "general of division" or "military governor".

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Zhang Xinglang (1936), 269.

<sup>13</sup> Feng Chengjun; Dang Baohai (1999), 516.

east of Chi-nan-fu. ... The Mss. are wrong by ten years as to the date of the revolt, which took place some thirteen years before Polo arrived in China. The account of the event, which Polo evidently heard on the spot on passing through Western Shan-tung, bears testimony to Li T'an's power and to the impression which his fall had left on his countrymen (see also « Tundinfu »).<sup>14</sup>

As for the original meaning of Sangon, Paul Pelliot argues specifically that:

This title appears only once, in « Liitan Sangon » (see « Liitan »), and is certainly *sängün*. All commentators, from *Pa*, 442, and *Y*, II, 138, to *RR*, 425, and *B*<sup>1</sup>, 444, excepting *Ch*, III, 12, have explained *sängün* as being Ch. 將軍 *chiang-chün* [*jiangjun*], « general ». And it is true that, when we find *sänün* (*sängün*) for the first time in the 8th cent. in a Turkish runic inscription of the Orkhon, it must have been borrowed simply from *chiang-chün*. But the case is no longer the same in the Mongol period, during which *chiang-chün* was rarely used (Cordier's addition to *Y*, II, 138, about « military governor » refers to the revival of the title of *chiang-chün* during the Manchu dynasty as a title for Tartar military governors; it is irrelevant here). On the contrary, both as a proper name and as a title, *sänggün* or *sänggüm* is then of rather frequent occurrence in transcriptions, and Rašidu-'d-Dīn, as I have already remarked in *TP*, 1930, 46, explains it as meaning « men of good origin », « sons of the aristocracy » (*ḥudāvand zādāh*, in *Ber*, I, 98). This can only be 相公 *hsiang-kung*, [*xianggong*] which in ancient China was an epithet used for ministers (« Duke minister »), but in the Middle Ages was applied to young men of high families; it is well known that the term has now much deteriorated in Northern Chinese. In the 13th cent., *hsiang-kung*, without being an official term, is frequently met with in Chinese texts as a polite designation for high officials who were neither ministers (*ch'êng-hsiang* [*chengxiang*]), nor assistant-ministers (*yu-ch'êng* [*youcheng*], *tso-ch'êng* [*zuocheng*]). For instance, in a diary of 1276, we find a mention of Bayan *ch'êng-hsiang*

<sup>14</sup> See Pelliot (1959-1973), vol. 2, 762-763. I would like to thank Professor Dang Baohai 黨寶海 for having pointed out this reference to me.

[Bayan *chengxiang*], of 'Ali[-bäg] *yu-ch'êng* [Ali *youcheng*], but of Po-lo[-huan] *hsiang-kung* [Boluo(huan) *xianggong*]<sup>15</sup> (*TP*, 1915, 396, 403<sup>16</sup>), Po-lo[-huan] being one of the generals under Bayan's command during his campaign against the Sung (cf. *Ch.* III, 33-34.). In the same work, the author notes that he stayed a certain day in the house of Yen *hsiang-kung* [Yan *xianggong*]<sup>17</sup> (*TP*, 1912, 432;<sup>18</sup> see also « Tundinfu »); the Yen family enjoyed in Tung-p'ing-fu a situation similar to that of Li T'an in Shan-tung. The well-known Činqai is mentioned as Chên-hai *hsiang-kung* in *YS*, 95, 14a.<sup>19</sup> In *The Ts'ai Yüan P'ei Anniv. Volume*, Peiping, 1934, 926,<sup>20</sup> I have quoted two cases where a man in charge of a « moving sheng » or province is called once by the title of *hsing-shêng* [*xingsheng*] (see « Scieng »), and the second time by that of *hsiang-kung*. The Yen family and Li T'an held the same position as heads of provinces. I have no doubt that Li T'an was commonly spoken of as Li T'an *hsiang-kung* or Li *hsiang-kung*, and that this is the true origin of Polo's « Liitan sangon ».<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The diary mentioned by Paul Pelliot is Yan Guangda 嚴光大 (fl. 1276), *Qiqingshi xingcheng ji* 祈請使行程記 (Record of the Itinerary of the Embassy Suing for Peace). The relevant entry reads as follows: "On the fourth day [of the third month], we passed Shaobo Town and crossed one fort [area], 60 li in diameter, where the north army was garrisoned. There was also a water stockade there, with numerous troops garrisoned and with more than sixty small stockades within. Boluo[huan] *xianggong* and Ali[-bäg] *youcheng* butchered horses, served wine, and welcomed and catered all the commissioners. Suddenly, it was reported that the army at the north gate of Yangzhou had come out and that Jiang Cai divided his files to kill and capture. Casualties were many, and the stalemate continued to last for half a day. As the dawn came, Boluo retreated to the centre because of the distance between the troops. ... On the twenty-first day [of the third intercalary month], when Bayan *chengxiang* returned, ..." (初四日，過邵伯鎮，徑行一堡子，闊六十里，北軍屯戍。又有水寨，屯軍甚多，內有小堡子六十餘所。波羅相公阿里右丞在內宰馬置酒，延待諸使。忽報揚州北門軍馬擁出，姜才分陣殺奪，交傷不少，相持半日。及暮，波羅相公以軍馬相距而退至中路，二十一日，巴延丞相回，...) Note that in *Yuanshi*, ch. 121, 2988, *Boluohuan* 波羅歡 is written *Boluohuan* 博羅歡。

<sup>16</sup> Moule (1915a), 393-419.

<sup>17</sup> See Yan Guangda, 205: "On the twenty second day [of the third month], the carriage departed and on midday it reached Dongping Prefecture. At night, we spent a night at Yan *xianggong*'s home." (二十二日，車行，午至東平府，夜宿嚴相公家。)

<sup>18</sup> Moule (1912), 431-433.

<sup>19</sup> *Yuanshi*, ch. 95, 2436.

<sup>20</sup> Pelliot (1933), 926.

<sup>21</sup> Pelliot (1959-1973), vol. 2, 825-826.

When taking Chinese primary sources of the era of the Mongol empire and the Yuan dynasty into account, we can see that Pelliot's conclusion is basically correct. Viewed from both phonetics and customary appellations in that historical period, Sangon can hardly be considered as the equivalent of the Chinese word *jiangjun* or "general". *Xianggong*, or "Duke minister" (Pelliot) or "Minister Duke" (Hucker),<sup>22</sup> is indeed a respectful title to habitually salute high-ranking government officials in the area of the Han Chinese in the Yuan empire. That the word *xianggong* is used to salute or address Li Tan as a powerful minister in the Shandong Branch Secretariat (*xingsheng* 行省, i.e. "moving *sheng*" or "province" in Pelliot's wording) is therefore in conformity with his social position and with the social and political customs of the time

Yet, Pelliot did not provide further sources to support his statement that *xianggong* was an honorific title by which Li Tan was addressed. The reason for the lack of further documentation was that after the failure of his insurgency, Li was completely tabooed throughout the empire, and as a consequence most of the extant contemporary documents and materials of later eras do not contain any positive records of him. Similarly, *xianggong* as a respectful appellation, was not any more used to refer to Li Tan. Therefore, notwithstanding his outstanding eruditeness, Pelliot could only guess the true meaning of Sangon by deduction rather than by reference to other, more explicit sources.

That it is hard to find any record where Li Tan is addressed as *xianggong* is at least true with regard to historiographical sources and literature. Texts inscribed on steles, however, can complement our knowledge in this regard. The practice of stele inscriptions follows the time-honored principle "to compose an essay so as to record past stories, and then incise the said essay into stone so as to make it last forever."<sup>23</sup> As a matter of fact, due to their durability, historical records inscribed on steles can survive for ages once they have been cut into stone. Moreover, to some extent, these epigraphic texts are relatively safe from being altered by copyists. From

<sup>22</sup> Hucker (1985), 2331.

<sup>23</sup> See Yu Ji 虞集, *Jurong junwang shiji bei* 句容君王世績碑 (Epitaph on the Feats of the Commandery Prince of Jurong), in *Yuanwen lei*, vol. 26, 329.



historical epigraphs inscribed on steles which were erected during the era of the Mongol empire and the Yuan dynasty, we can find a great deal of direct evidence that Li Tan was indeed addressed as *xianggong*. The following sources provide proof of this:

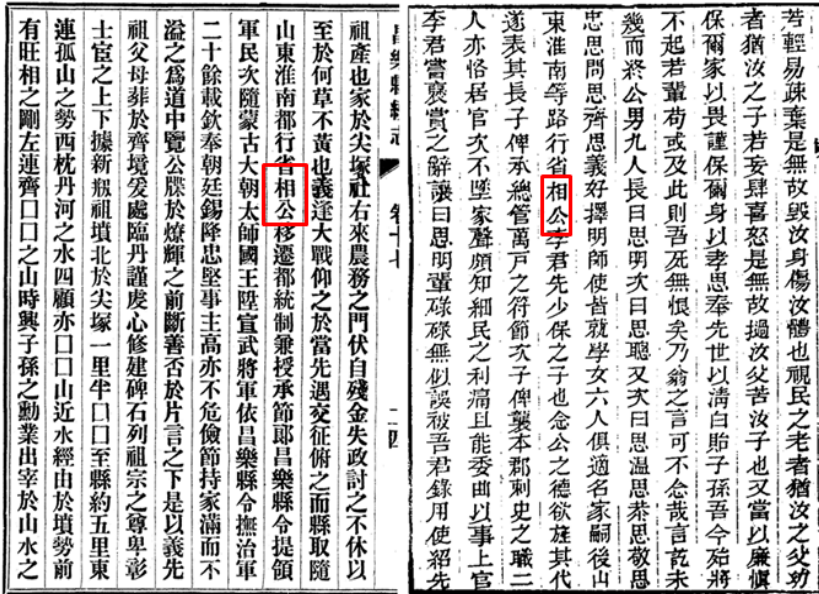


Figure 1: Li Tan Mentioned as *xianggong* in Stele Inscriptions (1236, 1255)

Left: *Dachao Wang gong lizang lishi ji* 大朝王公禮葬立石記 (Record of Gentleman Wang of the Great Dynasty on [the Occasion of] the Erection of a Stone [Stele] for the Ceremonial Funeral), 1236;

Right: *Yuanshuai taishou Jiang Gong mubei* 元帥太守姜公墓碑 (Tombstone of Gentleman Jiang, Marshal and Governor), 1255.

1. *Dachao Wang gong lizang lishi ji* 大朝王公禮葬立石記 (Record of Gentleman Wang of the Great Dynasty on [the Occasion of] the Erection of a Stone [Stele] for the Ceremonial Funeral), which had been written in 1236, the eighth year of the reign of Ögedei Khan (r. 1229-1241). It is an essay composed by Wang Yi 王義, Magistrate of Changle County 昌樂縣, whose main objective was to commemorate his reconstruction of the tombs of his parents and grandparents. In this record, Wang Yi is described as

someone in the service of the *xianggong* of the Shandong and Huainan Branch Secretariats, and as an officer who was then promoted to become Provincial Military Commander, Commandant of Holding Virtue, and Magistrate of Changle District, to govern the troops and the common people there (隨山東淮南都行省相公移遷都統制兼授承節郎、昌樂縣令, 提領軍民) (see Figure 1, left).<sup>24</sup> According to historiographical records, the governor of the Shandong and Huainan Branch Secretariats during that time was Li Quan 李全, who was no one else than Li Tan's father, who had been promoted in 1221 by Bolu (Buqalu, Bōl, Bo'ol, 1197-1228), the son of Muqali (c. 1170-1223), Grand Preceptor (*taishi* 太師) and Prince of the State (*guowang* 國王) of the Mongols, during the reign of Chinggis Khan.<sup>25</sup>

However, in 1231 Li Quan failed to attack Yangzhou and died, so Li Tan as his son, inherited Li Quan's official title and governed the Branch Secretariat of Yidu (i.e. the "province of I-tu" in Pelliot's wording), and thus Li Tan took control of this region and inherited the title of *xianggong*.<sup>26</sup> From this we can learn that the *xianggong* of the Branch Secretariats of Shandong and Huainan in the eighth year of the reign of Ögedei Khan was indeed Li Tan.

2. *Yuanshuai taishou Jiang Gong mubei* 元帥太守姜公墓碑 (Tombstone of Gentleman Jiang, Marshal and Governor), written by Mao Yi 毛翼 and erected in 1255, the fifth year of the reign of Möngke Khan,<sup>27</sup> is a stele that contains a biography of Jiang Fang 姜房, Regional Commander of Ninghai Prefecture and Chief of Tumens (Myriarch). The epitaph speaks of "Lord

<sup>24</sup> *Changlexian xuzhi*, 622.

<sup>25</sup> See *Yuanshi*, ch. 119, 2937: "[When] Li Quan was assigned governor of the Branch Secretariats of Shandong, Huainan and Chuzhou, assisted by Zheng Yande and Tian Shirong, the Prefectures and districts sincerely submitted to his authority and eventually the whole area of Shandong was pacified." (乃以全為山東淮南楚州行省, 鄭衍德、田世榮副之, 郡縣聞風款附, 山東悉平。)

<sup>26</sup> *Yuanshi*, ch. 206, 4591.

<sup>27</sup> The epitaph mentions that "on the day *jiashen* of the second month of the year *yimao*, the grave was moved to Lusongli, south of the prefectural seat, where his ancestors had been buried. The two of them asked me for an inscription on the deeds of the Gentleman." (以乙卯年二月甲申, 遷瘞于州治南魯宋裡, 從先塋也。二人狀公之行, 求銘于余。) From this record, the date of the stele inscription can be established.

Li, *xianggong* of the Routes in the Branch Secretariats of Shandong and Huainan, who is the son of the late Junior Guardian” (山東淮南等路行省相公李君，先少保之子也) (see Figure 1, right).<sup>28</sup> “Lord Li, *xianggong*”, refers to Li Tan, whereas the title “Junior Guardian” refers to his father Li Quan.

3. *Yuanshuai zongguan Feng jun zengzhu fentai zhi ji* 元帥總管馮君增築墳台之記 (Record on the Expanded Construction of the [Ancestral] Tomb [Undertaken] by Gentleman Feng, Marshal and Regional Commander), which was set up in 1257, the seventh year of the rule of Möngke Khan. The text was authored by Xu Zhigang 徐之綱 and it mainly speaks about Feng Zhang’s 馮彰 enlargement of his family’s ancestral tombs. The inscription of the epitaph says that Feng Zhang, Prefect of the Superior Prefecture of Yidu (*tongzhi Yidufu yin* 同知益都府尹), “used to serve the *xianggong* of the Great Provincial ... [text missing] in the Superior Prefecture of ... [text missing]” (*daishi ... fu da xing ... xianggong* 逮事□府大行□相公), and Feng Zhang is characterized as a “faithful, pure, meticulous, careful as well as an audacious and valiant person” (*zhong zhen shen mi jiayi yongwu* 忠貞慎密加以勇武), and that his “military exploits surpass those of his peers” (*suo li zhangong chaochu lunbei* 所立戰功超出倫輩) (see Figure 2, left).<sup>29</sup>

By examining the official title of Xu Zhigang, author of this inscription, who was Councillor of the Administrative Office of the Provincial Branch Censorate of Yidu and Superintendent of Education of the Superior Prefecture (*xingtai mufu yishiguan, tiling fuxue zhuren* 行台幕府議事官、提領府學諸任), we can infer that the words *da xing ... xianggong* 大行□相公, must be complemented to *da xingtai xianggong* 大行台相公, or *xianggong* of the Great Provincial Branch Censorate.

In another stele whose text was also written by Xu Zhigang, Xu’s official title is “Director of the Administrative Office of the Provincial Branch

<sup>28</sup> Cf. (*Tongzhi*) *Chongxiu Ninghaizhou zhi*, 523a.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. (*Guangxu*) *Yiduxian tuzhi*, ch. 48, 41a.

Censorate in Yidu” (*Yidu xingtai mufu zhu ren* 益都行台幕府諸任).<sup>30</sup> We can thus know that the Provincial Branch Censorate, or *xingtai* 行台 must be that of the Branch Secretariat of Yidu (*Yidu xingsheng* 益都行省).

Furthermore, when checking the epitaph for Xu Zhigang himself, we can read the following:

In the year *wuxu* [1238], [the Branch Secretariat of Yidu] began to recruit Confucian scholars as bureaucratic officials. Gentleman [Xu] was selected because of his [thorough] understanding of the [Confucian] classics. By that time, Li Tan ruled [the Branch Secretariat autonomously] with the help of troops of the [local] feudal lords, while Gentleman [Xu] as an Instructor of the School of the Superior Prefecture supported the Branch Secretariat administration. Li Tan liked [civilian] Confucianism, [but] he occasionally asked questions about failure and success of military campaigns [in the past], and [also] clandestinely recruited armoured soldiers, and [had them] trained in [military] toils.

戊戌歲，始招輯儒士。君以明經選益都。于時李壇以諸侯兵分省，君以府學教授佐省事，壇喜儒，間間攻戰成敗，陰蓄甲士，習勞苦。<sup>31</sup>

From the description above, we can judge that the *Yidu xingtai* 益都行台 actually is equivalent to the Provincial Branch Censorate of Yidu, one of the central institutions of the *Yidu xingsheng* 益都行省, i.e. Yidu Branch Secretariat. Therefore, we can conclude that in the seventh year of the reign of Möngke Khan, the person being *xianggong* of the Great Provincial Branch Censorate (*da xingtai xianggong* 大行台相公) can only refer to the

<sup>30</sup> See “Xianshi yasheng Zouguo gong xu shixi tuji” 先師亞聖鄒國公續世系圖記 (Diagram of the Lineage of the Prince of the Zou State, the Late Master and Second Sage), as quoted from Zhao Wentan (2006), 152.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Yuan Jue; Yang Liang, *Yuan Jue ji jiaozhu*, 1375.

*xianggong* of the Great Provincial Branch Censorate of the Province of Yidu, namely Li Tan.

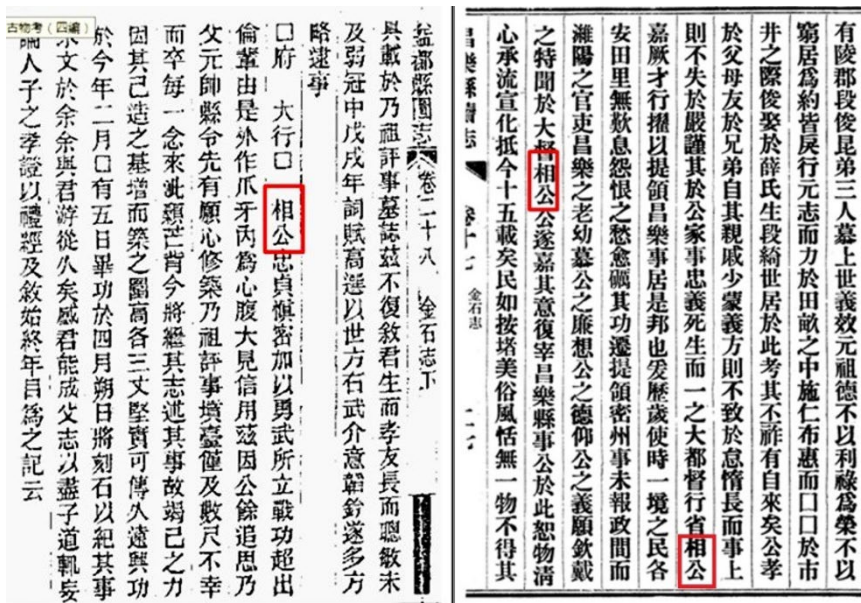


Figure 2: Li Tan Mentioned as *xianggong* in Stele Inscriptions (1257, 1261)

Left: *Yuanshuai zongguan Feng jun zengzhu fentai ji* 元帥總管馮君增築墳台記 (Record on the Expanded Construction of the [Ancestral] Tomb [Undertaken] by Gentleman Feng, Marshal and Regional Commander), 1257;

Right: *Duanshi xiujian zuying ji* 段氏修建祖塋記 (Record on the Construction of Master Duan's Ancestral Tombs), 1261.

4. *Duanshi xiujian zuying ji* 段氏修建祖塋記 (Record on the Construction of Master Duan's Ancestral Tombs), inscribed on a stele in 1261, the second year of the Zhongtong reign-period of the Yuan period, informs us that Duan Qi 段綺 was ordered twice to take charge of administrative affairs in Changle District 昌樂縣 by the Commander-in-Chief and *xianggong* of the Branch Secretariat (*da dudu xingsheng xianggong* 大都督行省相公) (see Figure 2, right).<sup>32</sup> According to Li Tan's biography in the *Yuanshi* 元史,

<sup>32</sup> *Changlexian xuzhi*, 627.

the official dynastic history of the Yuan, in the first year of the Zhongtong reign-period, when Khubilai Khan was enthroned, the Khan promoted Li Tan as Commander-in-chief (*da dudu* 大都督) of the Jiang-Huai region 江淮.<sup>33</sup> Hence we can know that Li Tan was both Commander-in-Chief of the Jiang-Huai region and *xianggong* of the Province of Yidu.

All these four records inscribed on steles are proving that Li Tan was indeed addressed by his subordinates with the title of *xianggong*. As a matter of fact, there are more sources supporting this proposition, as for instance, in a chapter about Li Tan in the *Qianwen ji* 前聞記 (Record of what I Heard in the Past),<sup>34</sup> a book written during the Ming period. This chapter contains an entry, the *Li Junwang Shandong shiji* 李郡王山東事蹟 (Stories and Feats of the Commandery Prince Li Tan in Shandong), written by Li Tan's followers after they had fled to the territory of the Southern Song dynasty. This text bluntly and explicitly relates Li Tan's deeds and stories during his rebellion against the Mongols, including a story when Li Tan's stronghold was besieged by Mongol troops:

As the first drum was beaten in the night of the nineteenth [i.e., after the beginning of the siege], a big star fell onto the prefectural seat. Li Tan took some incense into his hands and bowed down in prayer, saying that "Li Tan shall die here." Then he sat down in the middle of the courtyard, and pulled out his long whiskers with a pair of tweezers. In the early morning of the twentieth day, he asked everybody to go wherever they desired. The Prince [i.e., Li Tan] took seat in a small boat, [and let him rowed to] Haikouzi to drown himself, but the water only reached up to his waist. There was an old man whose family name was Huang, who [observed the scene and] asked him "Mylord (*xianggong*), you did all this [fighting] because the world is in disorder – why do you want to drown yourself?" He helped him out of the water and accompanied him to the seat of Mengquan Prefecture, where a Chiliarch (*qianhu*) resided.

---

<sup>33</sup> *Yuanshi*, ch. 206, 4591.

<sup>34</sup> Zhou Liangxiao (1984), 115-128.

十九夜一鼓，有大星墜於府治。李拈香而拜曰：「李璿死於此。」於是坐於庭中，以鑷摘去長鬚。二十日早，分付眾人出各討路去。王下小舟入海口子投水，止及其腰。有一老子姓黃，曰：「相公為天下不平，做出這事，何故自隕？」引而登崖，至孟權府千戶治所。<sup>35</sup>

This historiographical material makes clear that Li Tan, like other hereditary military commanders, was addressed as *xianggong* by his Chinese subordinates and subjects. After Li Tan began his insurgency and eventually died, the official texts, communiqués and announcements of the Yuan dynasty naturally viewed Li Tan as a treacherous minister and a traitor, and thus all the officially approved records on Li Tan would naturally have to abstain from using honourable titles for Li, such as *xianggong*.

Nonetheless, the people in the regions that Li Tan had governed would still address him with the honorific title *xianggong*, in commemoration of his authority and his great feats, but only among civilians or on private occasions. Thus, the materials presented here which do make use of the respectful appellation of *xianggong* are either epitaphs inscribed on steles that had been erected prior to Li Tan's insurgency, or represent historiographical records that had been written after the transition from the Yuan to the Ming dynasty.

As for Marco Polo's use of the appellation Liitan Sanggon (Li Tan *xianggong* in Chinese), we do not know for sure whether Marco Polo really understood the meaning of the expression *xianggong*. Although he was not a witness of Li Tan's rebellion, the Venetian traveller might have obtained related information about this event from persons having lived in the area Li Tan had governed, but only in fragmentary form. If Marco Polo had not been in regions where the population of Han Chinese was preponderant, and if he had not approached or immersed himself in the cultural atmosphere of the province of Shandong where Li Tan used to live, but had just composed his writings merely on the basis of hearsay and stories he heard on the other side of the Eurasian continent, he could not have known about such an appellation like *xianggong*, which had been used only in a certain

---

<sup>35</sup> Zhu Yunming, "Li Tan", in his *Qianwen ji*, 29a.

region and for a very particular person. Hence, it can be said that the sources offered above provides strong evidence that Marco Polo has obviously been in contact with the culture of the region where Han Chinese people outnumbered others and had even visited the place where Li Tan once had governed.

### 3. Baian Cingsan 伯顏丞相

In Chapter 139, *The Description of the World* relates that:

Now it happened that in the 1268 year of the incarnation of Christ the great Kaan who now reigns, that is Cublai lord of the Tartars, a man of the contrary nature to king Facfur, who took delight in nothing but in war and in conquest and in making himself a great lord, thought after his vast conquests of many provinces and kingdoms to conquer the province of Mangi, and he sends there a baron of his who was a very valiant knight who had Baian Cingsan for name, which means to say in our tongue Baian Hundred Eyes.<sup>36</sup>

If taken literally, Marco Polo seemed to have understood the word “Cingsan” as “Hundred Eyes”. However, Paul Pelliot once noted that:

... In F, Polo seems to say that « cingsan » means « Hundred eyes », but in R this meaning can be understood as attributed to « Bayan ». Although Polo was no Chinese scholar, he could not fail to know the value of *ch'êng-hsiang* [*chengxiang* 丞相], which had passed into Persian and Mongolian circles with its correct meaning of « minister »; the text of R leads us to believe that the mistake is due to the redactor of F, who misunderstood Polo's original text, and although the case is not unique, it is not without interest for the general history of Polo's work.<sup>37</sup>

Accordingly, we can conclude that Marco Polo was to say that the word “Baian” meant “Hundred Eyes”. This may have derived from people of the Han nationality who did not understand the Mongolian language and tried

<sup>36</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), 310.

<sup>37</sup> See Pelliot (1959-1973), vol. 1, 68. For a similar argument see Yule and Cordier (1903), vol. 2, 150n5.



to give a meaning to a Mongolian name by transcribing it as *baiyan* (or *boyan*) 百眼, i.e., “hundred eyes”, instead of using the standard transliteration Baiyan (or Boyan) 伯眼. This matter has been discussed comprehensively by scholars.<sup>38</sup> To solve this riddle, it is worth to start from Marco Polo’s account, and subsequently reveal the historical significance behind the expression “hundred eyes”.

In Chinese historical materials, the term *baiyan* 百眼 or “hundred eyes” as being related to Baiyan has not been discovered so far. However, those who are familiar with historical material of the Yuan dynasty will definitely recall that there is a story associated with Baian Cingsan or Bayan *chengxiang* 伯顏丞相, who conquered the Southern Song empire. In this story, there is a term called “hundred wild geese” (*baiyan* 百雁), which is used as an allusion to the name of Baiyan. This can be first seen in the book *Yutang jiahua* 玉堂嘉話 (Good Words at the Jade Hall) written by Wang Yun 王惲 (1227-1304):

Near the end of the Southern Song Dynasty, there was a folk ballad circulating in the area to the south of the Yangtze River which states that if the area to the south of the Yangtze River is due to fall, it must be by the time of the arrival of hundred wild geese (*baiyan*). By that time, no one could understand its meaning. When the Southern Song Dynasty perished, however, people eventually knew that this ballad referred to Baiyan.

宋末下時，江南謠云：「江南若破，百雁來過。」當時莫喻其意。及宋亡，蓋知指丞相百顏也。<sup>39</sup>

Wang Yun’s record had a wide influence, for these verses have been included in books like *Yuanchao mingchen shilüe* 元朝名臣事略 (Stories of Celebrated Ministers and Officials of the Yuan Dynasty), *Zhizheng Jinling xinzhì* 至正金陵新志 (A New Almanac of Jinling in the Reign of Zhizheng) or *Nancun chuogeng lu* 南村輟耕錄 (Writings on the Abandonment of Cultivation in South Village).

<sup>38</sup> Cai Meibiao (1992), 177-188.

<sup>39</sup> Wang Yun; Yang Xiaochun, *Yutang jiahua* (2006), 103.

Actually, the image of “white wild geese” (*baiyan* 白雁) emerged in poems before the Yuan dynasty.<sup>40</sup> However, when Baiyan *chengxiang* led Mongol troops and conquered the Southern Song dynasty, the term “white wild geese” began to imply much more political connotations in the works of men of letters. One of the most typical literary works is the “Song to White Wild Geese” (*Baiyan xing* 白雁行), composed by Liu Yin 劉因 (1249-1293):

As the north wind began to blow, the water of River Yi turned cold.  
 As the north wind began to blow again, coldness came to the Yangtze River area.  
 As the north wind began to blow a third time, white wild geese arrived, and the coldness extended as far as Mountain Zhuya [on Hainan Island].  
 Alas, of three hundred years of Heaven and Earth [i.e., the reign of the Song Dynasty],  
 nothing is left after the winds blew it all away.  
 In thinking of wandering light-heartedly across the vast land,  
 one just lingers and looks at the return of the wild geese over a river in spring.

北風初起易水寒，北風再起吹江幹。  
 北風三吹白雁來，寒氣直薄朱崖山。  
 乾坤噫氣三百年，一風掃地無留殘。  
 萬里江湖想瀟灑，佇看春水雁來還。<sup>41</sup>

In this poem, it is quite clear that the poet used the image of “white wild geese” to refer to Baiyan, while the “the north wind” refers to the troops of the Yuan dynasty. A huge number of similar poetic lines can be found that were composed during the Yuan period. Another poem of Liu Yin says that:

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Yuan Haowen’s 元好問 (1190-1257) fifth prose poem whose tunic title is Spring at Jade Pavilion, or *Yulou chun* 玉樓春: “... the wind blows and the sand is touched, and as the white wild geese’s sound is heard, frost is foreseeable ...” (驚沙獵獵風成陣，白雁一聲霜有信). See Xia Chengtao (2013), 2326.

<sup>41</sup> See Liu Yin, *Jingxiu xiansheng wenji*, ch. 5, 41b.

The sound of a white wild goose followed after the west wind,  
imperial hats and canopies, then all disappeared in mist and fog.  
一聲白雁更西風，冠蓋散為煙霧空。<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, Wang Silian 王思廉 (1238-1320) wrote in a poem that:

A sound of a white wild goose flew across the Yangtze waves,  
brings into my mind that the imperial spirit of Jinling has gone.  
一聲白雁度江潮，便覺金陵王氣銷。<sup>43</sup>

Likewise, Sa Tiansi 薩天錫 (1272-1355) in his poem “Hanye Wenjiao” 寒夜聞角 (Bugle Sound in Cold Night) composed verses saying:

The yellow cloud hid the moon in northern China beyond the Great Wall,  
the white wild geese honked and the cloud above the region to the south  
of the Yangtze River was dispersed.  
黃雲隔斷塞北月，白雁叫破江南煙。<sup>44</sup>

All these poetic lines hint at Baiyan’s conquest of the vast land south of the Yangtze River and the demise of the Southern Song dynasty, and thus it becomes clear that in Chinese historical materials written during the Yuan dynasty Baiyan 伯顏 has been punned as “hundred wild geese” (*baiyan* 百雁), but also as “white wild geese” (*baiyan* 白雁). Both expressions are homophonic transliterations of Baiyan’s name. The use of the expression “hundred eyes” (*baiyan* 百眼), as attested in Marco Polo’s book, can be viewed as a further homophone of the Mongolian name by speakers of Han Chinese. However, the transliteration “hundred eyes” is far less elegant than the puns using the image of wild geese, and seems to be somewhat more derogative or low-brow than the Chinese poets’ allusions. This “grassroots pun” as a kind of unconventional way of dealing with foreign names and expressions would not have been included in official records or literary works of Han Chinese scholar-officials. It is therefore quite probable that the transliteration “hundred eyes” was gradually lost.

<sup>42</sup> Liu Yin, *Jingxiu xiansheng wenji*, ch. 4, 6a.

<sup>43</sup> *Yuanwen lei*, ch. 8, 98.

<sup>44</sup> See Sa Tianxi, *Sa Tianxi shiji*, 46b.

Thanks to Marco Polo's memory and his records, however, knowledge about this popular way of naming Baiyan "hundred eyes" has survived, thus providing testimony of the folk culture of the Han Chinese.

How the various name puns for Baiyan emerged, can hardly be known. Some scholars hold that the expression "hundred eyes" was used as a kind of a propaganda while preparing the Yuan army for the conquest of the Southern Song empire.<sup>45</sup> Regardless in which way it may have been created, Marco Polo's testimony of the Chinese transliteration of Baiyan's name as "hundred eyes" is proof for his direct contact with Chinese-speaking groups. Such specific knowledge could hardly be obtained by the Venetian if his writings were only based on hearsay transmitted indirectly to European merchants.

#### **4. Cenchu and Vanchu in the Case of Ahmed's Assassination**

The Italian rendering compiled and published by Giovanni Battista Ramusio is the only version of Marco Polo's account in which Aḥmed's assassination is minutely described. This account has attracted great attention by researchers on the Mongol empire and the Yuan dynasty. There are two assassins mentioned in this story, namely, Cenchu and Vanchu.<sup>46</sup> As for the names of these two persons, annotators and translators gave different explanations. It was not until 1998 when Cai Meibiao published an academic paper on the issue that this question has been basically solved,<sup>47</sup> and so that academic circles have reached a consensus regarding the true meaning of these two names. Nevertheless, this issue can be further analysed by taking into consideration other historical material.

To begin with, it is important to succinctly list the various points of the discussion raised by previous scholars on these two names:<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Li Zhi'an (2005), 237.

<sup>46</sup> Ramusio (1559), f. 25b.

<sup>47</sup> Cai Meibiao (1998), 89-93.

<sup>48</sup> Although Cai Meibiao has made a detailed study on the names Cenchu and Vanchu, thanks to the resources available nowadays via the internet each and every issue can be checked and re-checked on the basis of Cai's findings, thus further clarifying the history of research of these two names.

1. Henry Yule, in the preface of his English translation of Marco Polo's book, has commented upon Cenchu and Vanchu of R that,

*Wangcheu* in the Chinese Annals; *Vanchu* in Ramusio. I assume that Polo's *Vanchu* was pronounced as in English; for in Venetian the *ch* very often has that sound. But I confess that I can adduce no other instance in Ramusio where I suppose it to have this sound, except in the initial sound of *Chinchitalas* and twice in *Choiach* (see II. 364).<sup>49</sup>

2. According to the introduction in Paul Pelliot's *Notes on Marco Polo*, Arthur Christopher Moule published in 1915 a paper in the *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, in which he discussed these two names. In this paper with the title "Notices of Christianity in China: Extracted from Marco Polo", Moule claimed that Vanchu and Chenchu are probably a *Wan-hu* 萬戶 [*wanhu*] (a commander of 10,000 or myriarch), and a *Ch'ien-hu* [*qianhu*] (a commander of 1000 or chiliarch), respectively.<sup>50</sup>

3. In Feng Chengjun's 馮承鈞 (1887-1946) translation of Antoine Henry Joseph Charignon's annotated French rendering of Marco Polo's account, Feng translated in this way:

One of them was a Khitan with the name Chen Zhu 陳著 (Tchen-tchou), who was a *qianhu* [chiliarch] ... who, together with another Khitan *wanhu* [myriarch], called Wang Zhu 王著 (Wang-tchou), assassinated Ahmed.

其中有一契丹人名陳著(Tchen-tchou)者，身為千，…遂與別一契丹人身為萬戶名稱王著 (Wang-tchou) 者同謀殺之。<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Yule and Cordier (1903), vol. 1, 99. See the somewhat different translation of this passage in Zhang Xinglang (1936), vol. 2, 216: 中國《元史》作王著 (Wang Cheu), 賴麥錫本作萬珠 (Vanchu), 余意李羅氏 Vanchu 之讀音, 與英文拼讀法相同, 蓋威尼斯語中 chu 音, 正與英文相同也。然賴麥錫本他處 ch 之讀音似此者難得有一二。

<sup>50</sup> Moule (1915b), 32.

<sup>51</sup> See Feng Chengjun; Dang Baohai (1999), 341. The original reads: 其中有一契丹人名陳著 (Tchen-tchou) 者, 身為千, …遂與別一契丹人身為萬戶名稱王著 (Wang-tchou) 者同謀殺之。

4. In Zhang Xinglang's 張星煒 (1888-1951) translation of Luigi Foscolo Benedetto's edition, it reads that there was a Khitan called Zhang Ku (Chencu), and who was a *qianhu* military official, and it also reads that he, "with another *wanhu* military official, whose name was Wang Zhu 王著 (Vancu), murdered Ahmed" (有一個契丹人, 名叫張庫 (Chencu) (譯音), 是一個千戶軍官, …對另一個萬戶軍官契丹人王著 (Vancu) 謀殺阿合馬).<sup>52</sup>

5. Shao Xunzheng 邵循正 (1909-1972) touched upon this issue in 1943 in an academic speech held at National Southwest Associated University (Xin-nan lianda 西南聯大) in Kunming. The address is included in his selected works. Shao said that:

According to my opinion, these two words are not personal names. The first word is *qianhu* [chiliarch], and the second word is *wanhu* [myriarch]. ... I believe that "to command 1000" and "to command 10,000 men" are annotations to the two nouns of *qianhu* and *wanhu* respectively, and these annotations are very clear. Therefore, as for the word "named" in the original text, its meaning must be understood as an appellation or an address to someone, rather than someone's family name or given name. All the scholars starting from Henry Yule were not careful when reading this sentence. Thus, they all treated the word Vancu as Wang Zhu. As a matter of fact, the Cenchu should be Wang Zhu, for his official rank was that of a *qianhu* and he thus commanded 1000 people. As for the word Vancu, I guess that it refers to Cui, Area Commander-in-chief (see "Biography of Ahmed" in *Yuanshi*).

據我的看法, 這兩個字都不是人名。頭一個字是千戶, 第二個字是萬戶。…我認為 '將千人'、'將萬人' 即千戶、萬戶兩名詞的注釋, 文意甚明顯。所以原文 named 一字, 其意應是 '稱呼', 而不是 '名為'。自 Yule 以下各家讀此句似均欠細心, 所以都把 Vancu 當作王著, 其實 Cenchu 是王著, 因為他官千戶,

---

<sup>52</sup> See Zhang Xinglang (1936), 163.

所以‘將千人’。Vanchu 我疑心是指崔總管（見《元史》阿合馬傳）。<sup>53</sup>

6. In the first volume of Pelliot's *Notes on Marco Polo*, which was collated and published posthumously by Louis Hambis in 1959, these two names are discussed. As for the word Chencu, Paul Pelliot explained that:

I agree with MOULE's explanation that this must represent Ch. 千戶 *ch'ien-hu* « chiliarch » (*JNCB*, 1915, 32; 1927, 26-27); that is in exact agreement with Polo's statement that the « Cathayan » whom he calls « Cenchu » « had under him a thousand men ». Cf. the similar case of « Vanchu ». It is a pity that this explanation should have been ignored in B<sup>1</sup>, 440, who adopts « Cenciu » instead of the « Cenchu » of R, our only source, and thinks that the name represents 張易 Chang I [Zhang Yi], one of the conspirators. But « Cenchu » (where *ch* before *u*=*k*) cannot be reconciled phonetically with Chang I; moreover, it was 王著 Wang Chu [Wang Zhu] who was the initiator of the plot, and we know from Chinese texts that he was really a *ch'ien-hu*.<sup>54</sup>

Whereas as to Vanchu, Paul Pelliot claimed that:

It has long been supposed that this was a transcription of 王著 Wang Chu [Wang Zhu], the name of the leader of the plot against Aḥmad (see « Acmat<sup>1</sup> »); B<sup>1</sup>, 449, still transcribes « Vanciu », and gives Wang Chu as its original. He ought not to have disregarded MOULE's paper in *JNCB*, 1927, 26-28. MOULE justly remarks that, in the « Vanchu » of R (the only source), *ch-* before *u* must sound *k* (see the same in « Cenchu »), and the « name » must be simply a transcription of the title 萬戶 *wan-hu* [*wanhu*], « myriarch ». Polo says positively that « Vanchu » was « master of ten thousand ». Although Polo mixes up the part played by the different conspirators, he does so to a less extent than Rašhīdu-'d-Dīn.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Shao Xunzheng (1985), 116-117.

<sup>54</sup> Pelliot (1959-1973), vol. 1, 236.

<sup>55</sup> Pelliot (1959-1973), vol. 2, 870.

7. On the basis of the research expounded above, Cai Meibiao fully affirmed the views of both Shao Xunzheng and Paul Pelliot. He holds that Cen chu and Van chu are transliterations of *qian hu* (Mong. *mingghan*, or chiliarch) and *wan hu* (Mong. *tumen*, or myriarch), respectively and that the true identities of these two persons are Wang Zhu 王著 (Wang Chu) and Zhang Yi 張易 (Chang I). Thus, a discussion that started with Henry Yule and lasted for more than one hundred years found an end once the true meaning of Cen chu and Van chu was accepted by mainstream academia.<sup>56</sup> Probably the genuine identities of these two persons could be further discussed, but the exact identification of Cen chu and Van chu with *qian hu* and *wan hu*, respectively, is beyond question.

The findings presented so far are a collation of the research results in this regard. Besides confirming that the two assassins mentioned by Marco Polo are addressed by their official ranking or title, this paper tries to introduce more historical information on the persons themselves. Addressing each other by official title or ranking was part of the social culture in ancient China, and this culture frequently and widely shows up in Chinese historical material compiled during the Yuan period. Concretely speaking, as for Ahmed's assassination, even though Wang Zhu had been sentenced to death for taking part in this murder, he was nonetheless considered an upright and morally correct personality for his having eliminated a treacherous high-ranking official, and thus Wang Zhu was addressed consistently with an honourable official title in the works of men of letters during the Yuan period. For instance, in "Wan yishi Wang qian hu" 挽義士王千戶 (Elegy to Chiliarch Wang, a Righteous Man) composed by Hou Kezhong 侯克中 (1220-1315), we can read the following:

Millions of people have been living in a wild frenzy,  
and they have striven with each other to produce their own heroes.  
The Heavenly Pivot [i.e., the star Dubhe of Ursa Major], self-contained,  
is eternally residing in the north,  
who said there are no rainbows in the east?

---

<sup>56</sup> Feng Chengjun; Dang Baohai (1999), 324.



[Soft] sleeves bear [enough] power to eradicate great evils,  
and tender brush tips, though having no strength, [are able to] record  
marvellous deeds.

If [we die and] meet in the underworld all [these assassins] like [Jing]  
Ke,<sup>57</sup>

we shall deeply regret that such a man [as Chiliarch Wang] died in such  
utmost upright manner.

億萬生靈沸鼎中，當時爭敢炫英雄。  
天樞自合長居北，蟬竦誰教不在東。  
袖裡有權除大惡，筆頭無力寫奇功。  
九原若見諸軻輩，應愧斯人死至公。<sup>58</sup>

In addition, Song Jiong 宋鞏 (1294-1346), in his record on the murder of Aḥmed, recollects every-day talk of his period by stating that “Chiliarch Wang’s (Wang *qianhu*) killing of the Western Minister is still a topic of conversation in these days” (王千戶殺西相，至今能談其事).<sup>59</sup> Also in this passage, the words “Chiliarch Wang” refer to Wang Zhu. It can thus be ascertained that after Aḥmed’s assassination Wang Zhu became well-known due to his sacrifice for justice, at least within the sphere of commemoration of the Han Chinese. Quite coincidentally, in Marco Polo’s narrative records, Wang Zhu is likewise addressed as “chiliarch”. This fully demonstrates that Marco Polo made use of a Chinese term which has been current in a particular Chinese region and under special historical circumstances. And it further indicates that Marco Polo had direct and personal contact with Chinese living under the rule of the Yuan Mongols. If such an accurate title used under such a particular historical constellation would have found its way into Marco Polo’s book merely on the basis of hearsay or legend, Marco Polo could have hardly convinced his readers of his narration of the assassination of Aḥmed.

<sup>57</sup> Jing Ke was a famous assassin who in 227 BC attempted to kill King Zheng of the Qin state, who later became China’s First Emperor (Qin Shihuangdi, r. 221-210 BC).

<sup>58</sup> Hou Kezhong, *Genzhai shiji*, ch. 6, 324.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. “Zhaohou fa bai fan hei” 趙侯發白返黑 (Marquis Zhao’s White Hair Turned Black), in Song Jiong, *Yanshi ji*, ch. 3, 140.

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis above is based upon the research and findings of previous scholars and experts. By taking more source material in Chinese into account and by investigating further the names and appellations of several persons mentioned and described by Marco Polo, we can obtain some new understanding on the origins, contexts and channels from which Marco Polo got the information he transmitted in his book.

Through the discussion above, we can confirm that the designations of several persons Marco Polo wrote about are in close association with the history of the Yuan dynasty and most of them were cultural products of the contemporary Han Chinese. Marco Polo's appellation of Li Tan as Sangon (*xianggong*) is such an instance. According to Paul Pelliot, the word *hsiang-kung* (*xianggong*) as Li Tan's appellation originated from Li Tan's "countrymen". Based on additional Chinese material, this paper has proven that, due to Li Tan's identification of being an insurgent official, his respectful appellation as *xiangong* can only be seen in inscriptions of epitaphs erected prior to his insurgency or in historical texts written after the end of the Yuan period.

Because Marco Polo's narration was written down many years after the Li Tan rebellion, Marco Polo could not have obtained knowledge about such honorific appellations like *xiangong* from officially recognized documents of the Yuan dynasty. Therefore, we can infer that Marco Polo's use of this title for Li Tan goes back to a limited period of time. Only by dwelling for a certain period of time in the area where Li Tan had governed and which was populated by Han Chinese could the Venetian have picked it up. Likewise, Marco Polo's appellation of Wang Zhu as Censhu (*qianhu*, or chiliarch) is also a specific cultural product of the area of Han Chinese population in the Yuan empire.

The numerous legends and stories behind the homophonic transcriptions of Baiyan's name as "hundred wild geese", "white wild geese" or "hundred eyes" are yet another example for a politically and culturally unique product of that historical period. Only by direct contact with the cultural environment of areas inhabited by Han Chinese could Marco Polo

have been able to faithfully record such a series of particular and culturally sensitive appellations. If his *Description of the World* would have been composed on the basis of hearsay of various kinds circulating in Venice or elsewhere in the west, far away from the Asian continent, it would have been impossible for Marco Polo to write in such an accurate way about particular appellations, such as *xianggong* for Li Tan, *qianhu* for Wang Zhu, and *wanhu* (Vanchu, or myriarch) for another of Aḥmed's assassina-tors.

Another finding from the analysis above is that we have gained some further information about the degree of Marco Polo's linguistic proficiency. Previous scholars, such as Henry Yule, Shao Xunzheng, Yang Zhijiu or Cai Meibiao have all proven from different angles that Marco Polo neither understood Chinese nor Mongolian.<sup>60</sup> They further noted that in China Marco Polo mainly used Persian, the *lingua franca* in the Mongolian empire. From the expression "Li Tan Sangon" we can infer that Marco Polo was comparatively unfamiliar with the Chinese language. If he had known that Sangon (*xianggong*) was an honourable appellation, he would not have used such a respectful title to refer to an insurgent who had been deeply hated by His Excellency, the Great Khan of the Yuan dynasty.

In short, by investigating several names and appellations of persons recorded in Marco Polo's book, we have discovered additional sources in Chinese language that support Marco Polo's narration. They contribute new and complementary information to the views held by preceding scholars. More importantly, the research and verification of these names and addresses used in Marco Polo's narration are veritable reflections of certain secular and spatial characteristics of Han Chinese culture within the Yuan empire. They further show how trustworthy indeed Marco Polo's account is and that it truly reflects his experience of having travelled in China.

Marco Polo's statements can add to our knowledge of certain historical issues in a unique way. In some cases, he even provides information that is not even available in the seemingly abundant treasure trove of historical

---

<sup>60</sup> Yule and Cordier (1903), vol. 1, 29; Shao Xunzheng (1985), 115; Yang Zhijiu (1982), 275-280; Cai Meibiao (1992), 177-188.

material in Chinese language. Furthermore, we can notice that some granular and tiny records in Marco Polo's book about various topics in the Yuan empire, just as those on names and appellations discussed in this article, are just like a constellation of precious stones which radiate a dim light in every direction, thus encouraging scholars to explore more details of Marco Polo's great travel.

## References

### Editions and Translations of Marco Polo

Feng Chengjun 冯承钧; Dang Baohai 党宝海 (newly annotated) (1999). *Make Boluo xingji* 马可波罗行纪 (Marco Polo's Travels) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe).

Ménard, Philippe, ed. (2001-2009). *Marco Polo; Le devisement du monde*, 6 vols. (Genève: Librairie Droz).

Moule, Arthur Christopher; Pelliot, Paul (1938). *Marco Polo: The Description of the World*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge; repr. New York: AMS, 1976).

Ramusio, Giovanni Battista (1559). *Dei viaggi di Messer Marco Polo, Gentilhuomo Venetiano*, in his *Secondo volume Delle navigationi et viaggi Nel quale si contengono L'istoria delle cose de'Tartari, & diversi fatti de'loro imperatori, descritta da m. Marco Polo gentilhuomo venetiano, et da Hayton Armeno. Varie descrittioni di diuersi autori ...* (Venedig: Stamparia Giunti). See <http://books.google.com/books?id=dpvHWQyVFTEC> (access by Oct. 10, 2022).

Yule, Henry; Cordier, Henri (1903). *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Complete Yule-Cordier Edition, Including the Unabridged Third Edition (1903) of Henry Yule's Annotated Translation, as Revised by Henri Cordier; together with Cordier's Later Volume of Notes and Addenda (1920)*, (London: Murray New York; repr. Dover Publications, 1993).

Zhang Xinglang 張星烺 (1936). *Mage Beiluo youji* 馬哥孛羅遊記 (Marco Polo's Travels) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan).

### Chinese Primary Sources

*Changlexian xuzhi* 昌樂縣續志, comp. by Wang Jinyue 王金嶽 and Zhao Wenqin 趙文琴 (*Zhongguo fangzhi congshu* 中國方志叢書, 1934).

- (Guangxu) *Yiduxian tuzhi* (光緒)益都縣圖志 (Illustrated Gazetteer of Yidu District (Guangxu Period)), comp. by Zhang Chengxie 張承燮 et al., 1907, in *Liao Jin Yuan shike wenxian quanbian* 遼金元石刻文獻全編 A Complete Collection of Liao, Jin and Yuan Stone Inscriptions and Documents), vol. 3 (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2003).
- Hou Kezhong 侯克中. *Genzhai shiji* 艮齋詩集 (Collected Poems of Genzhai [i.e. Hou Kezhong]), in *Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu* 影印文淵閣四庫全書 (Photofacsimile Reprint of the Hall of Literary Profundity Copy of the Complete Collection of the Four Treasures [of Literature]), vol. 1205 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1986).
- Liu Yin 劉因. *Jingxiu xiansheng wenji* 靜修先生文集 (Collected Writings of Gentleman Jingxiu [i.e. Liu Yin]), based on the *Yuan Zhishun yuannian Zongwentang kanben* 元至順元年宗文堂刊本 (1330) edition, in *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊 (Collection of the Four Branches [of Literature]).
- Sa Tianxi 薩天錫. *Sa Tianxi shiji* 薩天錫詩集 (Collected Poems of Sa Tianxi), based on the *Ming Hongzhi shiliunian kanben* 明弘治十六年刊本 (1503) edition, in *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊 (Collection of the Four Branches [of Literature]).
- Song Jiong 宋琰. *Yanshi ji* 燕石集 (Collections from Yanshi), in *Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan* 北京圖書館古籍珍本叢刊 (A Collection of Ancient Books and Rare Editions at Beijing Library), vol. 92 (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1988).
- (Tongzhi) *Chongxiu Ninghaizhou zhi* (同治)重修寧海州志 (Revised Gazetteer of Ninghai Department (Tongzhi Period)), comp. by Shu Kong'an 舒孔安 and Wang Houjie 王厚階, 1864, in *Zhongguo difangzhi jicheng* 中國地方誌集成 (Collection of Chinese Local Gazetteers), Part *Shandong fuxian zhi ji* 山東府縣誌輯 (Local Gazetteers of Prefectures and Districts in Shandong), vol. 54 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian; Chengdu: Bashu shushe; Nanjing: Jiangsu guji keyinshe, 1991).
- Wang Yun 王懌; Yang Xiaochun 楊曉春, rev. *Yutang jiahua* 玉堂嘉話 (Good Words at the Jade Hall) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006).
- Yan Guangda 嚴光大. *Qiqingshi xingcheng ji* 祈請使行程記 (Record of the Itinerary of the Embassy Suing for Peace), in Liu Yiqing 劉一清, *Qiantang yishi* 錢塘遺事 (Anecdotes of Qiantang), photofacsimile reprint of the 謝國楨氏所藏嘉慶洞庭掃葉山房席氏校訂本 (1796-1820) edition (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985).

- Yuan Jue 袁桷; Yang Liang 楊亮, coll. and annot. *Yuan Jue ji jiaozhu* 袁桷集校注 (Collected Works of Yuan Jue, Collated and Annotated) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012).
- Yuanshi* 元史 (History of the Yuan [Dynasty]), comp. by Song Lian 宋濂 et al., 1370 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976).
- Yuanwen lei* 元文類 (Yuan Literary Genres), comp. by Su Tianjue 蘇天爵, 1889 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936).
- Zhu Yunming 祝允明. *Qianwen ji* 前聞記 (Record of what I Heard in the Past), in Shen Jiefu 沈節甫, *Jilu huibian* 記錄彙編 (A Compilation of Records), photofacsimile reprint of 明萬曆本 (1572-1620) edition (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1938).

### Secondary Literature

- Cai Meibiao 蔡美彪 (1992). “Shilun Make Boluo zai Zhongguo” 试论马可波罗在中国 (A Discussion of Marco Polo’s Stay in China), *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 中国社会科学, 2: 178-180.
- Cai Meibiao 蔡美彪 (1998). “Make Boluo suoji Ahema shijian zhong de Cen chu Vanchu” 马可波罗所记阿合马事件中的 Cen chu Vanchu (*Cen chu* and *Vanchu* in Marco Polo’s Record of the Ahmad Incident), *Zhongguo shehui kexue yanjiushengyuan xuebao* 中国社会科学院研究生院学报, 5: 89-93.
- Huang Shijian 黄时鉴 (1983). “Lüetan Make Boluo shu de chaoben he kanben” 略谈马可波罗书的抄本与刊本 (A Brief Discussion of the Manuscripts and Prints of Marco Polo’s Book), *Xuelin manlu* 学林漫录, 4: 216-220.
- Hucker, Charles O. (1985). *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press).
- Li Zhi’an 李治安 (2005). *Hubilie zhuan* 忽必烈传 (A Biography of Khubilai Khan) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe).
- Lü Zongli 呂宗力, ed. (2016). *Zhongguo lidai zhiguan zhidu da cidian* 中国历代官制大辞典 (A Dictionary of Official Systems in China through the Ages) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan).
- Moule, Arthur Christopher (1912). “Marco Polo’s Sinjumatu”, *T’oung Pao*, second series, 13/3: 431-433.
- Moule, Arthur Christopher (1915a). “Hang-chou to Shang-tu: A.D. 1276”, *T’oung Pao*, second series, 16/3: 393-419.
- Moule, Arthur Christopher (1915b). “Notices of Christianity in China Extracted from Marco Polo”, *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 46: 19-37.

- Pelliot, Paul (1933). “Sur un passage du *Cheng-wou ts'ing tcheng lou*”, Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo 歷史語言研究所 (Institute of History and Philology), ed. *Qingzhu Cai Yuanpei xiansheng liushiwusui lunwenji* 慶祝蔡元培先生六十五歲論文集 (A Collection of Essays in Celebration of Mr. Cai Yuanpei's Sixty-fifth Birthday) (Beiping: Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo), 907-938.
- Pelliot, Paul (1959-1973). *Notes on Marco Polo: Ouvrage posthume* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, Librairie Adrien-Maisonneuve).
- Shao Xunzheng 邵循正 (1985). “Yuyan yu lishi: Fulun ‘Make Boluo youji’ de shiliao jiazhi” 语言与历史— 附论《马可波罗游记》的史料价值 (Language and History: Including a Discussion about the Value of *Marco Polo's Travels* as a Historical Source), in *Shao Xunzheng lishi lunwenji* 邵循正历史论文集 (Collected Articles on History of Shao Xunzheng) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe), 112-117.
- Xia Chengtao 夏承焘 (2013). *Songci jianshang cidian* 宋词鉴赏辞典 (A Dictionary of Song Prose Poem Appreciation) (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe).
- Yang Zhijiu 杨志玖 (1982). “Guanyu Make Boluo zai Zhongguo de jige wenti” 关于马可波罗在中国的几个问题 (Some Questions Regarding Marko Polo's Stay in China), *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 中国史研究, 2: 275-286.
- Zhao Wentan 赵文坦 (2006). “Zoucheng Mengmiao Yuanbei liangzhong jianshi” 邹城孟庙元碑两种简释 (Two Kinds of Succinct Explanations on the Steles Erected in the Yuan Dynasty at the Mencius Temple in Zoucheng City), *Qilu wenhua yanjiu* 齐鲁文化研究, 5: 150-153.
- Zhou Liangxiao 周良霄 (1984). “Li Tan zhi luan yu Yuanchu zhengzhi” 李璫之乱与元初政治 (Li Tan's Rebellion and Early Yuan Politics), Nanjing Daxue Yuanshi Yanjiushi 南京大學元史研究室 (Yuan History Research Institute of Nanjing University), ed. *Yuanshi lunji* 元史论丛 (Studies of Yuan History) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe), 115-128.

# Marco Polo on Military Affairs of the Yuan Dynasty

Ulrich Theobald

Marco Polo (1254-1324) arrived in China (1274) in a time when the power of Qubilai Qayan (r. 1260-1294) and his Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) were not yet settled. He experienced or at least heard of the fratricidal struggles among the Mongol leadership and was a witness of the Mongolian campaigns in and beyond southwest China. There is no wonder that substantial parts of his book narrate military campaigns. Also, during his travels to and through China, he learnt a lot about military matters, information that he passed on to his readers. Marco might even have held a position of military significance.<sup>1</sup>

This article provides an overview of Marco Polo's statements about the topic of war, and compares some of his statements with contemporary Chinese sources. The focus will be on catapults, battle tactics, war elephants, the Alan guard, weapon manufacturing, and falconry.

It is a fact that the evolvement of the military system of the Yuan dynasty into its final shape in the mid-fourteenth century accelerated only around 1300, when Marco Polo had already left China. The types of forces, tactics, and weaponry he describes thus reflects an earlier stage, and is far from providing a complete picture of the military system of the Yuan.<sup>2</sup> It

---

Thanks to Joachim Brinkmann for linguistic support.

<sup>1</sup> Haw (2006), 165. See also Haw's article on the *kešig* Guard in this book.

<sup>2</sup> The term "military system" refers to the shape of military institutions and theory as formed by intellectual, civilian and literary developments, and thus includes the relationship between war, society, and thought. See Di Cosmo (2009), 4. In a more institutionalist approach, a military system includes a mission defining its purpose and legitimizing the military's existence, the internal structure of armies embodying norms and assumptions, and the resources to survive and function. Cf. Wilson (2008), 17.



can nonetheless be seen that Marco made important observations that added substantially to Western knowledge about the Mongols and can in many instances be confirmed by contemporary Chinese sources.

The Mongol/Yuan wars occurring during the “Polian era” (1275-1291) and shortly thereafter are the invasions of Japan (1274-1281), of Myanmar (1277-1287, 1300-1301), of Vietnam (1283-1288) and Champa (southern parts of modern Vietnam), the planned invasion of Java (1293), and the internal wars with Nayan (Ch. Nayan 乃顔, d. 1287) and Qaidu (Ch. Haidu 海都, 1235-1303) or the rebel Li Tan 李壇 (d. 1262).<sup>3</sup> Out of all of these, Marco mentions the conquest of Yunnan, the inter-Mongolian strife, the Myanmar campaigns, and the Japanese adventure. Most famous is his controversial report of the long-lasting siege of the city of Saianfu (= Xiangyangfu 襄陽府, 1268-1273, province of Hubei) that was brought to an end by the use of catapults allegedly constructed by a German and a Nestorian Christian from among the entourage of the Polos,<sup>4</sup> but in fact – as the official dynastic history *Yuanshi* reports – by Western (*huihui* 回回) engineers. A closer study of Zhou Zhengang shows that Marco Polo’s account of the battle and the description of Xiangyang is imprecise and even faulty that one can assume Marco Polo did not even visit the city of Xiangyang after his arrival in China in 1275.<sup>5</sup>

## Catapults

The official biography of Ariq Qaya (Ch. Alihaiya 阿里海牙, 1227-1286) explains that a certain Ismā’īl (Ch. Yisimayin 亦思馬因) from the Western Territories (Xiyu 西域, i.e., today’s Xinjiang and regions west of it)<sup>6</sup> presented a new method of artillery (*xin pao fa* 新砲法) to the supreme Mongol commander Aju (Ch. Azhu 阿朮, 1227-1287). In the first lunar month of the tenth year of Qubilai’s reign (1273), they bombarded the city of Fancheng 樊城 on the north bank of the Han River 漢水 from where

<sup>3</sup> The case of Li Tan is dealt with in the article of Luo Wei in this book.

<sup>4</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/LXX: 159; Kinoshita (2016), 146: 128. At the time of the final defeat of Xiangyang, the Polos had not arrived yet in China, cf. Olschki (1960), 343.

<sup>5</sup> Zhou (2020), 99. A summary or arguments on this case can be found in Vogel (2013), 67-68.

<sup>6</sup> On the (enforced) movement of people under Mongol rule, cf. Allsen (2014).

Xiangyang was supplied. Thereafter, the catapults were moved to Xiangyang, where the defence towers (*qiaolou* 譙樓) were covered with barrage “like thunder”, which eventually led to the surrender of the city.<sup>7</sup>

Yet these Western catapults were not the only weapon of this kind. A son of a certain Jia Talahun 賈塔刺渾<sup>8</sup> from Ji 冀 (today’s Hebei) called Liushiba 六十八 was responsible for the ballistic machines placed south of Xiangyang on a “camel hill” citadel (*luotuoling yizicheng* 駱駝嶺一字城).<sup>9</sup> Two years later, he brought down the city of Changzhou 常州 (province of Jiangsu) and was made commander of a “newly attached [Chinese] ballistic brigade” (*xinfu paoshou jun* 新附砲手軍). Liushiba had inherited the job as master over the ballistic machinery from his father, who had once for Činggis Qayan (d. 1227) conscripted those “skilled in the use of mangonels” (*neng yong pao zhe* 能用砲者).<sup>10</sup>

Another commander of ballistic machinery during the battle of Xiangyang – and the only one mentioned in local gazetteers on Xiangyang – was Zhang Junzuo 張君佐. His biography states that he, too, occupied a “camel hill” citadel (*yizicheng tuotuoling* 一字城橐駝嶺), from where he attacked the Cow Horn Bastion (Niujiabao 牛角堡) close to Xiangyang’s southern gate.<sup>11</sup> During the siege of Fancheng, he “personally” (*qin* 親) erected a battery to break the corner towers.<sup>12</sup> During the Ming period, there was a bridge circa five kilometres (10 *li*) north of Xiangyang called Paoshiqiao

<sup>7</sup> *Yuanshi*, 128: 3125.

<sup>8</sup> Northern Chinese subjects who served the Mongols often adopted Mongolian names, see Li Zhi’an (2009).

<sup>9</sup> References to *zicheng* 子城 “child city” citadels (occasionally written 字, which is actually wrong) occur throughout the *Yuanshi* text. Zhang and Hu (2018), 134, provide a map of Xiangyang which shows that the city was not just surrounded by a moat, but that there were also isles of citadels or outworks inside the moat which were called *Zicheng* 子城 “child city” (or *yizicheng* 一字城 in this case; south and east) and *Erzicheng* 二子城 (consisting of two islands), respectively. The appearance of small fortifications inside the moat resembled the humps of camels, hence the name.

<sup>10</sup> *Yuanshi*, 151: 3577.

<sup>11</sup> The map of Zhang and Hu (2018) shows that the southwestern tip of the city wall was crowned with a “horn bastion” (*jiaotai* 角臺).

<sup>12</sup> *Yuanshi*, 151: 3582; (*Wanli*) *Xiangyangfu zhi*, 36: 22b.

砲石橋 “Catapult-stone Bridge”, called so because it was the place where the Yuan army had set up their mangonels.<sup>13</sup>

The plan to extinguish the city of Fancheng before bringing down Xiangyang came from a Chinese called Liu Zheng 劉整 (1211-1275). In his biography, the Western catapults are mentioned, too.<sup>14</sup> A subordinate of Liu, Sui Shichang 隋世昌, was responsible for the construction of the barricade in front of the trebuchets (*paolian* 砲簾) set up outside a horse paddock wall (*lanmaqiang* 欄馬牆) of Fancheng. The construction work was impeded by constant showers of arrows shot by the defenders, and by heavy snow which fell during the night.<sup>15</sup>

Yet most interesting is that the official dynastic history *Yuanshi* includes the biographies of several Western engineers, including that of Ismā‘īl, and thus reflects the transfer of West Asian technicians to the east.<sup>16</sup> He and ‘Alā’ ud-Dīn (Ch. Alao Wading 阿老瓦丁) had been recruited in 1271 by Abaqa (Ch. Abuge 阿不哥, 1234-1282), who was Il-Khan of Persia. ‘Alā’ ud-Dīn hailed from Mufali 木發里 (Mayyāfariqīn)<sup>17</sup> in the “Western Territories”.<sup>18</sup> The two engineers travelled to the seat of the Great Khan, where they were lodged in the quarters of the court officials and ordered to build and demonstrate the use of trebuchets in front of all five gates. Both were rewarded with silks, before setting off to campaign under the command of Ariq Qaya. In 1278, ‘Alā’ ud-Dīn was awarded the title of “General Spreading Martiality” (*xuanwu jiangjun* 宣武將軍) and given the post of an assistant brigade commander commanding the troops (*guanjun zongguan* 管軍總管, as head of the *paoshou zongguanfu* 砲手總

<sup>13</sup> (*Wanli*) *Xiangzangfu zhi*, 18: 1b.

<sup>14</sup> *Yuanshi*, 161: 3788. In the annals-biography of Emperor Shizu (Qubilai Qayan), his name is written Liu Shen 劉深, which is quite probably a confusion with another military person. The same paragraph lays the plan for conquering Fancheng first, and Xiangyang later, into the mouth of Ariq Qaya. See *Yuanshi*, 144: 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Yuanshi*, 166: 3893.

<sup>16</sup> Allsen (2002b).

<sup>17</sup> Allsen (2002a), 270. Allsen assumes that the crew were “very likely Arabs”.

<sup>18</sup> *Yuanshi shizu biao*, 2: 77b.

管府 “ballistic brigade”).<sup>19</sup> In 1285, the title *yuanshuai fu* 元帥府 or “military command”<sup>20</sup> was renamed upper (or first-class) brigade of Western ballistics (*huihui paoshou junjiang shang wanhu fu* 回回砲手軍匠上萬戶府), of which ‘Alā’ ud-Dīn was made Vice Brigade Commander (*fu wanhu* 副萬戶).<sup>21</sup>

Ismā‘īl hailed from “Xulie 旭烈 (Halab/Aleppo)<sup>22</sup> in the Western Territories”.<sup>23</sup> Arriving in the war theatre around Xiangyang, he inspected the ground and set up his catapult battery at the south-eastern corner of the city. His ballistic machinery was able to launch stones of 150 pounds (*jin* 斤, 89.4 kg)<sup>24</sup> weight which when hitting the target “penetrated the earth by seven feet (*chi* 尺)”, while the traditional trebuchets of the Song could launch stones up to a weight of 100 *jin* over a distance of 50 paces, as the *qishaopao* 七梢砲 mentioned in the military book *Wujing zongyao* 武經總要 (Compendium of Important Matters from the Military Classics) from the eleventh century.<sup>25</sup> From the book *Xiangyang shoucheng lu* 襄陽守城錄 (The Defence of the City of Xiangyang), which relates the siege of the city of Xiangyang by the Jurchens in 1206-1208, it can be learnt that traditional Song-period catapults were able to launch weights of up to 59 kg and into a distance of 77.5 metres,<sup>26</sup> while the counterweight catapults launched masses of 100 kg over 275 metres.<sup>27</sup>

The *Yuanshi* demonstrates that trebuchets and mangonels per se were by no means a novelty in the Yuan army, even if Ismā‘īl’s “new method” contributed a decisive advantage. The Western catapults were counter-

<sup>19</sup> Hucker (1985), 284 (no. 3286), and 531 (no. 7110); *Yuanshi*, 86: 2168.

<sup>20</sup> Hucker (1985), 597 (no. 8245).

<sup>21</sup> *Yuanshi*, 203: 4544.

<sup>22</sup> Allsen (2002a), 270.

<sup>23</sup> Li Wentian’s 李文田 *Yuanshi diming kao* 元史地名考, 182, explains that Xulie 旭烈 was an alternative transcription of Huli 忽里, as can be seen in the place names Hulimozi 忽里模子 or Hulisuantan 忽里算灘 (Hulisuanduan 忽里算端) in the territory of the Kipčak Ulus (Ch. Qinchā 欽察). Cf. *Yuanshi*, 63: 1571, and 149: 3524.

<sup>24</sup> Turnbull (2003), 57, says the weights Western catapults could launch were “[...] perhaps exceeding 200 lb”.

<sup>25</sup> *Wujing zongyao*, 12: 48a-b. The name refers to the arm (*shao* 梢) of the catapult which consisted of a bundle of seven balks fastened to each other, perhaps by an iron ring.

<sup>26</sup> Franke (1982), 83. Cf. *Xiangyang shoucheng lu*, fol. 12v (493).

<sup>27</sup> Allsen (2002a), 268.

weight trebuchets<sup>28</sup> in contrast to the traction mangonels used in China since ancient times, many of which can be seen in illustrated form in the *Wujing zongyao*.<sup>29</sup> This must be seen from the perspective of the Mongols, whose original trebuchets seem to have been inferior to those used by the Jin (Jurchen) and the Song armies.<sup>30</sup> In their early campaigns against the Jin empire, the Mongols made use of portable or even collapsible siege crossbows,<sup>31</sup> and later used the Chinese-type traction catapults service of which required 50 to 250 men.<sup>32</sup> The city walls and bastions of Xiangyang were particularly strong and advanced and thus required higher fire power to bring them down. Counterweight catapults required less manpower and achieved much higher efficiency rates in weight and distance. The trebuchets built by the Western engineers were able to launch stones or burning materials (*huopao* 火砲).<sup>33</sup> Batteries could be as large as comprising 12 machines, as can be seen in the biography of Manggudai (Ch. Mangwutai 忙兀台).<sup>34</sup>

Threatened by the new, powerful machines, the Song commander Lü Wenhuan 呂文煥 surrendered. The annals-biography, i.e. the official part of the *Yuanshi*, explains that Ismā‘īl’s “power-saving” (*lisheng* 力省) machines were able to launch huge stones over far distance.<sup>35</sup>

Ismā‘īl was rewarded with the post of Assistant Brigade Commander of Western Ballistics (*huihui paoshou zongguan* 回回砲手總管) and was rewarded with 250 *liang* 兩 of silver and a pendant token of rank in the shape of a tiger (*pei hufu* 佩虎符). He died shortly after and was succeeded in office by his son Bubo 布伯. The latter and his son Ḥasan (Ch. Hasan 哈散) continued to serve the Mongols in high military and civilian offices.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>28</sup> May (2019), 45.

<sup>29</sup> Hu Fengyu (2017), 28; *Wujing zongyao*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> *Jinshi*, 113: 2495-2496.

<sup>31</sup> Turnbull (2003), 55.

<sup>32</sup> Allsen (2002a), 267.

<sup>33</sup> *Yuanshi*, 127: 3107, and 151: 3582. This is confirmed by Carpini. See Hildinger (1996), 76: “they throw Greek fire”, which was sometimes “made of the grease of the men they had killed”.

<sup>34</sup> *Yuanshi*, 131: 3187.

<sup>35</sup> *Yuanshi*, 7: 144.

<sup>36</sup> *Yuanshi shizu biao*, 2: 78a.

The Mongol army included many ballistic units. In 1279, Nanggadai (Ch. Nangjiadai 囊加帶, also written 囊加歹 or Nangjiatai 囊加台) took with him 600 new (Chinese) engineer troops from the Lianghuai region 兩淮 (northern Anhui and Jiangsu) able to construct Western trebuchets (*zao huihuipao xinfu junjiang* 造回回砲新附軍匠), as well as Mongolian, Muslim, (northern) Chinese and new (Chinese) troops “able to build trebuchets” (*neng zao pao zhe* 能造砲者). The sentence with the double reference to ballistic machines seems flawed, but the statement is clear: There, too, were southern Chinese craftsmen who could build such machines.<sup>37</sup>

Throughout the country, there were quite a few ballistic brigades, as can be learnt from the biography of Temür Buqa (Ch. Tiemu'er Buhua 帖木兒不花), who took part in the battle of Xiangyang and other wars of conquering the Southern Song empire.<sup>38</sup> Zhang Badu 張拔都 was the successor of Handuhu 漢都虎 as commander of artillery men of all civil and military classes (*paoshou zhuse junminren jiang* 砲手諸色軍民人匠).<sup>39</sup> It seems that virtually in each circuit (*lu* 路) of the Mongol empire, ballistic units were created (*paoshou junjiang wanhu* 砲手軍匠萬戶), headed by a brigade commander (*wanhu* 萬戶), and later (date unknown) by a *daruyači* (Ch. *daluhuachi* 達魯花赤). Qi Gongzhi 蔡公直, for instance, was Commander of the Ballistic Brigade of the prefecture of Huzhou 湖州 (province of Zhejiang).<sup>40</sup> Anmuqai (Ch. Anmuhai 唵木海) was *daruyači* of a mobile ballistic brigade (*suilu paoshou* 隨路砲手).<sup>41</sup>

In the seventh year of his reign, in late autumn, Qubilai Qayan inspected the ballistic brigades “of all circuits” (*zhulu paoshou wanhu* 諸路砲手萬戶).<sup>42</sup> In 1281, the emperor-khan ordered the Western artillerists that were scattered in various “commanderies” (*huihui paoshou sanju ta jun zhe* 回回砲手散居他郡者) to concentrate in military agro-colonies (*tuntian* 屯

<sup>37</sup> *Yuanshi*, 10: 210.

<sup>38</sup> *Yuanshi*, 132: 3219.

<sup>39</sup> *Yuanshi*, 151: 3580. Zhang's personal name is unknown. Badu is a Mongolian epithet (perhaps from *bayatur* “hero”) granted for Zhang's prowess.

<sup>40</sup> *Yuanshi*, 165: 3883.

<sup>41</sup> *Yuanshi*, 122: 3010.

<sup>42</sup> *Yuanshi*, 7: 130.

田) around the Southern Capital Kaifeng 開封 (province of Henan).<sup>43</sup> Indeed, one military colony of a ballistic brigade (*paoshou wanhufu juntun* 砲手萬戶府軍屯) is recorded in the geographical parts of the *Yuanshi*, located in the prefecture of Guanzhou 灌州 in Sichuan, with a size of 95 households.<sup>44</sup>

In the summer of 1284, a general rearrangement of titles was carried out, in which the traditional title of *yuanshuaifu* 元帥府 for brigade commanders was replaced by *wanhufu* 萬戶府, with a shift of focus from the commander (*yuanshuai*) to those commanded (*wanhu* “ten thousand men”). This renaming was valid for Mongolian military commands (*Menggu du yuanshuaifu* 蒙古都元帥府, renamed *Menggu du wanhufu* “Mongolian chief brigades”), ballistic military commands (*paoshou yunshuaifu* 砲手元帥府, renamed *paoshou wanhufu* “ballistic brigades”), and chief ballistic military commands (*paoshou du yuanshuaifu* 砲手都元帥府, renamed *huihui paoshou junjiang wanhufu* 回回砲手軍匠萬戶府 “Western ballistic engineer brigades”).<sup>45</sup> The latter term does not mean that rank and file of these brigades were Westerners, but they used “Western”, i.e., counterweight, catapults.

Whether the involvement of a figure like Ismā‘īl in the conquest of Xiangyang should be mentioned in official annals or not, was debated by no one else than Temür Qayan (Ch. Tiemu’er 鐵穆耳, Emperor Chengzong 元成宗, r. 1294-1307) himself. When the annals or “veritable records” (*shilu* 實錄) of the Emperors Taizong 元太宗 (Ögödei Qayan, r. 1229-1241), Xianzong 元憲宗 (Möngke Qayan, r. 1251-1259), and Shizong 元世祖 (Qubilai Qayan) were submitted to the throne, he found the mentioning of a “petty matter” (*xiaoshi* 小事) like the artilleryman (*paoshou*) Ismā‘īl from Biemalisidan 別馬里思丹 inappropriate.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Yuanshi*, 11: 232.

<sup>44</sup> *Yuanshi*, 100: 2574.

<sup>45</sup> *Yuanshi*, 13: 267; Hucker (1985), 545 (no. 7325), and 546 (no. 7337).

<sup>46</sup> *Yuanshi*, 19: 407. This *hapax legomenon* place name seems to be derived from Bešbaliq “Five cities”, normally transcribed in Chinese as Bieshibali 別失八里, and the toponymic ending “-stan”. It was an old Turkic city in the northern parts of today’s Xinjiang.

While the “Western” catapults had come to the Mongol empire from the West,<sup>47</sup> Chinese experts of artillery were dispatched to the West. In the 1240s, Hülegü (1217-1265) brought 1,000 Chinese ballistae (*Khitāi man-janīqi* in Farsi) to Iran to bring down the rule of the Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs (better known as the Assassins) over that territory.<sup>48</sup>

## The Mongol Warrior as a Weapons System

The importance of military affairs in the thirteenth century is underlined by Eric Hildinger: “The army was the single most important institution of the [early] Mongolian state.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, the early Mongolian state was a military state. All political matters were concerned with war, and the whole population served to wage war. Not just Marco Polo, but also other travellers gave evidence of the Mongolian military and its tactics, like Pīano Carpini, who in 1246 described the light and heavy (armoured) cavalry of the Mongols in great detail.

Carpini explains that everyone had two or three bows, and three large quivers with arrows, a battle-axe, and the rich warriors also swords. He then describes how leather armour was made, and how the horse armour, helmets, and iron armour for men looked like.<sup>50</sup> Some Tartars had lances with a hook at the head with which they dragged enemy riders from the saddle.<sup>51</sup> Marco Polo himself dedicates half a chapter on Mongol weaponry and equipment, and praises the quality of their bows and arrows.

All their harness of war is excellent and costly. Their arms are bows and arrows, sword and mace; but above all the bow, for they are capital archers, indeed the best that are known. On their backs they wear armour of cuirbouly [*cuir bouilli* “cooked leather”], prepared from buffalo and other hides, which is very strong.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> On the use by the Mongols of captive craftsmen from Europe, see Guzman (2010).

<sup>48</sup> May (2019), 46.

<sup>49</sup> Hildinger (2001), 119.

<sup>50</sup> Hildinger (1996), 71-72.

<sup>51</sup> Hildinger (1996), 73.

<sup>52</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), I/LIV: 260; Kinoshita (2016), 70: 57.



William of Rubruck, however, observed that the Mongols had rather “few arms other than bows and arrows and hides”.<sup>53</sup>

Marco praises the Mongolian warriors as “excellent soldiers, and passing valiant in battle [...] of all troops in the world these are they which endure the greatest hardship and fatigue, and which cost the least; ...”<sup>54</sup> Just like Carpini, Marco admired the battle tactics of the Mongols and provides granular descriptions, for instance, their approach of the joint action of infantry and cavalry:

And they rushed to work so doughtily with their bows and their maces, with their lances and swords, and with the arblasts of the footmen, that it was a wondrous sight to see. Now might you behold such flights of arrows from this side and from that, that the whole heaven was canopied with them and they fell like rain.<sup>55</sup>

When quick advancement or relocation was needed, the method of mounted infantry was applied:

And a great part of the horsemen had each a foot-soldier armed with a lance set on the crupper behind him (for it was thus that the foot-men were disposed of).<sup>56</sup>

Marco’s observations differ somewhat from the common image of the Mongols as swarming arrow shooters who quickly appear, let loose their arrows, and immediately withdraw beyond grasp when their quivers were empty, as it is well known from the feigned retreat tactic which Western observers also described:

Carpini: “You should know that when the Tartars see the enemy they advance and everyone shoots three or four arrows, and if they see that they cannot overwhelm the enemy they go back to their comrades. And this is a trick, so that their adversaries follow them to a place where the Tartars have prepared an ambush. If their enemies follow them to this

---

<sup>53</sup> Jackson (1990), 259.

<sup>54</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), I/LIV: 260-261; Kinoshita (2016), 70: 57.

<sup>55</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/IV: 338; Kinoshita (2016), 79: 70.

<sup>56</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/IV: 337; Kinoshita (2016), 79: 69.

trap, the Tartars circle around them and wound and kill them. [...] You should know that if they can do otherwise they prefer not to fight hand to hand, but they injure and kill men and horses with arrows, and when the men and horses have been hurt by arrows, then they fall upon them.”<sup>57</sup>

Marco Polo: “They never let themselves get into a regular medley, but keep perpetually riding round and shooting into the enemy. And as they do not count it a shame to run away in battle, they will sometimes pretend to do so, and in running away they turn in the saddle and shoot hard and strong at the foe, and in this way make great havoc. [...] But when the Tartars see that they have killed and wounded a good many horses and men, they wheel round bodily, and return to the charge in perfect order and with loud cries, and in a very short time the enemy are routed.”<sup>58</sup>

In this passage, it seems as if Marco had copied information provided earlier in Carpini’s report. But Marco’s additional information quoted further above makes the Mongol warrior appear like a complete weapons system, with horses, mounted infantrymen, different types of arrows, some of which must exactly be targeted to be effective, and also equipped with polearms and hand weapons to fight in close combat. The use of a great variety of weapons is also attested for other Central-Asian peoples.<sup>59</sup>

There is still another piece of information from the Venetian which needs to be taken into account:

You must know that the practice of the Tartars [Mongols] going to battle is to take each a bow and 60 arrows. Of these, 30 are light with small sharp points, for long shots and following up an enemy, whilst the other 30 are heavy, with large broad heads which they shoot at close quarters, and with which they inflict great gashes on face and arms, and cut the enemy’s bowstrings, and commit great havoc. This every one is ordered to attend to. And when they have shot away their arrows they

---

<sup>57</sup> Hildinger (1996), 75.

<sup>58</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), I/LIV: 262-263; Kinoshita (2016), 70: 58.

<sup>59</sup> Sinor (1981), 141.

take to their swords and maces and lances, which also they ply stoutly.<sup>60</sup>

This information adds to Carpini's statements that the length of Tartar arrows was "two feet and one palm and two fingers", the arrowheads very sharp and honed on both sides "like a two-edged sword", and with a sharp haft a finger long to embed the arrowhead in the shaft. Moreover, Carpini clarifies that the Mongols used different arrows for war and for hunting.<sup>61</sup>

While the dispersed Mongol archers proved superior to massed shock cavalry, close combat was necessary when confronted with an opponent who also used the hit-and-flight tactic, like during the battle of 'Ain Ġālūt in northern Palestine in 1260, when the Mamluks from Egypt defeated the Mongol army of the Il-Khan Ulus by hand-to-hand combat which also contradicts Carpini's thesis of the Mongol's general aversion against close combat.<sup>62</sup> In the middle of the thirteenth century, the Mongols were experienced enough to make use of arms beyond the traditional light cavalry, be it heavy or armoured cavalry, infantry, catapult artillery, and even riverine navy.<sup>63</sup>

## War Elephants

The many problems that armies, when charged by an enemy who used substantially different tactics, became most evident in the case of the crusader army at the Horns of Hattin in 1187, when they were attacked by Sultan Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn's (1137-1193) army that used similar tactics as the Mongols did. Yet the Mongolian army, too, met circumstances when their archers could not disperse the enemy's formation, as during the clash at the border to Myanmar (in Marco's text called Mien) in 1277 in a spot called Nga-saunggyan.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), IV/II: 460; Kinoshita (2016), 199: 194.

<sup>61</sup> Hildinger (1996), 73-74.

<sup>62</sup> Hildinger (2001), 166

<sup>63</sup> See May (2019).

<sup>64</sup> To put the event into a context, see Harvey (1925), 65ff., or Olschki (1960), 332-335.

So this king [of Mien and of Bangala] prepared a great force and munitions of war; and he had, let me tell you, 2000 great elephants, on each of which was set a tower of timber, well framed and strong, and carrying from twelve to sixteen well-armed fighting men. And besides these, he had of horsemen and of footmen good 60,000 men.<sup>65</sup>

The Captain of the Tartar host [...] immediately gave orders that every man should dismount and tie his horse to trees of the forest that stood hard by, and that then they should take to their bows, a weapon that they know how to handle better than any troops of the world. They did as he bade them, and plied their bows stoutly, shooting so many shafts at the advancing elephants that in a short space they had wounded or slain the greater part of them as well as of the men they carried.<sup>66</sup>

It can be assumed that the Mongol riders dismounted because a standing archer is able to loose more arrows than a riding one.<sup>67</sup> Marco speaks of 2,000 war elephants the defenders used. It might be worthwhile to compare this figure with that of other incidents recorded in historical sources. Hannibal (247-c. 181), who in 219 BCE passed the Alps, took with him 37 of the animals.<sup>68</sup> During the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BCE between Alexander the Great (r. 336-323) and Darius III (r. 336-330), the Persians had 15 war elephants.<sup>69</sup> During the Battle of Ankara in 1402, fought between Tamerlane (r. 1370-1405) and Bayezid I (r. 1389-1402), the Timurid army made use of 32 beasts.<sup>70</sup> These figures are not very high. Yet when looking at the subcontinent of India, another picture is presented, with the “elephant industry”<sup>71</sup> of the Delhi sultans, who bred no less than 3,000 war elephants at one time.<sup>72</sup> A *mansabdar* officer of the Mughal empire commanding 5,000 infantry, for instance, had at his disposal 90 war elephants.<sup>73</sup> When

---

<sup>65</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/LI: 99; Kinoshita (2016), 121: 110.

<sup>66</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/LII: 101-102; Kinoshita (2016), 123: 111.

<sup>67</sup> Turnbull (2003), 47.

<sup>68</sup> Kistler (2006), 110.

<sup>69</sup> Kistler (2006), 26.

<sup>70</sup> Finkel (2005), 29.

<sup>71</sup> Kistler (2006), 68.

<sup>72</sup> Gommans (2002), 123.

<sup>73</sup> Nicolle (1993), 8.

the state of Pegu in “Lower Burma” attacked Lanxang (today’s Laos) in 1434, the invader’s army included 200 elephants, 1,500 horse, and 30,000 infantry.<sup>74</sup> Vasco da Gama (c. 1469-1524) observed in 1498 that the Thai state of Ayutthaya could field 400 elephants. Half a century later, João de Barros (1496-1570) speaks of “ten thousand” elephants, which is, without a doubt, exaggerated.<sup>75</sup>

A Chinese source, the official dynastic history *Yuanshi*,<sup>76</sup> explains that during the battle, the kingdom of Mian (Mien) dispatched 10,000 cavalry, 800 elephants, and 40-50,000 infantry, and the Mongol cavalry just 700 men, which were thus immensely outnumbered.<sup>77</sup> The elephants of Mian were armoured (*bei jia* 被甲) and protected on both sides by large bamboo tubes (*da zhutong* 大竹筒), and carried “war towers” (*zhanlou* 戰樓) on their back. Bamboo tubes as a protection for the pachyderm’s flanks are also mentioned in later sources. An intrusion of the Myanmar army on Chinese soil in 1388 was repelled by showering the elephants with arrows which they apparently did not like.<sup>78</sup> The “Tartars” might have pushed back the Mien army in a similar way. The Mogul emperor Bābur (r. 1526-1530) observed that elephants were very difficult to kill, but could more easily be driven off.<sup>79</sup> The Chinese, too, had made this experience as early as 602, when Liu Fang 劉方 (d. 605), a general of the Chinese Sui 隋 empire (581-619), overcame the elephants of the army of the Vietnamese Early Lý dynasty 前李 (544-602) by using crossbows against them.<sup>80</sup> In the same way, the elephant units of General Li Chengwo 李承渥 of the state of Southern Han 南漢 (917-971) were defeated during the battle of Shaozhou 韶州 in 971 by the crossbows of the army of Song.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Baker and Phongpaichit (2017), 97.

<sup>75</sup> Baker and Phongpaichit (2017), 90-91.

<sup>76</sup> *Yuanshi*, 210: 4656-4657.

<sup>77</sup> Such a small detachment might have been just a skirmishing party, and not a full army prepared for invasion. Perhaps Marco Polo or his informers confounded different stages of the Mongol-Myanmar conflict, and turned a mere “frontier incident” into a “fine pitched battle”, cf. Olschki (1960), 334.

<sup>78</sup> Elvin (2004), 15.

<sup>79</sup> Nicolle (1993), 15.

<sup>80</sup> *Suishu*, 53: 1358.

<sup>81</sup> *Songshi*, 481: 13926; cf. Schafer (1957), 291.

The *Yuanshi* report goes on to say that commander Qudu (Ch. Hudu 忽都) divided his small army into three sections and did indeed rout the Mian after long hours of battle. Even if the number of Mongolian troops seems totally underrated (or wrong?), the other figures come close to the picture which Marco Polo draws – even if the number of elephants is doubled. The battle is described with the identical text in another, anonymous report called *Yuanchao zheng Mian lu* 元朝征緬錄 (Record of the Yuan Dynasty's Expedition to Mian).

A little-noticed source on Vietnam, Lê Tắc's 黎崱 (in 1285 forcibly resettled to China) *Annan zhilüe* 安南志略, reports that in 1257 the Mongol army under Aju was stopped by the war elephants of the Trần dynasty 陳 (1225-1400). However, a shower of arrows frightened the elephants with the effect that they fled, trampling Vietnamese foot soldiers to death.<sup>82</sup>

Quite interestingly, the Great Khan is reported to have used elephants himself during battles that took place in the northeast of China at the banks of River Liao 遼河, far away from where these animals actually live and are used for labour and in war.<sup>83</sup> Rashīd ad-Dīn (1247-1318) mentions this also in his history of the Mongols *Ĝāmi' at-tawārīh*.<sup>84</sup> Qubilai's elephant vehicle is also described by Odorico da Pordenone (1286-1331).<sup>85</sup>

Marco Polo's reports on the use of elephants in war deviate from the mediaeval custom of the "allegorisation" of these animals and shows them instead in their "material existence" and their significance for daily life.<sup>86</sup>

## Army Organization

Concerning the organization and structure of the army, Marco Polo gives information on the imperial guard.

The established guard [of honour] at each gate of the city [of Cambaluc] is 1000 armed men.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>82</sup> *Annan zhilüe*, 4: 1a-1b.

<sup>83</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/IV: 337; Kinoshita (2016), 79: 69.

<sup>84</sup> Boyle (1971), 298.

<sup>85</sup> Yule (1913), 228.

<sup>86</sup> Kinoshita (2021).

<sup>87</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/XI: 375; Kinoshita (2016), 85: 76.

You must know that the Great Kaan, to maintain his state, hath a guard of twelve thousand horsemen, who are styled Keshican [Mo. *kešigten*], which is as much as to say ‘knights devoted to their Lord’. Not that he keeps these for fear of any man whatever, but merely because of his own exalted dignity. These 12,000 men have four captains, each of whom is in command of 3,000.<sup>88</sup>

The total size of 12,000 men is confirmed in another chapter, where the author says, “Cogatai, who was Captain of the 12,000 that formed the standing garrison of the City ...”<sup>89</sup> Marco Polo’s own relation to and possible enlisting into the *kešig* Guard (Ch. *qiexue* 怯薛, or variously transcribed as *qiexuedan* 怯薛丹, *qiexuedai* 怯薛歹 or 怯薛帶, *qiexuetai* 怯薛台, or *qiexueguan* 怯薛官) is discussed by Stephen Haw in this book.<sup>90</sup> Close to the *kešig* Guard were three other units, namely *qieliankou* 怯憐口 “bondmen” (Mo. *gerün kö[begün]*),<sup>91</sup> *xibochi* 昔博赤 “falconers” (Mo. *sibayuči*, see below),<sup>92</sup> and *halachi* 哈刺赤 (Mo. *qarači*) “supervisor of mares”.<sup>93</sup> Other functionaries mentioned as responsible for duties in the Khan’s palace were *balahachi* 八刺哈赤 “gate officer”<sup>94</sup> (Mo. *balayači*), and *yudianchi* 玉典赤 (Mo. *egüdenči*) “doorkeeper”.<sup>95</sup>

Yet the information of Marco Polo is only quite fragmentary. Even if the *kešig* Guard constituted the main body of the central army (as it originated in Činggis Qayan’s bodyguard), there was a bodyguard (*shiwēn qinjūn* 侍衛親軍) of its own, created in 1260/64 as a supplement to the *kešig* Guard. During the time the Polos were in Yuan China, there were further units created and additional restructurings of the Yuan army undertaken, namely the creation in 1279 of “ethnic” units, consisting of Mongols, Semuren, and “Chinese”.<sup>96</sup> In the same year, five central guard regiments

<sup>88</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/XII: 379; Kinoshita (2016), 86: 76.

<sup>89</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/XXIII: 419.

<sup>90</sup> See also Haw (2006), 166. See also Farquhar (1990), 245 (no. 47).

<sup>91</sup> Farquhar (1990), 245 (no. 47j).

<sup>92</sup> Farquhar (1990), 90 (no. 3s).

<sup>93</sup> Farquhar (1990), 89 (no. 3b). *Yuanshi*, 17: 368.

<sup>94</sup> Farquhar (1990), 89 (no. 3g). *Balahachi* is otherwise also found as a personal name.

<sup>95</sup> Farquhar (1990), 33 (no. 34). *Yuanshi*, 80: 1998.

<sup>96</sup> The Chinese expression *semuren* 色目人, lit. “classified people” is traditionally used to refer to Central and Western Asian people in the service of the Mongols, cf. Endicott-West (1989),

(*wu wei* 五衛) were founded, each consisting of 10,000 “Chinese”. The Mongolian Bodyguard of the Khan (*Menggu shiwei* 蒙古侍衛) was in 1280 divided into a left and a right wing. One year later, Qubilai had a Tangut Guard (*Tangwu wei* 唐兀衛) created, a Kipčak Guard (*Qincha wei* 欽察衛), and a “Runners Guard” (*guichi wei* 貴赤衛, from Mo. *güyügeci*).<sup>97</sup> In 1289, a New (Chinese) Personal Militant Guard (*wuwei xinjun* 武衛新軍) was brought into existence. Yet from the beginning, the Mongols had created special units of “ethnic troops”, for instance, regiments of Tangut (Ch. *Tangwu* 唐兀), Qarluq (Ch. Halalu 哈剌魯), Arghun (Ch. A’erhun 阿兒渾), and Uyghur (Ch. *Weiwu’er* 畏兀兒) people, to create a “racially balanced body” of guards.<sup>98</sup> All these nations had accepted the sovereignty of the Mongols and thus became part of their federation. This required their participation in the “obligatory and self-sustaining military system”<sup>99</sup> of the Mongols.

That practically the whole Mongol core army consisted of guards has to do with the dual function of the guardsmen as civilian and military functionaries. In the early phase of the Mongol empire, the guard also functioned as a household establishment, and guardsmen were charged with secular duties, such as assessing taxes, processing petitions or managing the arsenals and the falconry. Unlike in the Chinese system, where the use of honorific titles was a widespread custom, members of the guard as “soldier-servants” of the Khan did indeed serve in both military and civilian functions.<sup>100</sup>

The “nationalization” and bureaucratization of new Chinese bodies of troops – either recruited from among former subjects of the Jin empire or those of the Southern Song – posed no greater problem for the Yuan dy-

---

13, and Farquhar (1990), 36. The term “Chinese” as used here is somewhat ambiguous as it includes both ethnic Han Chinese of South China (*nanren* 南人), as well as northern residents that might alternatively be classified as Han Chinese (*Hanren* 漢人), Kitan or Jurchen. The most comprehensive published study on the Semuren is Funada (1999).

<sup>97</sup> Farquhar (1990), 272 (no. 50), and 260 (no. 48.21), where the foundation of the Runners’ Guard is dated 1276.

<sup>98</sup> Farquhar (1990), 274 (no. 50.4); Hsiao (1978), 45.

<sup>99</sup> Hsiao (1978), 7.

<sup>100</sup> Allsen (1986), 509-511, and 514.



nasty. This was different for the Mongolian and other ethnic troops because it infringed upon the privileges of their nobility.<sup>101</sup>

The military organization of tribes was arranged in multiples of ten:

You see, when a Tartar [Mongol] prince goes forth to war, he takes with him, say, 100,000 horse. Well, he appoints an officer to every ten men, one to every hundred, one to every thousand, and one to every ten thousand, so that his orders have to be given to ten persons only, to other ten, and so on; no one having to give orders to more than ten. And every one in turn is responsible to only to the officer immediately over him; and the discipline and order that comes of this method is marvellous, for they are a people very obedient to their chiefs. Further, they call the corps of 100,000 men a *tuc* [*tut*, from Tü./Mo. *tuy* “yak-tail banner”]; that of 10,000 they call *toman* [Mo. *tümen*]; the thousand they call ... [text missing, Mo. *mingyan*]; the hundred *guz* [Tü. *yüz* or Mo. *ǰayun*]; the ten ... [text missing, Mo. *arban*]<sup>102</sup>

Such arrangements in “chiliarchies” of battalions of 1,000 and “myriarchies” of brigades of 10,000 can be seen in the military system of the Jurchens from a century earlier, called *meng’an mouke* 猛安謀克,<sup>103</sup> and is described by Carpini. The latter speaks of “decani”, “centenarii”, and “millenarii”. A unit of 10,000 was commanded by an officer called “darkness” (*tenebre*), which is perhaps a distortion of the Mongolian word *tümen*.<sup>104</sup> Chinese sources confirm the decimal arrangement. Yet battalions (*qianhusuo* 千戶所) with a nominal size of 1,000 men were in practice often just as strong as 300 to 700.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Hsiao (1978), 15.

<sup>102</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), I/LIV: 261-262. No transmitted version of the Marco Polo text has a complete wording of this passage, cf. the “Electronic Ramusio” of Eugenio Burgio et al., or Boivin, Harf-Lancner and Mathey-Maille (2003), 33, where no missing words are indicated. Kinoshita (2016), 70: 57, however, translates “*tomans* can be counted by thousands, hundreds, or tens”. The additions of the presumable Mongol terms are derived from Alemany (2000), 405.

<sup>103</sup> Hsiao (1978), 8.

<sup>104</sup> Hildinger (1996), 71, 125n43. See also Pelliot (1959-1973), no. 252 (*guz*), no. 364 (*toman*), and no. 367 (*tut*).

<sup>105</sup> Chen and Shi (1996), 197.

Among the Mongols, warfare was seen as a hereditary profession, which means that the post of soldier was passed on to the oldest son. Tribal leaders of the steppe people were obliged to raise troops from among their tribesman. Only with the takeover of north China was the recruitment practice gradually centralized. An edict from 1267 required that one male person was to be recruited from among 2 to 3 households, or three men from among 6 to 7 households.<sup>106</sup>

The hereditary character of the army demanded that ranks were regularly restocked by drafting of young men for “cadet armies” (Ch. *qiekundu* 怯困都, from Mo. *keüked* “sons, children”), a custom made a law in 1282. This system of military households (*junhuzhi* 軍戶制) allowed for a relatively large standing army.

The conquered territories were secured by occupation or elite troops<sup>107</sup> (*tammači*, Ch. *tanmachi* 探馬赤, perhaps literally Chinese “reconnoitering cavalry”, plus suffix actoris *-či*, or Mo. *tamayači* “seal holder” or *tamači* “persons rounding up [game]”)<sup>108</sup> drafted from regular units of different ethnic stock, mainly tribes that Činggis Qayan had subjected, like Ĵalayir, Qonggirad, Ikire, Uru’ut, and Manyud. After 1262, these *tammači* “vanguard troops” became independent units, and they also absorbed non-Mongolian Semu people, with the effect that a substantial part of these troops was called “Western vanguard” (*Xiyu tanmachi* 西域探馬赤).<sup>109</sup>

From the beginning, the Mongols integrated Chinese troops (*Hanjun* 漢軍) into their army, the first units of 1214 coming from the Jin empire (Jurchens, Kitans, Koreans etc.). After 1232, the Mongols drafted Chinese troops in north China, and integrated surrendering units from the Song empire (*xinfujun* 新附軍 “newly attached troops”). During the period of the southern conquest, the Mongols had to hugely increase their armies, and recruited up to one third of all households in North China.<sup>110</sup> In 1277, for

<sup>106</sup> Chen and Shi (1996), 186.

<sup>107</sup> May (2007), 36-38.

<sup>108</sup> An overview on the theories of the origin of the word can be found in Ma Tian (2018), 59.

See also Qu Dafeng (2001) and Ostrowski (1998).

<sup>109</sup> Ma Tian (2018).

<sup>110</sup> He Shouquan (1987), 388.

instance, 200,000 “newly attached troops” were drafted,<sup>111</sup> and that was only one round of conscription. It seems that the Chinese troops served as cannon fodder during the wars of conquest in China proper.<sup>112</sup>

After 1279, when the Yuan finally replaced the Song dynasty as masters of China, the Mongols began to standardize all types of troops, with the central units built around the *kešig* Guard, and local units located throughout the empire. Some of them had special purposes, like the “salt troops” (*yanjun* 鹽軍) in Zhejiang and other provinces, which were recruited to control the salt trade and arrest smugglers.<sup>113</sup>

It can be seen that there were many changes in the military system of the early Yuan dynasty and still no regular system. Practically nothing of this information is passed on by Marco Polo’s book, perhaps because of the provisional character of the whole army, but also because Marco was apparently not overly familiar with this field of administration.

## Alans in the Mongol Army

One exception to his rather blurred knowledge about the Yuan military organisation is Marco’s observation that Alan troops participated in the conquest of Changzhou, on which he explains that:

[...] at the time of the conquest of [city of Cingnju = Changzhou] the great province of Manzi [South China], when Bayan [Ch. Boyan 伯顏, 1236-1295] was in command, he sent a company of his troops, consisting of a people called Alans, who are Christians, to take this city.<sup>114</sup>

Alans are also mentioned in the report of Carpini<sup>115</sup> and that of Rubruck, who dedicates two chapters to them (ch. 11 and 18) and mentions them frequently throughout his book. In Chinese sources, the Alans are called Asu 阿速, Asu 阿宿, Asuti 阿速惕, Asi 阿思 or Alan 阿蘭, in older times

---

<sup>111</sup> Chen and Shi (1996), 191.

<sup>112</sup> Chen and Shi (1996), 192.

<sup>113</sup> Chen and Shi (1996), 191.

<sup>114</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/LXXXVI: 178; Kinoshita (2016), 150: 131.

<sup>115</sup> Hildinger (1996), 67, 92, 103.

also transcribed as Yancai 奄蔡,<sup>116</sup> and they appear in the *Yuanshi* mainly in the shape of the Alan Guard (*Asu qinjun* 阿速親軍, *Asu wei* 阿速衛, *Asu weijun* 阿速衛軍 or *Asu weibing* 阿速衛兵). Marco Polo became acquainted with their military units when they were still in an embryonic state. In the later decades of the Yuan period, new guard units were created which consisted mainly of Semuren, like the Left and Right Kipčak Guard (*zuo-you Qincha wei* 左右欽察衛), the Left and Right Alan Guard (*zuo-you Asu wei* 左右阿速衛) or the Tangut Guard (*Tangwu wei* 唐兀衛). Alans were also found in the Guard of Longzhen Garrison (*Longzhen wei* 隆鎮衛), and the Guard of Wuwei [Garrison] (Wuwei Asu 武威阿速).<sup>117</sup> These guard troops were garrisoned around the capital Dadu 大都 (Qayanbaliq, today's Beijing), and protected the capital and patrolled the streets. During their leisure time, they worked on the fields of agro-colonies (*tuntian*) to supply their garrisons with food, while during wartime they participated in campaigns.

The Alan Guard became more important during the reign of Külüg Qayan (Emperor Wuzong 元武宗, r. 1307-1311) and played a crucial, almost praetorian, role in the fratricidal wars of the late Yuan dynasty,<sup>118</sup> as they occupied prominent positions in the Guards, and were integrated in the central Bureau of Military Affairs (*shumiyuan* 樞密院).<sup>119</sup> For some Alan leaders and their lineages, the *Yuanshi* provides biographies.<sup>120</sup> The earliest known leader of the Alans, Kanghusi 抗忽思, joined Batu (Ch. Badu 拔都, 1205-1255) in 1236. His son Atachu 阿塔出 was in Möngke's army that conquered Sichuan, and participated in the war against Qaidu. In 1274, he was ordered to keep in check the northernmost Song stronghold in Chaoxian 巢縣 (today's Chaohu 巢湖, Anhui), where he was assassinated by a Song defector. His son Baidar (Ch. Bota'er 伯塔兒) obtained

<sup>116</sup> Su Beihai (1998). Alemany (2000), 399, even assumes that the ancient Wusun 烏孫 were Alans.

<sup>117</sup> Alemany (2000), 407; Farquhar (1990), 247 (no. 48.17).

<sup>118</sup> See Yeo Chi-ho (2012). Thanks to Philipp Münster for supporting me with the Korean reading.

<sup>119</sup> Alemany (2000), 403.

<sup>120</sup> A complete list of Alan leaders in the service of the Yuan dynasty is provided by Ye Xinmin (1983), 112-113. Alemany (2000), 408-421 presents genealogies of the Alan leaders whose names are transmitted.

his battalion command and likewise collected laurels in the suppression of rebellions of Chinese subjects and Mongol princes. Bota'er was given the title of Chief Military Commissioner of the Bodyguard (*wei qinjun du zhi-huishi* 衛親軍都指揮使) and "Heroic" *daruyaçi* of the Alans (*Asu badu daluhuachi* 阿速拔都達魯花赤).<sup>121</sup>

Another Alan commander in the army of Möngke was Yuwashi 玉哇失.<sup>122</sup> He participated in Qubilai's feud against Ariy Böke (Ch. Ali Buge 阿里不哥, c. 1219-1266), and is said to have served during the siege of Xiangyang and during the conquest of the lower Yangtze region. His son Yesüder (Ch. Yesudai'er 也速歹兒) died during the siege of Yangzhou 揚州 (by Marco called Yangiu, in Jiangsu). Marco Polo reports that there were many troops garrisoned in the region during his time as a "governor" of the city.<sup>123</sup> The grandson of Yuwashi, whom we may call Yuwashi Junior (d. 1306), belonged to the vanguard troops sent out by Qubilai to engage the rebel Prince Nayan in the northeast. Yuwashi was effective in capturing Nayan alive.<sup>124</sup> Later on, he played a certain role in the war against Qaidu.

A further person worth mentioning is Nikolaos (Ch. Niegula 捏古剌), who fought at the fortress of Diaoyushan 釣魚山 (Diaoyucheng 釣魚城, close to Chongqing). His sons continued to serve the Mongols in high military positions.<sup>125</sup> The same is true for Arslan (Ch. A'ersilan 阿兒思蘭) and his sons.<sup>126</sup> Qutluy Temür (Ch. Hudu Tiemu'er 忽都帖木兒, d. 1311) served under Qaišan (Ch. Haishan 海山) in the war against Qaidu.<sup>127</sup> Matarsa (Ch. Mata'ersha 馬塔兒沙), an older brother of Bayatur (Ch. Baduer 拔都兒, d. 1297), died during the siege of Diaoyushan. Bayatur distinguished himself in the campaign against Nayan in 1287 and was made "General of Far-Reaching Authority" (*guangwei jiangjun* 廣威將軍) and Vice Military Commissioner of the Rear Guard (*houwei qinjun fu du*

<sup>121</sup> *Yuanshi*, 132: 3205; Hucker (1985), 537 (no. 7199).

<sup>122</sup> *Yuanshi*, 132: 3208-3209.

<sup>123</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/LXVIII: 154; Kinoshita (2016), 144: 127.

<sup>124</sup> The story is found in Yule and Cordier (1993), II/IV: 339; Kinoshita (2016), 79: 70, but without mentioning the person who captured Nayan.

<sup>125</sup> *Yuanshi*, 123: 3037.

<sup>126</sup> *Yuanshi*, 123: 3038.

<sup>127</sup> *Yuanshi*, 132: 3219.

*zhihuishi* 後衛親軍副都指揮使).<sup>128</sup> Šira Bayatur (Ch. Shila Badu'er 失刺拔都兒) was a high commander in Bayan's army during the conquest of the Song in 1274, and in Prince Heyuanlu's 和元魯 division in the campaign against Nayan.<sup>129</sup>

Even if Marco Polo's report does not tell the names of Alan commanders, Chinese sources give evidence that Alan troops and commanders played crucial roles in virtually all military campaigns of importance taking place during the time the Polos dwelled in China.

## Weapon Manufactures

In the decade before the Polos arrived in China, the Mongol state began to implement a stricter weapons policy, and transformed the private weapons industry into a business owned by the state. During the 1260s there was heavy punishment applied to all those privately producing weapons, but when the court decided to annihilate the Southern Song and was therefore in need of weaponry, the harsh policy of nationalization of arms manufacturing was somewhat relaxed. This was in the 1270s, when Marco Polo began his life in Yuan China. The weapons policy still followed the old paradigm that individual military units had to provide their arms themselves, and thus gave sufficient leeway to the possibility to procure weapons from a private market. The central Directorate for Armaments (*junqijian* 軍器監),<sup>130</sup> founded in 1268, was in 1283 renamed Directorate of Imperial Armaments (*wubeijian* 武備監), and a year later Court of Imperial Armaments (*wubeisi* 武備寺).<sup>131</sup>

In 1285, the Yuan court initiated central production of arms, and fixed numbers to be supplied to each garrison. In 1293, the year when Marco Polo left China, private production of weaponry was prohibited, and craftsmen became employees of state-owned workshops.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>128</sup> *Yuanshi*, 132: 3212.

<sup>129</sup> *Yuanshi*, 135: 3284.

<sup>130</sup> Hucker (1985), 200 (no. 1738), a title derived from the Song administration.

<sup>131</sup> Hucker (1985), 572 (no. 7809).

<sup>132</sup> Chen and Shi (1996), 229-231.

Marco Polo was quite interested in weapons manufacturing and mentions this fact in cities where the business was of some importance,<sup>133</sup> as

Tai'anfu [= Taiyuanfu 太原府] is a place of great trade and great industry, for here they manufacture a large quantity of the most necessary equipments for the army of the Emperor.<sup>134</sup>

[The craftsmen in Kenjanfu = Jingzhaofu 京兆府 = Chang'an 長安, present-day Xi'an 西安, Shaanxi] also manufacture all sorts of equipments for an army.<sup>135</sup>

The people [of Yanju = Yangzhou] live by trade and manufactures, for a great amount of harness for knights and men-at-arms is made there.<sup>136</sup>

On the backdrop of the weapon manufacturing policy described above, it seems that Marco Polo experienced the last blooming of a private arms industry. The official history of the Yuan dynasty provides information on places where supervisory agencies of [state-owned] weapon manufacturers (*junqi renjiang tijusi* 軍器人匠提舉司) were located.<sup>137</sup> A general and diverse arms industry was found in the cities of Datong 大同, Pingyang 平陽, Taiyuan 太原, Baoding 保定, Zhending 真定, Huaimeng 懷孟, Henan 河南, Shangdu 上都, Liaohe 遼河, Fengshengzhou 奉聖州, Weizhou 蔚州, Xuandefu 宣德府, Dongping 東平, Daning 大寧, Runingfu 汝寧府, and Longxing 隆興. Armour was produced in Tongzhou 通州, Jizhou 薊州, and Dadu 大都, arrows in Yidu 益都 and Jinan 濟南, and bows and arrow strings in Dadu.

The arms manufacturing supervision of Datong, for example, was responsible for the armour office (*jiaju* 甲局) of Fengzhou 豐州, Yingzhou 應州, Pingdi 平地, Shanyin 山陰, and Baideng 白登, as well as the bow office (*gongju* 弓局) of Fengzhou and Saifuding 賽甫丁. In the circuit of Pinglu, there were offices for various sorts of manufacture (*zazaoju* 雜造局), and the armour office of Jiangzhou 絳州. Quite outstanding against all other supervisions was the supervision of bow manufacturers

<sup>133</sup> Haw (2006), 159.

<sup>134</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/XXXVII:13; Kinoshita (2016), 107: 94.

<sup>135</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/XLI: 24; Kinoshita (2016), 111: 97.

<sup>136</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/LXVIII, 154; Kinoshita (2016), 144: 127.

<sup>137</sup> *Yuanshi*, 90: 2284-2288.

(*gongjiang tijusi* 弓匠提舉司) in the capital Dadu. The *daruyači* in charge oversaw the bow offices of Shuangta 雙搭, Chengjili 成吉里, and Tongzhou 通州.

Of all these cities, only Taiyuan is mentioned by Marco Polo. Yet one must bear in mind that Marco's observations also or perhaps only included the private business of which no records are provided in the *Yuanshi*. In contrast to what Marco says, the state-owned arms industry seems to have been rather small in the circuit of Taiyuan.

## Falconers

The Mongolian language has quite a few words for different species or types of hunting birds, like *angčün* "trained hunting falcon", *itelgü* "gyrfalcon, lanner falcon", *kegere kögsin* "gerfalcon", *načün* "falcon", *qarčayai* "falcon, hawk", *salbar* "falcon", *sar* "falcon, eagle, hawk, buzzard", or *singqur* "falcon, gerfalcon", and specialized words for handling falcons, like *ogibui* or *oriibüi* "to call back a falcon", *orkibui* "to release a falcon or hawk" or *urija* "whistle to lure hawks and gerfalcons".<sup>138</sup> However, also China had a long tradition of hunting with birds of prey.<sup>139</sup>

Rubruck dedicates a full paragraph to the description of how the Mongols released gerfalcons.

They have an abundance of gerfalcons which they uniformly carry on the right hand, and they always put a little thong round the falcon's neck which hangs down to the middle of his chest: when they cast him at the prey, they use this with the left hand to hold the falcon's head and chest at a downward angle, so that he is not hurled back by the wind or carried upwards.<sup>140</sup>

Marco Polo provides more detailed information on hunting birds, like name tags attached to the birds' feet. Lost birds were collected by an officer

---

<sup>138</sup> Lessing (1960).

<sup>139</sup> Schafer (1958).

<sup>140</sup> Jackson (1990), 85.



(“a baron”) called *bularguchi* “keeper of lost property”.<sup>141</sup> Marco amazes his readers by statements like the following:

In fact, those 360,000 horsemen that [the Great Khan] got together consisted merely of the falconers and whippers-in that were about the court!<sup>142</sup>

He takes with him full 10,000 falconers, and some 500 gerfalcons besides peregrines [*Falco peregrinus*], sakers [*Falco cherrug*], and other hawks in great numbers; and goshawks also to fly at the water-fowl [...] And let me tell you when he goes thus a-fowling with his gerfalcons and other hawks, he is attended by full 10,000 men who are disposed in couples, and these are called *toscaol*, which is as much as to say, ‘watchers’.<sup>143</sup>

The number 10,000 might be a hint that falconers were organized in *tomans* or brigades, like military units. An army of 360,000 men would consist of 36 brigades. Marco’s statement that this army was mainly composed of falconers and dog handlers must perhaps not be taken too literally, but gives evidence of the great importance hunting and sporting played for the Mongol elite. Physical activities served to train the body in peacetime, and hunting – either with birds or with hounds – was thus a widespread activity in leisure time. The statement of Marco shows that even during military campaigns, the Mongols took with them falcons and hounds. The Great Khan was in daily life permanently surrounded by large groups of hunters and falconers and could immediately make them ready for war in case of need. The dual use of functionaries as military men and huntsmen corresponds to the principle of the early Mongol period that the Khan’s guard was the core of the civilian central administration, including the imperial household. It is therefore no surprise that even a senior minister might serve his sovereign as a falconer on occasion.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Pelliot (1959-1973), no. 86. The word *bularyučī* is attested only in Il-Khanid sources.

<sup>142</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/III: 335; Kinoshita (2016), 78: 69.

<sup>143</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), II/XX: 402-403; Kinoshita (2016), 94: 82. On the word *toscaol*, which is quite probably of Türkic origin, consult Pelliot (1959-1973), no. 365. Haw (2006), 129, analyses the geographical habitats of the birds of prey in question.

<sup>144</sup> Allsen (1986), 520-521.

Chinese sources give evidence of the existence of hunting brigades (*xibaochi* 昔寶赤 or *xibochoi* 昔博赤, from Mo. *sibayuči*, lit. “person handling birds”) that are mentioned side by side with night watch guards (*halači*), Alan guards (*Asu wei* 阿速衛), gelding overseers (*atachi* 阿塔赤, Mo. *aytači*),<sup>145</sup> and runner guards (*guiyouchi* 貴由赤, Mo. *güyügeči*)<sup>146</sup> that participated in military campaigns (*cong zheng* 從征).<sup>147</sup> Members of the night watch which had the status of *Kešig* were expected to master bow and arrow, as well as to hunt with hawks and falcons (*yingsun* 鷹隼). For those mastering both skills, the designations “bearer of arrow-tip cases” (*huo'erchi* 火兒赤, Mo. *horči*),<sup>148</sup> “falconer” (*xibaochi*), and “bondman” (*qieliianchi* 怯憐赤, Mo. *gerünči*)<sup>149</sup> were reserved.<sup>150</sup> Marco’s number of units of 500 falcons (or falcon handlers) might be attested by an incident in which the Khan presented with grain some 578 falconers whose reserves had run out.<sup>151</sup>

Falconers were organized in falconer households (*xibaochi hukou* 昔寶赤戶口), and thus belonged to the typical hereditary professions of the social system of the Mongol empire. Another term for falcon handlers is “men capping the falcons” (*gaiyingren* 蓋鷹人).<sup>152</sup> It might be that they were but assistants to chief falconers who were responsible for flying the birds. The Great Khan himself owned 1,374 falconer households organized in eight falconry offices (*dabuying fang* 打捕鷹房). Princes of blood had falconries (*dabusuo* 打捕所) of their own.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Farquhar (1990), 89 (no. 3c).

<sup>146</sup> Farquhar (1990), 260 (no. 48.21).

<sup>147</sup> *Yuanshi*, 13: 274; see also 17: 368 and 18: 385. Another Mongolian word for falconer is *qarcayači*.

<sup>148</sup> Farquhar (1990), 245 (no. 47).

<sup>149</sup> Farquhar (1990), 285n34.

<sup>150</sup> *Yuanshi*, 99: 2524. On the importance of *gerünči* for diplomatic matters, see He Canwen (2015).

<sup>151</sup> *Yuanshi*, 15: 327.

<sup>152</sup> *Yuanshi*, 101: 2599.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

## Conclusions

We cannot rule out that Ismāʿīl, one of the Central Asian poliorcetic experts who during the siege of Xiangyang replaced the traditional mangonels by counterweight catapults, was a Nestorian Christian. For this reason, Marco Polo's mentioning of Nestorians in "his entourage", might reflect the presence of Ismāʿīl and others during the siege, even if it is for sure that no one of the Polo family was present during the battles. Yet Chinese sources draw a much more detailed picture of the ballistic machines of the Yuan army and their technical advancements.

In contrast to earlier reports on the Mongol warrior which only speak of a hit-and-flight tactic, Marco Polo makes clear that the "Tartars" applied a very flexible approach that included the option of close combat with hand weapons also in combination with infantry troops. The traveller's report of how the Mongols overcame, with a substantially smaller body of troops, the army of Mien with their huge contingent of war elephants, corresponds to other experiences in which elephants were driven away by showers of long-range weapons. Marco's mentioning of Alan troops in the heart of China can be substantiated by Chinese sources. Alans (Asu) played an important role among the many ethnically divided guard units of the Mongol army and won laurels in crucial military campaigns fought during the time the Polos were dwelling in China. Some names of Alan leaders show that they were perfectly integrated in the Mongolian empire.

Yet concerning the organization of the Yuan army, Marco Polo only provides a very rough picture that does not reflect the multi-ethnic character of the Yuan army. His statements concerning weapons manufacturing, on the other hand, give evidence of economic activities not found in original sources of the time, as these only refer to matters where the state was involved, and not private entrepreneurship. Marco's statements about the arms industry are thus a testimony of a private artisanal world that was by and by subordinated to state control during the time he stayed in China. The *Description of the World* gives also evidence of the great importance falconers played among the Mongol hunting campaigns and military organization.

## References

- Allsen, Thomas T. (1986). "Guard and Government in the Reign of the Grand Qan Möngke, 1251-59", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 46 (2): 495-521.
- Allsen, Thomas T. (2002a). "The Circulation of Military Technology in the Mongolian Empire", in Nicola di Cosmo, ed. *Warfare in Inner Asian History, 500-1800* (Leiden: Brill), 265-293.
- Allsen, Thomas T. (2002b). *Technician Transfers in the Mongolian Empire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press).
- Allsen, Thomas T. (2014). "Population Movements in Mongol Eurasia", in Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran, eds. *Nomads as Agents of Cultural Change: The Mongols and Their Eurasian Predecessors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 119-151.
- Annan zhilüe* 安南志略, comp. by Lê Tác 黎則, c. 1435, in *Zhong-wai jiaotong shiji congkan* 中外交通史籍叢刊 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000).
- Baker, Chris; Phongpaichit, Pasuk (2017). *History of Ayutthaya: Siam in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Boivin, Jeanne-Marie; Laurence Harf-Lancner, and Laurence Mathey-Maille (2003). *Marco Polo: Le Divisement du monde, édition critique publiée sous la direction de Philippe Ménard*, tome II (Genève: Droz).
- Boyle, John Andrew (1971). *The Successors of Genghiz Khan* (New York and London: Columbia University Press).
- Chen Gaohua 陈高华; Shi Weimin 史卫民 (1996). *Zhongguo zhengzhi zhidu tongshi; diba juan, Yuandai* 中国政治制度史; 第八卷, 元代 (Complete History of Political Systems in China; Vol. 8, Yuan Period) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe).
- Di Cosmo, Nicola, ed. (2009). *Military Culture in Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press).
- "Electronic Ramusio", ed. by Samuela Simion and Eugenio Burgio (2013ff.). See URL <http://virgo.unive.it/ecf-workflow/books/Ramusio/main/index.html> (retrieved July 19, 2022).
- Endicott-West, Elizabeth (1989). *Mongolian Rule in China: Local Administration in the Yuan Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, and Harvard-Yenching Institute).
- Elvin, Mark (2004). *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

- Farquhar, David M. (1990). *The Government of China under Mongolian Rule* (Stuttgart: Steiner).
- Finkel, Caroline (2005). *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1823* (London: Murray).
- Franke, Herbert (1982). "Die Belagerung von Hsiang-yang: Eine Episode aus dem Krieg zwischen Sung und Chin (1206-1208)", in Dieter Eikemeier et al., *Ch'en-yüeh chi: Tileman Grimm zum 60. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Attempto), 77-90.
- Funada Yoshiyuki 船田善之 (1999). "Genchō jika no shikimokujin ni tsuite" 元朝治下の色目人について (On the Semuren under the Yuan Dynasty), *Shigaku zasshi* 史学雑誌, 108 (9): 1593-1618, 1715.
- Gommans, Jos (2002). *Mugal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and High Roads to Empire, 1500-1700* (London and New York: Routledge).
- Guzman, Gregory G. (2010). "European Captives and Craftsmen Among the Mongols, 1231-1255", *The Historian*, 72 (1): 122-150.
- Harvey, G.E. (1925). *History of Burma: From the Earliest Times to 10 March 1824, the Beginning of the English Conquest* (London etc.: Longmans, Green & Co.).
- Haw, Stephen G. (2006). *Marco Polo in China: A Venetian in the Realm of Kubilai Khan* (London and New York: Routledge).
- He Canwen 合灿温 (2015). "Qieliangkou zai Yuan-Li guanxi zhong de shuangfang shenfen" 怯怜口在元丽关系中的双重身份 (The Ambivalent Position of *qieliangkou* Bondmen in the Relation Between the Yuan Empire and the Kingdom of Koryō), *Suihua xueyuan xuebao* 绥化学院学报, 35 (3): 99-102.
- He Shouquan 何寿全 et al., ed. (1987). *Zhongguo junshi shi; disan juan, Bingzhi* 中国军事史; 第三卷, 兵制 (Military History of China; Vol. 3, Military Systems) (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe), 385-398.
- Hildinger, Erik (1996). *The Story of the Mongols Whom We Call the Tartars; Historia Mongalorum quos nos Tartaros appellamus: Friar Giovanni di Plano Carpini's Account of His Embassy to the Court of the Mongol Khan* (Boston, MA: Branden).
- Hildinger, Erik (2001). *Warriors of the Steppe: A Military History of Central Asia, 500 B.C. to 1700 A.D.* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo).
- Hsiao Ch'i-ch'ing (1978). *The Military Establishment of the Yuan Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press).
- Hu Fengyu 胡风雨 (2017). "Huihui pao zai Song-Yuan Xiang-Fan zhi zhan de yingyong ji dui houshi de yingxiang" 回回炮在宋元襄樊之战的应用及对后

- 世的影响 (The Use of Western Catapults in the Song-Yuan Conflict about the City of Fancheng and Its Influence on Later Ages), *Hubei wenli xueyuan xuebao* 湖北文理学院学报, 38 (1): 26-30.
- Hucker, Charles O. (1985). *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford University Press).
- Jackson, Peter, ed. (1990). *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253-1255* (Surrey: Ashgate).
- Jinshi* 金史 (History of the Jin [Dynasty]), comp. by Tuo Tuo 脱脱, 1344 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975).
- Kinoshita, Sharon (2016). *Marco Polo: The Description of the World* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett).
- Kinoshita, Sharon, (2021). "Sheep, Elephants, and Marco Polo's *Devisement du monde*", in Jane Gilbert and Miranda Griffin, eds. *The Futures of Medieval French: Essays in Honour of Sarah Kay* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer), 314-328.
- Kistler, John M. (2006). *War Elephants* (Westport and London: Praeger).
- Lessing, Ferdinand D. (1960). *Mongolian-English Dictionary* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press).
- Li Wentian 李文田 (1898). *Yuanshi diming kao* 元史地名考 (An Investigation of Place Names in the *Yuanshi*) (*Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 edition, 2002).
- Li Zhi'an 李治安 (2009). "Yuandai Hanren shou Menggu wenhua yingxiang kaoshu" 元代汉人受蒙古文化影响考述 (A Research on the Influence of Mongolian Culture on Personal Names of Han Chinese During the Yuan Period), *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究, 1: 24-50.
- Ma Jianchun 马建春 (2002). "Qincha, Asu, Woluosi ren zai Yuanchao de huodong" 钦察、阿速、斡罗思人在元朝的活动 (Kipčaks, Alans and Russians in the Activities of the Yuan Dynasty), *Xibei minzu yanjiu* 西北民族研究, 35 (4): 23-40.
- Ma Tian 马天 (2018). "Yuandai junzhi 'tanmachi' zhong de semu benti ji qi lishi gongji" 元代军制 "探马赤" 中的色目本体及其历史功绩 (The Semu Character and the Historical Merits of *tanmachi* Troops in the Military System of the Yuan Period), *Beijing daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 北华大学学报(社会科学版), 19 (4): 58-63.
- May, Timothy (2007). *The Mongol Art of War: Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Military System* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military).

- May, Timothy (2019). "Military Integration in Mongol Warfare: The Development of Combined Arms Warfare in the Mongol Empire", *Acta Mongolica*, 18 (532), 41-52.
- Nicolle, David (1993). *Mughul India, 1504-1761* (London: Osprey).
- Nossov, Konstanin (2008). *War Elephants* (London: Osprey).
- Olschki, Leonardo; John A. Scott, transl. (1960). *Marco Polo's Asia: An Introduction to his "Description of the World," Called "Il milione"* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press).
- Ostrowski, Donald (1998). "The *tamma* and the Dual-administrative Structure of the Mongol Empire", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 61 (2): 262-277.
- Pelliot, Paul (1959-1973). *Notes on Marco Polo: Ouvrage posthume* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale and Adrien-Maisonneuve).
- Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1806). *Yuanshi shizu biao* 元史氏族表 (Genealogical Tables in the *Yuanshi*) (*Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 edition, 2002).
- Qu Dafeng 瞿大风 (2001). "Zai shi 'tanmachi' yi ci ji qi yu 'tanmachi jun' de guanxi" 再释 "探马赤" 一词及其与 "探马赤军" 的关系 (A New Explanation for the Term *tanmachi* and Its Relation to the 'tanmachi Troops'), *Neimenggu shehui kexue (Hanwen ban)* 内蒙古社会科学(汉文版), 22 (2): 40-42.
- Schafer, Eduard H. (1957). "War Elephants in Ancient and Medieval China", *Oriens*, 10 (2): 289-291.
- Schafer, Edward Hetzel (1958). "Falconry in T'ang Times", *T'oung Pao*, second series, 46 (3-5): 293-338.
- Sinor, Denis (1981). "The Inner Asian Warriors", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 101 (2): 133-144.
- Songshi* 宋史 (History of the Song [dynasty]), comp. by Tuo Tuo 脱脱 et al., 1345 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1977).
- Su Beihai 苏北海 (1998). "Zhongyuan Yancai: Asu zu kao" 中原奄蔡——阿速族考 (Alans in the Central Plain: An Investigation into the Asu Tribes), *Xinjiang daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 新疆大学学报(哲学社会科学版), 26 (3): 44-51.
- Suishu* 隋書 (History of the Sui [dynasty]), comp. by Wei Zheng 魏征, 636 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973).
- Turnbull, Stephen; illustrated by Wayne Reynolds (2003). *Mongol Warrior, 1200-1350* (Botley, Oxford: Osprey).

- Vogel, Hans Ulrich (2013). *Marco Polo Was in China: New Evidence from Currencies, Salts and Revenues* (Leiden and Boston: Brill).
- (Wanli) *Xiangyangfu zhi* (萬曆襄陽府志 (Local Gazetteer of Xiangyang, Wanli Edition), comp. by Wu Dao'er 吳道邇, 1584 (*Zhongguo difangzhi* 中國地方誌 edition, 1981).
- Wilson, Peter H. (2008). "Defining Military Culture", *Journal of Military History*, 72 (1): 11-41.
- Wujing zongyao* 武經總要 (Compendium of Important Matters from the Military Classics), comp. by Zeng Gongliang 曾公亮 and Ding Du 丁度, 1045 (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 edition, 1792).
- Xiangyang shoucheng lu* 襄陽守城錄 (The Defence of the City of Xiangyang), comp. by Zhao Wannian 趙萬年, 1207 (*Zhongguo yeshi jicheng* 中國野史集成 edition, 1993).
- Ye Xinmin 叶新民 (1983). "Yuandai de Qincha, Kangli, Asu, Tangwu weijun" 元代的钦察、康里、阿速、唐兀卫军 (Kipčaks, Qangli, Alans, and Tanguts During the Yuan Period), *Neimenggu shehui kexue* 内蒙古社会科学, 3 (6): 109-115.
- Yeo Chi-ho 呂治昊 (2012). "Wöndaе Asūin ūi taedu wa chöngch'ichök yökhal" 元代아스人(Asud)의擡頭와政治的役割 (The Political and Social Roles of Alan Leaders During the Yuan Period), *Tongyang sahak yön'gu* 東洋史學研究, 120 (9): 181-222.
- Yuanchao zheng Mian lu* 元朝征緬錄 (Record of the Yuan Dynasty's Expedition to Mian), anon., no date (*Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 edition, 1935).
- Yuanshi* 元史 (History of the Yuan [Dynasty]), comp. by Song Lian 宋濂, 1370 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976).
- Yule, Henry (1913). *Cathay and the Way Thither, being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, New Edition, Revised throughout in the Light of Recent Discoveries by Henri Cordier, Vol. II: *Odoric of Pordenone*. (London: Hakluyt).
- Yule, Henry; Cordier, Henri (1993 [1903]). *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Complete Yule-Cordier Edition, Including the Unabridged Third Edition (1903) of Henry Yule's Annotated Translation, as Revised by Henri Cordier; together with Cordier's Later Volume of Notes and Addenda (1920)* (New York: Dover [London: Murray]).
- Zhang Wei 张卫; Hu Gen'gen 胡根根 (2018). "Xiangyang gucheng junshi gongfang gongcheng kongjian geju yanjiu 襄阳古城军事攻防工程空间格局研究



(A Research on the Defence Constructions and Spatial Structure of the Old City of Xiangyang)”, *Huazhong jianzhu* 华中建筑, 11: 134-137.

Zhou Zhengang 周振刚 (2020). “Make Boluo he Xiangyang 马可·波罗和襄阳 (Marco Polo and Xiangyang)”, *Xungen* 寻根, 2020 (3): 95-102.

# Marco Polo and the *kešig*, with a Further Note on the Toponym “Singui”

Stephen G. Haw

It has been suggested in the book *Marco Polo's China* (Haw 2006) that Marco Polo may have been a member of Qubilai Qa'an's *kešig* (personal bodyguard). The main evidence for this, the presence of what has been described as the silver belt “of a Tartar knight” among Marco's possessions at his death, has been questioned. This paper adduces additional evidence to support the hypothesis, particularly a previously little-noticed statement in Ramusio's edition of Marco Polo's book. It is pointed out that the extent of Marco's knowledge of the *kešig*, which was essentially a secret organization, would have been hard to acquire by anyone who was not actually a member. It is further suggested that membership of the *kešig* would be entirely consistent with what is known about Marco and his activities in the Yuan Empire. Further evidence is also presented regarding the identification of the toponym “Singui” in Marco Polo's book. It is maintained that the identification with Xizhou is correct.

## 1. Marco Polo and the *kešig*

In the book, *Marco Polo's China*, it is suggested that Marco Polo may have been a member of Qubilai Qa'an's *kešig*. One of the principal pieces of evidence adduced in support of this suggestion is that the extant inventory of Marco's possessions at his death includes “the silver belt of a Tartar knight”.<sup>1</sup> This statement is based on the authority of Leonardo Olschki,<sup>2</sup> but it has been questioned if the inventory really does include such an

---

<sup>1</sup> Haw (2006), 165-166.

<sup>2</sup> Olschki (1960), 105-106.

item.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it does not seem to be possible to find it in the published transcription of the inventory: several silver belts are certainly listed, but none seems to be described as “of a Tartar knight”.<sup>4</sup> It may be that these words were supplied by Olschki. I have not so far been able to check the original manuscript of the inventory. Nevertheless, even if this evidence proves to be non-existent, there are still sound reasons for the suggestion to be upheld.

The monk Jean le Long of Ypres, writing in the early 1350s (within 30 years of Marco’s death), stated that: “Marcus Pauli cum imperatore retentus, ab eo miles effectus ...”.<sup>5</sup> Henry Yule’s translation of this says that Marco was “retained by the Emperor and employed in his military service”.<sup>6</sup> This translation is inaccurate, however. Although in classical Latin *miles* simply means “soldier”, in medieval Latin it was used to mean a “knight”: “Latin documents used the Latin *miles* and the Anglo-Norman *chivaler* (or ... the French *chevalier*) interchangeably and indifferently”.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that Marco was not an ordinary soldier, but a retainer of Qubilai Qa’an with at least moderately high status. It is interesting to note that Marco defines *kešigten* as “knights and liegemen of the lord” (or “trusted knights of the lord”);<sup>8</sup> the manuscript designated F has: “chevalers et feelz dou seingnor”.<sup>9</sup> At least one version of the text of *The Description of the World* states that, as well as learning several of the languages of the Yuan court, Marco also learnt the archery of the Mongols.<sup>10</sup> If he had been made a soldier or knight by the Qa’an, then no doubt he would have needed to learn some of the Mongols’ military skills. Other indirect evidence, from

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Man (2009), 238-239.

<sup>4</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 554-558.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Marsden and Wright (1892), xxvi; and in D’Avezac (1841), 119.

<sup>6</sup> Yule and Cordier (1993), vol. 1, 121; see also Larner (1999), 130.

<sup>7</sup> Bell, Curry, King and Simpkin (2013), 55; see also Niermeyer (1976), 676-678.

<sup>8</sup> Cliff (2015), 108; Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 85-86.

<sup>9</sup> Eusebi and Burgio (2018), vol. 1, 107; Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, français 1116, f 38v. In the original manuscript, “chevalers” is abbreviated to “ch’rs”. On abbreviations of this kind, see below.

<sup>10</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 16.

his book, that Marco may have been a kešigtei, has been adduced in *Marco Polo's China*.<sup>11</sup> It is unnecessary to repeat it here.

There is, however, further evidence in Marco's book, which has generally been overlooked in the past. Despite a long acquaintance with the book, only comparatively recently did its full import become clear to me. The kešig was, to a very great extent, a "state secret". No one who was not an insider at the Yuan court could have had detailed knowledge of the kešig and its activities. It is, therefore, highly significant that Marco had such knowledge. It indicates that Marco was intimate with court life at the time of Qubilai Qa'an, and, in particular, with the activities of the kešig. The fact that Marco was able to give such an accurate account of the kešig<sup>12</sup> is highly suggestive, for even the *number* of palace guards (which included the kešigten) was secret.<sup>13</sup> A memorial written by Tash Temür, an administrator of the Privy Council, dated October/November 1319, states that even censors should not know the number of palace guards and that this was "a state regulation".<sup>14</sup> This was, by then, an old ordinance, for both Činggis Qan and Ögödei Qa'an are reported to have ordered: "One must not ask the number of nightguards".<sup>15</sup> Apart from Marco's own account, there are very few sources of information about the kešig extant today. The principal ones are *The Secret History of the Mongols (Yuanchao mishi)*, which contains material relating to its formation and early history,<sup>16</sup> and the *Yuan shi (History of the Yuan Dynasty)*.<sup>17</sup> Otherwise, there is only a limited amount of information in the *Guochao wenlei*,<sup>18</sup> later copied by Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 in his *Nan cun chuo geng lu*,<sup>19</sup> and isolated references to the activities of individual kešigten.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Haw (2006), 164-168.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-167.

<sup>13</sup> Endicott-West (1989), 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 8, *juan* 99, 2532. A translation of this memorial may be found in Hsiao (1978), 102.

<sup>15</sup> De Rachewiltz (2006), vol. 1, 158, 210; *Yuanchao mishi*, 228, 297.

<sup>16</sup> De Rachewiltz (2006), vol. 1, 113-114; 152-158; 209-213; *Yuanchao mishi*, 163-164; 219-228; 295-300.

<sup>17</sup> Mainly in *Yuan shi*, vol. 8, *juan* 99, 2523-2537; translated in Hsiao (1978), 92-108.

<sup>18</sup> Yuan Mingshan (c. 1320), 11a.

<sup>19</sup> Tao Zongyi (c. mid-fourteenth century), *juan* 1, 19.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Wang Yun (c. 1300), *juan* 84, 5b.

This paucity of material relating to the kešig reflects the secrecy surrounding it. Of the two major sources, the *Secret History* was, as its title indicates, essentially secret. It was only supposed to be read by members of the Mongol ruling class.<sup>21</sup> Only after the Mongols had been replaced as rulers of China by the Ming dynasty was this secrecy lifted. The *Yuan shi*, of course, was not compiled until the early years of the Ming period. The material it contains relating to the kešig probably came mainly from Yuan imperial archives, and would not have been freely available while the Mongols were still in power in China.

The information that Marco gives about the kešig agrees very closely with that in the *Yuan shi*. However, this work does not corroborate what he says about the clothes given to the kešigten by the Qa'an:<sup>22</sup> “no fewer than 12,000 barons and knights are dressed with him in a similar colour and style; naturally their clothes are not so costly, but they are all of the same colour and of silk and gold fabrics ... the Great Khan gives rich robes to these 12,000 barons and knights thirteen times a year, so that they are all dressed in robes matching his own ...”.<sup>23</sup> However, there is contemporary corroboration that Mongol lords did indeed dress their retainers in this way. The Armenian Vardan, who personally visited the Ilkhan Hülegü during a quriltai in 1264, describes how: “With all their nobles [the Činggisid qans] put on new clothes, each day changing into a different color ...”.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, Marco's book, in the version of the text edited by Ramusio, actually comes very close to stating that Marco was enrolled in the kešig. This text says that Qubilai Qa'an “held him [Marco] in great favour and made them write him among the other honoured members of his household, for which reason he was held of great account and value by all those at the court”.<sup>25</sup> Marsden's translation reads: “he caused him to be enrolled among his attendants of honour”.<sup>26</sup> Ramusio's original Italian text says: “& fecelo

---

<sup>21</sup> De Rachewiltz (2006), vol. 1, xlv.

<sup>22</sup> Haw (2006), 166-167.

<sup>23</sup> Cliff (2015), 111-112; cf. Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 221.

<sup>24</sup> Thomson (1989), 220; cf. Dulaurier (1860), 300-301.

<sup>25</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 85.

<sup>26</sup> Marsden and Wright (1892), 14.

scrivere tra gli altri suoi famigliari honorati”.<sup>27</sup> My own translation of this would be “had him inscribed among his other honoured attendants”. The kešigten were indeed the “honoured attendants” of the Qa’ans – they were the Qa’ans’ household, and included cooks, quiver bearers, grooms, musicians, scribes and various other personal servants.<sup>28</sup> “The Kesig was in charge of domestic services to the royal family”.<sup>29</sup> They were “the most important group of the emperor’s attendants and servitors (... which included also eunuchs and palace women); they were greatly honoured by the emperor”.<sup>30</sup> Marco was certainly not a woman, and, as he had children after his return to Venice,<sup>31</sup> it seems unlikely that he was a eunuch. If, in fact, he was enrolled as an honoured attendant of Qubilai Qa’an, then the probability is that he was enlisted as a member of the kešig. Indeed, if this passage from Ramusio’s edition of Marco’s book is considered alongside Jean Le Long’s statement that the Qa’an made Marco a knight, then the only reasonable conclusion is that, if both these statements are correct, Marco must indeed have been enrolled in the kešig. It is also worth noting that Marco claims to have been used by Qubilai Qa’an to undertake personal missions on the Qa’an’s behalf,<sup>32</sup> and that Činggis Qan included envoys among his kešigten.<sup>33</sup> It was common for members of the kešig to be sent on “a kind of detached service ... for purposes of carrying out an imperial commission. ... In this manner the emperor was kept abreast of conditions in all corners of the empire”.<sup>34</sup> This accords very well with the report that Qubilai Qa’an “entrusted him [Marco] with every mission of importance or to distant lands”.<sup>35</sup>

If Marco was a kešigtei, this might explain why he gives such prominence to the battle between the forces of Qubilai Qa’an and of Nayan. At the beginning of the section of the book that deals with Qubilai Qa’an, he

---

<sup>27</sup> Ramusio (1559), 3C.

<sup>28</sup> Farquhar (1990), 246-247; Allsen (1986), 509-510.

<sup>29</sup> Hsiao (1978), 37.

<sup>30</sup> Farquhar (1990), 247.

<sup>31</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 30.

<sup>32</sup> Cliff (2015), 11-12; Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 86-87.

<sup>33</sup> Hsiao (1978), 35.

<sup>34</sup> Allsen (1986), 518-519.

<sup>35</sup> Cliff (2015), 12; cf. Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 87.

gives a lengthy account of Nayan's alliance with Qaidu and how they plotted concerted action against Qubilai, and of the Qa'an's response and the defeat of Nayan.<sup>36</sup> The Qa'an, Marco tells us, made his preparations to march against Nayan very quickly, assembling an army composed only of men who were in and near the capital – including (according to Ramusio's text) his bodyguard;<sup>37</sup> “li deputati alla persona sua”.<sup>38</sup> It is therefore quite possible that Marco himself took part in the battle, unless he was away on a mission at the time. He might have been in Yunnan and Myanmar (Burma) in 1287-1288.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, even if not present in person, he would no doubt have heard all about the battle from other kešigten. It clearly remained impressed on his memory a decade or so later, when the book came to be written.<sup>40</sup>

Is it likely that Marco Polo, a young Venetian, unknown in Qubilai Qa'an's empire until he was about 20 years old, would have been enrolled in the Qa'an's kešig, apparently very shortly after his arrival at the Yuan court? After all, the kešig was a very important Mongol institution, and its members were highly privileged. Under Činggis Qan, the kešigten “were recruited from among the sons and younger brothers of [his] officials, the Chiliarchs, Centurions and Decurions, ... the sons of his vassals, and likely commoners”.<sup>41</sup> More or less from the beginning, the kešig of the Mongol Qans included non-Mongols. The famous Saiyid Ajall Shams al-Din (according to his biography in the *Yuan shi* – but more likely his father),<sup>42</sup> whose family was from Bukhara, was enrolled in the kešig of Činggis Qan in about 1220.<sup>43</sup> A later kešigtei, Dalima 答里麻, came from Gaochang 高昌 and was probably an Uighur: as his father's name was Sargis, he may

<sup>36</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 193-201; Cliff (2015), 88-93.

<sup>37</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 195-196; Cliff (2015), 89.

<sup>38</sup> Ramusio (1559), 20A.

<sup>39</sup> Haw (2006), 104.

<sup>40</sup> On Nayan's rebellion and the fact that Marco's account has at least the general facts right, see Pelliot (1963), 788-789.

<sup>41</sup> Farquhar (1990), 246.

<sup>42</sup> De Rachewiltz and Wang, eds. (1993), 467.

<sup>43</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 10, *juan* 125, 3063.

well have been from a Christian family.<sup>44</sup> There were also Alans from the Caucasus in the kešig: Atachi 阿塔赤 was enrolled in the kešig of Ögö-dei,<sup>45</sup> as also was Yelie Baduer 也烈拔都兒, whose son, Yuwashi 玉哇失, played a prominent role in the defeat of Nayan.<sup>46</sup> It would not be difficult to give examples of many more non-Mongol kešigten–Kipchaks, Uighurs, Tanguts, Jurchens, and various others, including Chinese.<sup>47</sup>

It is not, then, particularly surprising that the son of someone whom Qubilai Qa'an had entrusted with an embassy to the Pope, and who had returned to give a report of the mission which greatly pleased the Qa'an,<sup>48</sup> should have been favoured with such an appointment. Of course, the evidence is not conclusive, but it has in its favour the fact that it makes good sense. If Marco Polo was indeed a member of Qubilai Qa'an's kešig, then much that is in his book is elucidated: his detailed knowledge of Yuan court life, both at Dadu and at Shangdu; his journeys to remote parts of the Yuan Empire that were scarcely fully pacified at the time; his great loyalty to Qubilai Qa'an; his obvious interest in military affairs; his inclusion in the embassy taking a Mongol princess to the Ilkhan, which provided the opportunity for the Polos to return home.<sup>49</sup> All of this is fully consonant with his being a member of the kešig, nor does there seem to be anything in the book which contradicts such a hypothesis.

## 2. The Toponym "Singui"

Although it seems that most of my identifications of Marco Polo's Chinese toponyms have generally been accepted,<sup>50</sup> questions have been raised about a few of them, particularly my identification of "Singui", "Singiu",

---

<sup>44</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 11, *juan* 144, 3431. Dalima may be a Chinese transcription of "Tarim"; see Brose (2007), 242.

<sup>45</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 11, *juan* 132, 3205.

<sup>46</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 11, *juan* 132, 3208-3209.

<sup>47</sup> For examples of Chinese members of the kešig, see Allsen (1986), 508.

<sup>48</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 85; Cliff (2015), 10-11.

<sup>49</sup> Haw (2006), 42-43, 107, 159-168. On the return journey, see Cleaves (1976).

<sup>50</sup> Cliff (2015), xlv, accepts all but a very few: Haw "[c]onvincingly identifies nearly every Chinese place mentioned by Marco".



“Singuy” or “Silingui”.<sup>51</sup> I consider that this toponym should be identified with Xizhou 熙州, later Lintaofu 臨洮府, in present-day Gansu province.<sup>52</sup> This has been questioned and the old identification with modern Xining 西寧 reasserted.<sup>53</sup> To explain the fact that Xining is certainly not in the right place to be Marco’s Singui, Atwood has referred to: “Marco Polo’s tendency to get the story right, but the exact location wrong”.<sup>54</sup> As an example of this, Professor Atwood has cited to me the case of the Merkit.<sup>55</sup> It was probably from Atwood that Cliff obtained his information about the Merkit: “they were not a forest people but lived in a well-watered steppe region that was (and is) Mongolia’s main centre of agriculture. Marco seems to have confused them with the Barghu [Bargu] people who lived in the forests to the north”.<sup>56</sup> However, the Merkit had been thoroughly routed in the course of Činggis Qan’s campaigns during the early 1200s; they are even said to have been “annihilated”.<sup>57</sup> It is more than likely that those of them who survived had been forced to abandon their fields and take refuge in the forests. In fact, there is evidence for this in *The Secret History of the Mongols*. When Činggis Qan was rewarding his followers towards the end of his campaigns in Mongolia, he asked Sorqan Šira what he would like. The reply was: “If you are to favour me, let me have the free use of grazing grounds. Let me settle on and freely use the territory of the Merkit on the Selengge River”. Činggis Qan granted this request.<sup>58</sup> Clearly, then, the agricultural land of the Merkit in the “well-watered steppe region” around the Selengge (Selenga) was turned into pasture. Whether their agriculture had been revived by the time Marco was in China is very much open to question. It is doubtful that this example can be used to support Atwood’s claim, which, in my personal opinion, is spurious; Marco very rarely gets the story

---

<sup>51</sup> For all these and other variants, and the versions of the text in which they occur (mainly manuscripts, but also Ramusio’s printed edition), see Pelliot (1963), 832.

<sup>52</sup> Haw (2006), 90-91.

<sup>53</sup> Cliff (2015), 77, 374 n. 45; Atwood (2015), 33-34. On the identification of Singui with Xining, see Pelliot (1963), 832-833.

<sup>54</sup> Atwood (2015), 33 n. 38.

<sup>55</sup> Personal communication, 15 February 2016.

<sup>56</sup> Cliff (2015), 374 n42. Cliff (2015), li, records the assistance of Atwood.

<sup>57</sup> See De Rachewiltz (2006), vol. 1, 123, 126-128, 162-163; vol. 2, 724-725, 844.

<sup>58</sup> De Rachewiltz (2006), vol. 1, 149-150.

right but the location wrong.<sup>59</sup> In the case of Singui, there is little or no evidence that he did. Since he clearly indicates that this place was on a route from Wuwei 武威 in the Gansu corridor into China,<sup>60</sup> which Xining certainly is not,<sup>61</sup> the identification with Xining seems perverse.<sup>62</sup>

Atwood has recently tried to argue that Xining controlled an area which “would straddle the usual road from the Gansu corridor to the Wei River 渭河 Valley and North China”.<sup>63</sup> There are serious problems with this. Firstly, Atwood’s claim is purely speculative: there is no clear evidence for the existence of this supposed administrative area. Secondly, Marco’s text specifically states that the *city* of Singiu was on the road:

la mestre cité est Ergivul [Wuwei]. Et de cest cité ver iscieloc puet l’en aler es contrés dou Catai; et en ceste voie de seloc, ver le contré dou Catai, treuve une cité qui est apellés Singiu ...<sup>64</sup>  
the principal city is Ergivul. And from this city towards the southeast one can go into the country of Cathay; and on this southeast road, towards the country of Cathay, there is a city called Singiu ...<sup>65</sup>

The erroneous identification of Singiu with modern Xining dates all the way back to Marsden’s annotated edition of Marco’s book, first published in 1818,<sup>66</sup> when European knowledge of China (and particularly of western China, far removed from the coast) was very limited indeed. The fact that this identification has persisted to the present day is quite extraordinary. Pelliot noted that there is only a single occurrence of the variant “Silingui”,

<sup>59</sup> Haw (2006), 46-47.

<sup>60</sup> Cliff (2015), 77; Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 179.

<sup>61</sup> A glance at any good map of the region will show that Wuwei is further east, and therefore closer to central China, than Xining. The latter is located in a river valley separated from the Gansu corridor by high mountains.

<sup>62</sup> My criticisms of this identification remain valid; cf. Haw (2006), 17, 91.

<sup>63</sup> Atwood (2020), 434.

<sup>64</sup> Eusebi and Burgio (2018), vol. 1, 90; cf. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, français 1116, f 30v.

<sup>65</sup> This is my own translation. The translation of Kinoshita is inaccurate here: she gratuitously inserts mention of a province of “Xiningzhou”, although MS F, which she claims to be translating, mentions only a city of Singiu with nothing about any province of that name; Kinoshita (2016), xiv, 60. This mention of a province (called Sinlingiu) is in fact taken from MS Z; Barbieri (2008), 96.

<sup>66</sup> Marsden and Wright (1838), 150.

in the Zelada manuscript,<sup>67</sup> but he apparently took this as confirmation of the identification, with very little discussion.<sup>68</sup> However, the Zelada manuscript also contains an occurrence of “Singui”<sup>69</sup> and neither any other manuscript nor Ramusio’s edition of the work contains any variant similar to “Silingui”.<sup>70</sup> In view of the frequent corruptions of toponyms by copyists in the early versions of Marco’s book, the variant form “Silingui” cannot be taken to have any very certain value. Indeed, in another case where a single variant occurs in a manuscript of the book, Pelliot dismisses it saying: “no stress can be laid on its single discrepancy”.<sup>71</sup>

A similar case is that of Anqing 安慶. This is an instructive example, as it shows how scholars have sometimes distorted the evidence to fit with their preconceptions. It has been claimed that: “while the description is of Anqing, the name Marco gives [Namghin] corresponds to *Namging*, the medieval pronunciation of Nanjing (‘Southern Capital’). In the Yuan era this name referred not to modern Nanjing but to modern Kaifeng [開封], the ‘Southern Capital’ of the Jin dynasty.”<sup>72</sup> This is highly problematic, because the orthography “Namghin” is a purely hypothetical “reconstruction” of the supposed “original” form of the toponym. It does not occur in any of the early recensions of the book, but was invented by Pelliot to fit his hypothesis that the toponym should be identified with “Nanjing” (= Kaifeng). He argued that: “there was no point in mentioning a place as obscure and out of the way as An-ch’ing [Anqing]”.<sup>73</sup> This is certainly incorrect, for during the thirteenth century Anqing was in fact not obscure: it was the seat of a *lu* 路 (Route), and had been a *fu* 府 in the Song Empire.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, Marco clearly places his Nanghin in Mangi, that is, the former

<sup>67</sup> The Zelada manuscript was unknown in Marsden’s time; on its discovery, see Herriott (1939), 172.

<sup>68</sup> Pelliot (1963), 822-833.

<sup>69</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 2, xxii; Barbieri (2008), 96.

<sup>70</sup> Pelliot (1963), 822.

<sup>71</sup> Pelliot (1959), 574.

<sup>72</sup> Cliff (2015), 383 n. 20.

<sup>73</sup> Pelliot (1963), 789-791.

<sup>74</sup> Liu Yingli, Zhan Youliang and Guo Shengbo (2003), vol. 2, 409; *Yuan shi*, vol. 5, *juan* 59, 1413. On *lu* and other administrative units, see Haw (2006), 83. There were only 185 *lu* in the whole of Qubilai Qa’an’s empire; *Yuan shi*, vol. 5, *juan* 58, 1346.

southern Song Empire, while Nanjing (Kaifeng) was in the former Jin Empire (Catai).<sup>75</sup>

The Yuan-period pronunciation of Anqing was *ʔank'ij*<sup>76</sup> or *Ankhiŋ*.<sup>77</sup> As Pelliot noted, however, the initial sound, which was sometimes a glottal stop, was also sometimes pronounced *ŋ*.<sup>78</sup> I have personally heard a dialect pronunciation of *an* 安 as *ŋan* in Shandong province. I see no reason to think that Marco's *nanghin* (in manuscript F<sup>79</sup> and Ramusio's edition)<sup>80</sup> or *nanghyn* (in the Zelada manuscript)<sup>81</sup> could not have been intended to represent *Dank'ij*, now Anqing.<sup>82</sup> The use of *n* rather than *ng* (*ŋ*) in transcriptions of this kind is a common feature of Romance languages.<sup>83</sup> Pelliot claims that the initial sound of *ŋan* gives "g- in two or three cases in Polo's text ..., but never n-".<sup>84</sup> I would suggest, however, that Marco heard different dialect pronunciations in different places and that his orthography reflects this. It is entirely possible that his initial g- may have been intended to represent a glottal stop, while his initial n- represents *ŋ*.<sup>85</sup> It is essential to understand that there has never in practice been a nationwide standard pronunciation of Chinese. Even today, after decades of radio and television broadcasts in standard pronunciation, there are still entire provinces where

<sup>75</sup> For more discussion of this point, see Haw (2020), 221-222.

<sup>76</sup> Coblin (2007), 111, 144.

<sup>77</sup> Pulleyblank (1991), 24, 256.

<sup>78</sup> Pelliot (1963), 790.

<sup>79</sup> Eusebi and Burgio (2018), vol. 1, 162, 163; Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, français 1116, f 63v.

<sup>80</sup> Ramusio (1559), 42B.

<sup>81</sup> Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 2, xlii; Barbieri (2008), 190, 191.

<sup>82</sup> For further discussion of why Marco's *Nanghin* cannot be Nanjing (= Kaifeng), see Haw (2020), 220-222.

<sup>83</sup> Hence French "Pékin", etc.; see Haw (2014), 7 n.19.

<sup>84</sup> Pelliot (1963), 790. Pelliot gives no examples, but one is "Coigangiu" for *Huai'anzhou*: see below; and Haw (2006), 80, 114. On the question of how Marco represented the glottal stop, see Haw (2021), 482-483, 488, 490.

<sup>85</sup> It is unlikely that initial g- could have been intended to represent *ŋ*:- there is little phonetic resemblance. It could very well have been intended to represent a glottal stop, however. It is hard to see how Marco and Rustichello could otherwise have written a glottal stop, for which there is no sign in the Roman alphabet. For further discussion of this point, see Haw (2021), 481-483.

absolutely correct Modern Standard Chinese (*putonghua* 普通話) is hardly ever heard.<sup>86</sup>

It is essential to take into consideration the way in which medieval scribes worked when copying manuscripts and the conventions to which they usually adhered. For example, the insertion of an *-n-* in what should probably read “Sigiū” can very easily be understood once it is realised that medieval scribes commonly used various kinds of abbreviations. These included a straight or slightly curved line placed above a word, often above a vowel, to indicate omission of an *n* or *m*. Thus,  $\bar{i}$  was frequently written to represent *in* or *im*.<sup>87</sup> A line above any vowel other than *i* is unlikely to be ambiguous, but above *i* it may easily be confused with a slightly lengthened (or smudged) dot, which easily occurred in handwriting. Thus, whether what the scribe intended to write was *i* or  $\bar{i}$ =*in* is often unclear.<sup>88</sup> The use of contractions, that is the omission of one or more of the middle letters of a word, was also common.<sup>89</sup> Hence, the appearance of extra letters in “Silingui” is also readily explicable. It was only necessary for a scribe to mistake an extraneous mark above a word for a sign indicating contraction, for extra letters to be inserted during the process of copying. When reading Marco Polo’s toponyms, the practices of medieval European scribes must always be kept in mind.

It is scribal practices of the kind just described which explain how Xiangyangfu 襄陽府 came to be written “Saianfu”.<sup>90</sup> It may be surmised

---

<sup>86</sup> I cite as an example the large and populous province of Sichuan, where I lived for three and a half years. Even in the provincial capital, Chengdu 成都, pronunciation of what is supposed to be Modern Standard Chinese is usually far from standard. The Sichuan version of Modern Standard Chinese has even been named: it is known as *Chuanpu* 川普.

<sup>87</sup> Cappelli (1982), 13-14. Cappelli’s work specifically applies to Latin manuscripts, but very similar usage occurred in other languages, especially Romance languages. “In areas under Roman rule, such as France, Italy, and Spain, there was a continuation [in the use of manuscript abbreviations] from late Antiquity through the Dark Ages into the later Middle Ages”; Honkapohja (2013), §3.5.

<sup>88</sup> It must be noted, however, that in many medieval scripts *i* was not dotted. This is the case in manuscript F, for example. This often tends to increase confusion, as it can be very difficult to distinguish *in* from *ni* (or from *ui* or *iu* or even from *m*). The letter *i* was sometimes dotted as early as the twelfth century; Bischoff (1990), 122.

<sup>89</sup> Cappelli (1982), 7. For a specific example in MS F, see note 9 above.

<sup>90</sup> Moule (1957), 80; Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 316.

that the original transcription of this toponym was “Sianianfu”, a good rendering of the Chinese name according to the usual practice of Marco and Rustichello. Clearly, an original *n* before the second *i* could have been lost for the reason just explained above: “Sianianfu” became “Siāianfu” and then “Siaianfu”. A scribe then balked at writing four vowels in succession, and dropped the first *i*. It is a very unfortunate fact that the text of Marco Polo’s book has not been preserved in anything like its original form. All extant versions have undergone at least some degree of distortion at the hands of copyists, for whom the toponyms in particular (and perhaps especially those in China) were often entirely unfamiliar and were therefore frequently misread and miscopied.

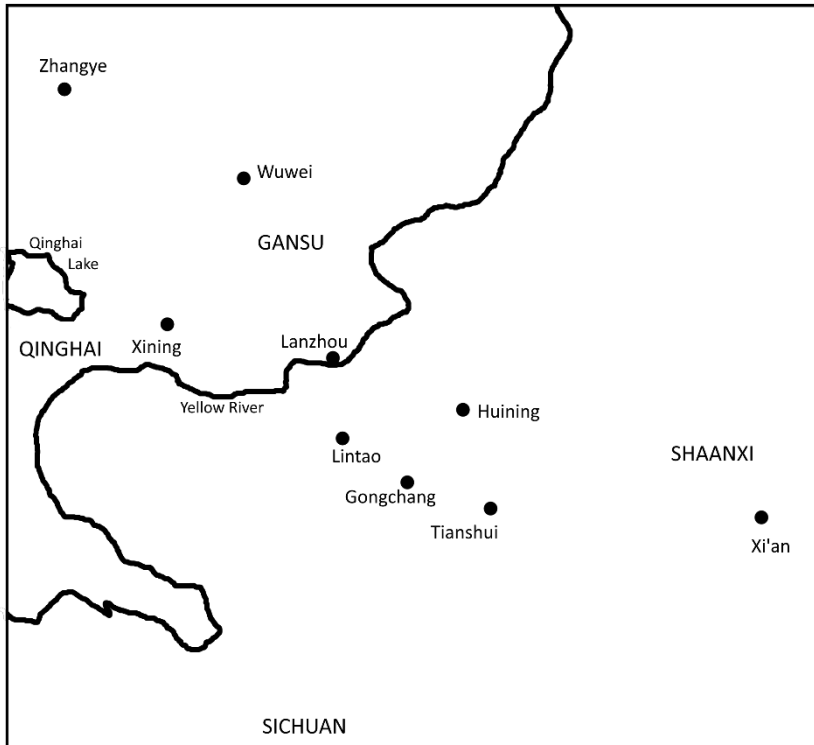
It has also been pointed out to me by Professor Atwood that there is a phonetic problem with the transcription of Chinese *Xī* 熙 by “Si”. This is because the initial sound of *Xī* was formerly more like *h* (*x*) than *s*.<sup>91</sup> However, there is certainly a question of possible variation in pronunciation by speakers of Chinese during the thirteenth century. Some of them may have used a pronunciation close to that of Modern Standard Chinese (*putonghua*).<sup>92</sup> More important is the question of what orthography was available to Marco Polo (and Rustichello) when the text came to be written. It is very unlikely that a medieval Italian would have written any foreign toponym with an initial *h*, which was usually silent in Romance languages, and had probably ceased to be pronounced during late Roman times.<sup>93</sup> This explains why initial Chinese *h* is usually represented by *c* in Marco Polo’s book. Examples are “Cacanfu/Cacianfu” for *Hejianfu* 河間府 and

<sup>91</sup> Karlgren (1964), 253 [character 960j]. See also Pulleyblank (1991), 328. Note that Pulleyblank’s initial *x*- represents a sound similar to modern Chinese (*Pinyin*) *h*-.

<sup>92</sup> For a discussion of variations in pronunciation during the thirteenth century in relation to the ’Phags-pa system of transcription of Chinese, see Coblin (2007), 34-66. “There was almost certainly considerable variation” [in pronunciation]; Coblin (2007), 39. It is my personal opinion that there are clear signs in Marco Polo’s transcriptions of Chinese that a dialect which he often heard, and perhaps spoke, had already assimilated Chinese *hi* and *si* to something similar to Modern Standard Chinese *xi*, and that *k*- and *ts*-, now both *j*-, were similarly no longer distinguished. Coblin suggests that the ’Phags-pa transcriptions represent a *southern* variant of the standard Chinese of the period; Coblin (2007), 44-45. For further discussion, see Haw (2021), 479-491.

<sup>93</sup> Lubliner (2008).

“Coigangiu” for *Huai’anzhou* 淮安州.<sup>94</sup> Initial *c* could not have been used in this way before *i* because, in Italian, *ci* would have been pronounced like English *chi* (as in “chin”).<sup>95</sup> It must be realised that the romanization of



**Map 1. Sketch Map of the Area from the Gansu Corridor to Xi'an**

Notes:

- Zhangye was Ganzhou, Marco Polo's Campçio/Canpicion, etc.
- Wuwei is Marco's Ergivul.
- Lintao was Xizhou, Marco's Singui/Singiu, etc.
- Huining became Xiningzhou in 1216, but was reduced to the status of a *xian* after it was conquered by the Mongols in 1227, and was Huizhou from 1270.
- Xi'an is Marco's Quengianfu/Quenzanfu, etc.

<sup>94</sup> Pelliot (1959), 115, 398.

<sup>95</sup> In French, before *i* and *e*, *c* was pronounced like *s*, as it still is today.

Chinese is by no means easy. Numerous very different systems have been devised, none of which is entirely satisfactory. The most widely used system today, devised in the People's Republic of China and usually called *Pinyin*, is partly arbitrary in its representations of Chinese sounds. The same letter is sometimes used to represent different sounds; for example, the *-i* in *zi* is not intended to be pronounced in the same way as the *-i* in *li*. Marco Polo and Rustichello had no ready-made system available to them and had to contrive their own. It is scarcely surprising if their transcriptions are sometimes problematic.<sup>96</sup>

A further possible objection to the identification of “Singui” with Xizhou is that the name Xizhou was not in use during the thirteenth century, or at least not officially. The town is now called Lintao 臨洮, and was given the name (and status)<sup>97</sup> of Lintaofu 臨洮府 during the Jin dynasty, in 1142.<sup>98</sup> The name Xizhou goes back to the Song period and was used officially from 1072.<sup>99</sup> The change of name under the Jin in 1142 was probably not recognised in the (southern) Song Empire, however. It occurs twice in a work written in the Song Empire at about the time that it was conquered by the Mongols, that is, shortly after Marco Polo had arrived in China.<sup>100</sup> Even if the name Xizhou had not continued in colloquial use after 1142, it is entirely possible that it was returned to use after the Jin Empire had been overthrown by the Mongols, when families which had fled south in the face of the Jurchen advance may have returned to their ancestral home in Xizhou/Lintaofu.<sup>101</sup> The name Xizhou was certainly not forgotten even as late as the middle of the fourteenth century, for it occurs in the title

<sup>96</sup> For further discussion of the orthography of Marco Polo's toponyms, see Haw (2021).

<sup>97</sup> Changes of the names of towns in China often resulted from a change in the administrative status of the town. Thus *zhou* 州 and *fu* 府 (“prefecture” and “superior prefecture”, respectively) denoted administrative units of different ranks. See also Haw (2006), 82-84; *Yuan shi*, vol. 5, *juan* 58, 1346.

<sup>98</sup> *Jin shi*, vol. 2, *juan* 26, 653; Haw (2006), 90.

<sup>99</sup> *Song shi*, vol. 2, *juan* 15, 282; vol. 7, *juan* 87, 2162.

<sup>100</sup> Wang Yinglin (late thirteenth century), vol. 2, *juan* 10, 1160; vol. 3, *juan* 16, 1791.

<sup>101</sup> Of course, the flight would have occurred generations earlier, during the 1120s, but Chinese remember their ancestral homes, *guxiang* 故鄉. This observation is based on personal experience: Chinese have spoken to me (in English) about their “old homes”, meaning *guxiang*, although they have never been there.



of a *Yuanben* 院本<sup>102</sup> recorded by Tao Zongyi.<sup>103</sup> The possibility that Marco Polo may have heard of the town by the name of Xizhou therefore cannot be ruled out.

In contrast, it is very unlikely that he would have heard of Xining as “Xiningzhou”. Indeed, there is no evidence that Xining (in modern Qinghai province) even existed under that name at the time that Marco arrived in China. A geographical work describing the Yuan Empire, originally compiled during the 1280s (and therefore contemporary with Marco Polo), then first printed in 1307, contains no mention whatsoever of Xining under any name.<sup>104</sup> The town had first been given the name (and status) of Xiningzhou in 1104, when it was within the Song Empire.<sup>105</sup> It is probable, however, that Song control was never very secure in the region around Xining.<sup>106</sup> Whether this Song name gained much currency is questionable. By the 1120s, the Song Empire was under attack by the Jurchens and lost most of northern China. In 1131, Xiningzhou surrendered to Jin forces.<sup>107</sup> Subsequently, the Jurchens handed it over to the Tanguts, and it was incorporated into their Xia 夏 state. Exactly when this happened is not clear, but it was probably between 1131 and 1147. However, under Tangut rule it was never a *zhou*,<sup>108</sup> probably because it had been devastated during fighting in the region and had dwindled in size and importance. In fact, it is reported that, after the Song had lost the area, Xiningzhou was derelict.<sup>109</sup> The Ming-period gazetteer of Xining Guard (Xiningwei 西寧衛) states that “the old town of Xiningzhou was built during the Yuan period”.<sup>110</sup> This clearly suggests that any earlier town on the site no longer existed by the time of the Mongol conquest. Thus, there ceased to be a Xiningzhou in the Song Empire by 1131 and in the Jin Empire by about

<sup>102</sup> A kind of stage performance of Chinese opera type.

<sup>103</sup> Tao Zongyi (c. mid-fourteenth century), *juan* 25, 307.

<sup>104</sup> The relevant section would be that dealing with the *Gansu deng chu xing zhongshusheng* 甘肅等處行中書省; Liu Yingli, Zhan Youliang and Guo Shengbo (2003), vol. 2, 754-758.

<sup>105</sup> *Song shi*, vol. 7, *juan* 87, 2168; Yang Yingju (1747), *juan* 31, 7a-7b.

<sup>106</sup> Dunnell (1994), 196; Dunnell (1996), 75-76.

<sup>107</sup> *Song shi*, vol. 2, *juan* 26, 485; Yang Yingju (1747), *juan* 31, 8a.

<sup>108</sup> Li Fanwen, ed. (2005), 667, 671.

<sup>109</sup> Gu Zuyu (c. 1692), vol. 6, *juan* 64, 3005.

<sup>110</sup> Liu Minkuan and Long Ying (c. 1590), 27.

1140. Thereafter, the former Xiningzhou was within the Xia state and was no longer a *zhou*. It did not become Xiningzhou again until 1286.<sup>111</sup> At the time when Marco Polo entered China and passed through the Gansu corridor there was no Xiningzhou in what is today Qinghai.

In 1216, however, a different Xining, which had been a *xian* 縣 (“county”) under Qinzhou 秦州 (modern Tianshui 天水) became sufficiently important to be raised to the status of a *zhou* (“prefecture”).<sup>112</sup> This Xiningzhou was in what is now southeastern Gansu province, a considerable distance from the Xining in modern Qinghai.<sup>113</sup> It is this Xiningzhou which was taken by the Mongols in 1227,<sup>114</sup> and it was probably to this Xiningzhou that Chikü and four thousand Qonggirad were sent “sometime before 1236”.<sup>115</sup> Atwood has confused and conflated this Xiningzhou (later Huizhou 會州 and now Huining 會寧 in Gansu) with Xining in modern Qinghai.<sup>116</sup> This confusion fatally undermines Atwood’s arguments relating to Marco’s Singiu. Atwood claims a link between the appanage of Chikü and that of Janggi (Chinese Zhangji 章吉), saying that the latter was a great-grandson of Chikü.<sup>117</sup> This relationship seems to be questionable, for Chikü was granted Xiningzhou as his appanage after the Mongols had taken the place in 1227, but before 1236. If Janggi was his great-grandson (three generations younger), that would probably place his lifetime at least four decades later, yet he is reported to have been granted an appanage in the area of Xining (in modern Qinghai) in early Mongol times.<sup>118</sup> This suggests that there was no large generational gap between them. It may be

<sup>111</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 5, *juan* 60, 1452.

<sup>112</sup> *Jin shi*, vol. 2, *juan* 26, 646-647.

<sup>113</sup> For a map showing the location of this Xining, see Tan Qixiang, ed. (1996), 57.

<sup>114</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 1, *juan* 1, 24; *Da Ming yitong zhi*, vol. 5, *juan* 35, 2488; *Huiningxian zhi*, *juan* 2, 2b. See also Haw (2020), 216; Zhang Suiwang (2017), 95-98.

<sup>115</sup> Atwood (2015), 31-32.

<sup>116</sup> See Atwood (2020), 432-434, where his discussion of Xiningzhou (“Silingjiu”) relates partly to Xiningzhou (in modern Qinghai) and partly to Xiningzhou (modern Huining).

<sup>117</sup> Atwood (2015), 32; Atwood (2020), 433.

<sup>118</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 5, *juan* 60, 1452. The text says early Yuan 元, but in the *Yuan shi* this usually means the period before the reign of Qubilai Qa’an. However, it also says that Janggi was granted a princely title in 1287. This would not rule out him having been granted his appanage some forty years or so earlier, however. He might have been an old man in 1287. It must be

suspected that Atwood has confused two different people called Janggi, who certainly existed during the thirteenth century. One is reported to have been executed in 1251.<sup>119</sup> Another was made a prince in 1287.<sup>120</sup> There may well have been others. Whatever the relationship between Chikū and Janggi, however, it is probable that their appanages were different. In any case, there is no good reason to think that Marco Polo mentions the Qonggirad in connection with his Singiu. Atwood's claim that he does<sup>121</sup> rests on the most tenuous of evidence: that "the women of Xiningzhou" were "peculiarly beautiful".<sup>122</sup> This is not even what Marco Polo really says: "These people ... are fat and have small noses and black hair. ... The women have no hair anywhere on their bodies except on their heads. They are very white, with a most delicate complexion, and all their limbs are very well formed in every respect."<sup>123</sup> Since Marco gives a considerable amount of information about Qonggirad women elsewhere,<sup>124</sup> it seems strange that he does not specify that these "peculiarly beautiful" women of Singiu were Qonggirad.<sup>125</sup>

A clear example of the errors resulting from Atwood's confusion is what he says about Xiningzhou being subordinate to Gongchang Route 鞏昌路 under early Mongol rule, but later "assigned to the Gansu Branch Secretariat".<sup>126</sup> This is incorrect. Under Mongol rule, the Xiningzhou of 1216 (later Huizhou and now Huining in Gansu) was always in Gongchang Route, in Shaanxi Branch Secretariat.<sup>127</sup> It was Xiningzhou (in modern Qinghai) which was governed by the Gansu Branch Secretariat.<sup>128</sup>

---

noted that the *Yuan shi* makes no mention of Chikū in connection with Xining in modern Qinghai.

<sup>119</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 1, *juan* 3, 45; Boyle (1958), vol. 2, 580, 583.

<sup>120</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 5, *juan* 60, 1452.

<sup>121</sup> Atwood (2020), 435-436.

<sup>122</sup> Atwood (2020), 435. Atwood has apparently forgotten that perceptions of beauty are highly subjective.

<sup>123</sup> Cliff (2015), 78. Cf. Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 180.

<sup>124</sup> Cliff (2015), 97-98. Cf. Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 205-206.

<sup>125</sup> For further discussion of this question, see Haw (2023), 473-474.

<sup>126</sup> Atwood (2020), 433.

<sup>127</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 5, *juan* 60, 1429, 1432; Liu Yingli, Zhan Youliang and Guo Shengbo (2003), vol. 1, 183, 205.

<sup>128</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 5, *juan* 60, 1449, 1452.

Confusion about Xiningzhou is further increased by the fact that there was yet a third place with this name during the thirteenth century. When Ögödei was in residence there (probably during the late 1220s), Huolu 獲鹿, a *xian* subordinate to Zhending 真定 (in modern Hebei province), was given the name and status of Xiningzhou. It reverted to being Huolu again in 1235.<sup>129</sup> Two silver coins found in 2007 bear the unusual legend “Xining tong bao” 西寧通寶.<sup>130</sup> It has been suggested that this means that they were issued in Xiningzhou in modern Qinghai.<sup>131</sup> However, this is highly unlikely, as the coins bear the tamgha (“mark”) of Möngke and must have been issued before 1260, when, as seen above, there was no Xiningzhou in what is now Qinghai. In 1236, Zhending was granted as appanage to Sorqaqtani Beki, mother of Möngke (and of Qubilai and Hülegü).<sup>132</sup> Although Huolu officially ceased to be Xiningzhou in 1235, it is possible that the name continued in use, or was revived, after that date. It seems at least possible that these coins may have been issued during one of the interregnums after the death of Ögödei in 1241 and before Möngke became Qa’an in 1251. This would explain why the legend “Dachao tong bao 大朝通寶” was not used, as this legend was appropriate for use only by a Qa’an.<sup>133</sup> The tamgha of Möngke clearly suggests a connection with Huolu in the appanage of Sorqaqtani Beki.

In summary, it is clear that there was no Xiningzhou at or near modern Xining in Qinghai when Marco Polo entered China. There were two other places which had been called Xiningzhou during the early period of Mongol rule of northern China, but neither of them is a likely candidate for Marco’s “Silingui”. The only realistic alternative is therefore to reject this reading in favour of “Singui” (= Sigiü). Since “Silingui” occurs only once

---

<sup>129</sup> *Yuan shi*, vol. 5, *juan* 58, 1356.

<sup>130</sup> In this legend, the character *ning* is somewhat simplified in a non-standard form which cannot be correctly reproduced here.

<sup>131</sup> Belyaev and Sidorovich (2014), 9. It must be noted that Xining in Qinghai is *not* in the Gansu corridor, as claimed here.

<sup>132</sup> De Rachewiltz and Wang, eds. (1993), 303, 624; *Yuan shi*, vol. 1, *juan* 2, 34-35.

<sup>133</sup> Belyaev and Sidorovich (2014), 11-12. The misunderstanding regarding the meaning of Xining invalidates most of these authors’ discussion of the coins.

in any manuscript of Marco Polo's book, it is entirely reasonable to suppose that it is no more than a scribal error.

The arguments in favour of Singui/Sigiu being Xizhou are very strong. Not only was Xizhou on a route from Wuwei and the Gansu corridor into China, but it was also very much associated with musk, as Marco states of Singiu.<sup>134</sup> In fact, Xizhou was one of only 17 places in the entire (northern) Song Empire which regularly presented musk as tribute to the throne.<sup>135</sup> None of the others had a name resembling "Singui". Within the area of Xizhou there was a locality called "Shepo 麝坡 (Musk Slope)", reported to have produced musk.<sup>136</sup> Atwood is entirely wrong to say that musk deer and the Reeves's pheasant are "characteristic fauna of the eastern Tibetan plateau".<sup>137</sup> They are not. Indeed, Atwood has recently changed his view of the fauna. He now suggests that it occurs only in the Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 甘南藏族自治州 in southwestern Gansu.<sup>138</sup> He apparently has failed to notice that this prefecture borders directly on modern Lintao County 臨洮縣, the former Xizhou, and is a considerable distance from Xining in Qinghai. There is no evidence that this area was ever under the jurisdiction of Xiningzhou. Atwood's arguments that "the 'province' of Xiningzhou encompassed far more than just the prefecture" are based on his interpretation of Marco Polo's description<sup>139</sup> and are therefore circular: he uses what Marco Polo says about Singiu to "prove" his claims relating to Xiningzhou, and then uses these same claims to "prove" that Marco's Singiu is Xiningzhou. The fallacy is obvious. The evidence of the fauna clearly supports the identification of Singiu with Xizhou, as I have

<sup>134</sup> Cliff (2015), 78; Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 179-180.

<sup>135</sup> *Song shi*, vol. 7, *juan* 85, 2113-2114 (Xiangyangfu 襄陽府, Jinzhou 金州, Fangzhou 房州, Junzhou 均州); *juan* 86, 2133 (Daizhou 代州), 2134 (Xianzhou 憲州, Lanzhou 嵐州); *juan* 87, 2145 (Shangzhou 商州, Guozhou 虢州), 2146 (Yan'anfu 延安府), 2148 (Fuzhou 鄜州), 2150 (Qingyangfu 慶陽府), 2162 (Xizhou 熙州), 2163 (Hezhou 河州), 2164 (Gongzhou 鞏州); *juan* 89, 2214 (Maozhou 茂州), 2223 (Wenzhou 文州).

<sup>136</sup> Liu Yingli, Zhan Youliang and Guo Shengbo (2003), vol. 1, 184.

<sup>137</sup> Atwood (2015), 33. Moreover, Atwood cites "Haw (2006)" as authority for this claim, but nothing in this work supports what he says.

<sup>138</sup> Atwood (2020), 435.

<sup>139</sup> Atwood (2020), 434-435.

always maintained.<sup>140</sup> Although musk deer occur in forested areas of Tibet,<sup>141</sup> the Reeves's pheasant is not Tibetan at all. It occurs mainly in mixed and coniferous forests at moderate altitudes (up to about 1,800 m/6,000 ft) and has never been recorded from anywhere on the Qinghai-Tibet plateau.<sup>142</sup> Indeed, it is only in an area such as that around Xizhou (Lintao) that musk deer, Reeves's pheasants and also yaks<sup>143</sup> are likely to occur, as the valleys and mountains of southern Gansu provide a range of habitats suitable for all these animals.<sup>144</sup> Atwood's argument that "although Silingjiu may not have had such characteristically Tibetan fauna itself, it was known as the gateway to Tibetan areas that did"<sup>145</sup> is entirely erroneous. Xiningzhou must be ruled out as the original of Marco Polo's "Singiu". My identification of Singui/Singiu = Sigiu as Xizhou is the only one which entirely fits with Marco's information about the place and is easily the best explanation of the toponym that has yet been suggested.

## References

### a) Editions and Manuscripts of Marco Polo's Book

Barbieri, Alvaro (2008). *Marco Polo: Milione; redazione Latina del manoscritto Z*, 2nd ed. (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo/Ugo Guanda Editore).

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, français 1116. *Livre qui est appelé le Divisiment dou monde, de Marc Pol.*

Cliff, Nigel (2015). *The Travels* (London: Penguin).

---

<sup>140</sup> Haw (2006), 90-91.

<sup>141</sup> And also in many parts of China; Haw (2006), 91, 126.

<sup>142</sup> Haw (2006), 91, 128; De Schauensee (1984), 194; MacKinnon and Phillipps (2000), 36; Xu Ji-Liang et al. (2010), 201-202.

<sup>143</sup> As described by Marco Polo for the "Singui" area; Cliff (2015), 77-78; Moule and Pelliot (1938), vol. 1, 179-180.

<sup>144</sup> For a description of this region from a naturalist's point of view, see Farrer (1917). Farrer's "Ti-tao Jô" [on the map at the end of vol. 1] is his idiosyncratic romanization of Didaozhou 狄道州, which is now Lintao and was formerly Xizhou.

<sup>145</sup> Atwood (2015), 33. This statement is completely contradicted by Atwood's more recent claim. He offers no explanation for his change of opinion; Atwood (2020), 435.

- Eusebi, Mario; Burgio, Eugenio (2018). *Marco Polo: Le Devisement dou monde*, 2 vols. (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari).
- Kinoshita, Sharon (2016). *Marco Polo: The Description of the World* (Indianapolis: Hackett).
- Marsden, William, trans.; Wright, Thomas, ed. (1892). *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Venetian* (London: George Bell & Sons).
- Moule, Arthur C.; Pelliot, Paul (1938). *Marco Polo: The Description of the World*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge).
- Ramusio, Giovanni Battista (1559). "L'Historia delle cose de Tartari, et diversi fatti de'loro Imperatori", in Giovanni Battista Ramusio, ed. *Navigazioni et Viaggi*, vol. 2 (Venezia: Stamperia de Giunti).
- Yule, Henry; Cordier, Henri (1993). *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Complete Yule-Cordier Edition, Including the Unabridged Third Edition (1903) of Henry Yule's Annotated Translation, as Revised by Henri Cordier; Together with Cordier's Later Volume of Notes and Addenda (1920)* (New York: Dover Publications).

## **b) Other Works**

- Allsen, Thomas T. (1986). "Guard and Government in the Reign of the Grand Qan Möngke, 1251–59", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 46/2: 495-521.
- Atwood, Christopher P. (2015). "The First Mongol Contacts with the Tibetans", *Revue d'Études Tibétaines*, 31: 21-45.
- Atwood, Christopher P. (2020). "Three Yuan Administrative Units in Marco Polo: Kinjin Talas, Silingjiu, and Kungchang", *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, 49: 417-442.
- Bell, Adrian R.; Curry, Anne; King, Andy; Simpkin, David (2013). *The Soldier in Later Medieval England* (Oxford: University Press).
- Belyaev, V.A.; Sidorovich, S. V. (2014). "Newly Discovered Types of Mid-13th Century Chingizid Silver Coins", *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society*, 219: 8-14.
- Bischoff, Bernhard (author); Ó Cróinín, Dáibhí; Ganz, David (transl.) (1990). *Latin Palaeography: Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: University Press).
- Boyle, John Andrew (1958). *The History of the World-Conqueror, by 'Ala-ad-Din 'Ata-Malik Juvaini*, 2 vols. (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press).

- Brose, Michael C. (2007). *Subjects and Masters: Uyghurs in the Mongol Empire* (Bellingham: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University).
- Cappelli, Adriano (author); Heimann, David; Kay, Richard (transl.) (1982). *The Elements of Abbreviation in Medieval Latin Paleography* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Libraries).
- Cleaves, Francis Woodman (1976). "A Chinese Source Bearing on Marco Polo's Departure from China and a Persian Source on his Arrival in Persia", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 36: 181-203.
- Coblin, W. South (2007). *A Handbook of 'Phags-pa Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press).
- D'Avezac, M. (1841). "Note sur les Observations qui précèdent [sur le Commentaire qui accompagne la Relation de Plan de Carpin ...]", *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, 16/2: 106-120.
- Da Ming yitong zhi* 大明一統志 (Complete Description of the Great Ming Empire), comp. by Li Xian 李賢 et al., 10 vols. (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1965).
- De Rachewiltz, Igor (2006). *The Secret History of the Mongols*, 2 vols. (Leiden and Boston: Brill).
- De Rachewiltz, Igor; Wang, May, eds. (1993). *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yuan Period (1200–1300)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz).
- De Schauensee, Rodolphe Meyer (1984). *The Birds of China* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press).
- Dulaurier, Édouard (1860). "Les Mongols d'après les historiens Arméniens", *Journal Asiatique*, 16/5: 273-322.
- Dunnell, Ruth W. (1994). "The Xi Xia", in Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, eds. *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. VI: *Alien Regimes and Border States, 907–1368* (Cambridge: University Press), 154-214.
- Dunnell, Ruth W. (1996). *The Great State of White and High: Buddhism and State Formation in Eleventh-century Xia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press).
- Endicott-West, Elizabeth (1989). *Mongolian Rule in China: Local Administration in the Yuan Dynasty* (Cambridge (Mass.): Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University/Harvard-Yenching Institute).
- Farquhar, David M. (1990). *The Government of China under Mongolian Rule* (Stuttgart: Steiner).
- Farrer, Reginald (1917). *On the Eaves of the World*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Arnold).



- Gu Zuyu 顧祖禹 (c. 1692). *Du shi fangyu jiyao* 讀史方輿紀要 (Essentials of Geography for the Reading of History), 12 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005).
- Haw, Stephen G. (2006). *Marco Polo's China: A Venetian in the Realm of Kubilai Khan* (London and New York: Routledge).
- Haw, Stephen G. (2014). "The Persian Language in Yuan-Dynasty China: A Reappraisal", *East Asian History*, 39: 5-32.
- Haw, Stephen G. (2020). "The Overview of the Unified Territories of the Great Yuan and Marco Polo's Account of the Empire of Qubilai Qa'an", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 170/1: 215-235.
- Haw, Stephen G. (2021). "The Orthography of Marco Polo's Toponyms", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 171/2: 479-502.
- Haw, Stephen G. (2023). "Yuan Administrative Units in Marco Polo's Description of the World", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 173/2: 467-494.
- Herriott, J. Homer (1939). "The Zelada Manuscript of Marco Polo", *Geographical Review*, 29/1: 172-173.
- Honkapohja, Alpo (2013). "Manuscript Abbreviations in Latin and English: History, Typologies and How to Tackle them in Encoding", *Varieng: Studies in Variation, Contacts and Change in English*, 14. Available under <http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/series/volumes/14/honkapohja/> (last accessed 2018/02/20).
- Hsiao, Ch'i-ch'ing (1978). *The Military Establishment of the Yuan Dynasty* (Cambridge (Mass.): Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University).
- Huiningxian zhi* 會寧縣志 (Gazetteer of Huining County), comp. by Yang Huyang 陽湖楊 et al. (Huiningxian: 1831).
- Jin shi* 金史 (History of the Jin Dynasty), comp. by Tuotuo 脫脫 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975).
- Karlgren, Bernhard (1964). *Grammata Serica Recensa* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities).
- Larner, John (1999). *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
- Li Fanwen 李范文, ed. (2005). *Xi Xia tong shi* 西夏通史 (Complete History of the Xi Xia State) (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe).
- Liu Minkuan 劉敏寬; Long Ying 龍膺 (c. 1590). *Xiningwei zhi* 西寧衛志 (Gazetteer of Xining Guard), ed. Wang Jiguang 王繼光 (Xining: Qinghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2016).

- Liu Yingli 劉應李; Zhan Youliang 詹友諒; Guo Shengbo 郭声波 (2003). *Da Yuan hunyi fangyu shenglan* 大元混一方輿勝覽 (Overview of the Unified Territories of the Great Yuan) (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe).
- Lubliner, Jacob (2008). "The Story of H". Available under [faculty.ce.berkeley.edu/coby/essays/h.htm](http://faculty.ce.berkeley.edu/coby/essays/h.htm) (last accessed 2018/02/20).
- MacKinnon, John; Phillipps, Karen (2000). *Zhongguo niaolei yewai shouce* 中國鳥類野外手冊 (Field Guide to Chinese Birds) (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe).
- Man, John (2009). *Xanadu: Marco Polo and Europe's Discovery of the East* (London: Bantam Press).
- Marsden, William (1838). *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the late William Marsden, D.C.L., F.R.S., etc., etc., Written by himself, with notes from his correspondence* (London: Cox & Sons).
- Moule, A.C. (1957). *Quinsai, with Other Notes on Marco Polo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Niermeyer, Jan Frederik (1976). *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden: Brill).
- Olschki, Leonardo (1960). *Marco Polo's Asia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press).
- Pelliot, Paul (1959). *Notes on Marco Polo: Ouvrage posthume*, vol. 1. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale).
- Pelliot, Paul (1963). *Notes on Marco Polo: Ouvrage posthume*, vol. 2. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale).
- Pulleyblank, Edwin G. (1991). *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese, and Early Mandarin* (Vancouver: UBC Press).
- Song shi* 宋史 (History of the Song Dynasty), comp. by Tuotuo 脱脱 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977).
- Tan Qixiang 譚其驤, ed. (1996). *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji: Song, Liao, Jin shiqi* 中國歷史地圖集: 宋, 遼, 金時期 (Historical Atlas of China: Song, Liao, Jin Period) (Beijing: Zhongguo ditu chubanshe).
- Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (c. mid-fourteenth century). *Nan cun chuo geng lu* 南村輟耕錄 (Notes of a Southern Villager Resting from Labour) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959).
- Thomson, Robert W. (1989). "The Historical Compilation of Vardan Arewelc'i", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 43: 125-226.

- Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (late thirteenth century). *Kunxue jiwen (quan jiao ben)* 困學紀聞 (全校本) (Record of Observances from Arduous Studies (complete annotated edition)) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008).
- Wang Yun 王惲 (c. 1300). *Qiuqian Xiansheng da quan wen ji* 秋澗先生大全文集 (Complete Works of Mr. Qiuqian [i.e. Wang Yun]) (*Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊 edition).
- Xu Ji-Liang 徐基良 et al. (2010). “Breeding Habitat Selection of Reeves’s Pheasant (*Syrnaticus reevesii*) in Dongzhai National Nature Reserve, Henan Province, China”, *Dongwuxue yanjiu* 動物學研究, 31/2: 198-204.
- Yang Yingju 楊應琚 (1747). *Xiningfu xin zhi* 西寧府新志 (New Gazetteer of Xiningfu) (Xiningfu?).
- Yuanchao mishi (wai si zhong)* 元朝密史 (外四種) (The Secret History of the Mongols (with four other works)) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008).
- Yuan Mingshan 元明善 (c. 1320). “Taishi Qiyang Zhong Wu Wang bei” 太師淇陽忠武王碑 (Memorial Inscription of the Grand Preceptor, the Loyal and Martial Prince of Qiyang), in *Guochao wenlei* 國朝文類 (Classified Writings of the [Yuan] Dynasty), *juan* 23, 10a-20b (*Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊 edition).
- Yuan shi* 元史 (History of the Yuan Dynasty), comp. by Song Lian 宋濂 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976).
- Zhang Suiwang 張雖旺 (2017). “Chengjisi Han suo gongpode Xiningzhou zhi kaozheng” 成吉思汗所攻破的西寧州之考證 (On the Correct Identification of the Xiningzhou Conquered by Činggis Qan), *Qiannan minzu shifan xueyuan xuebao* 黔南民族師範學院學報, 37/5 (no. 198): 95-98.

# Marco Polo's Crouching Dragons and Hidden Tigers<sup>1</sup>

Hans Ulrich Vogel

In this paper I will present a first discussion of Marco Polo's references to dragons and tigers, and with a focus on China. For reasons that will be explained, Marco Polo said little about dragons, but much about "lions", i.e. tigers. Hence, this article will mainly deal with *Panthera tigris*. As has been remarked already by other scholars, the Venetian's observations of "lions" in Asia mostly refer to tigers.<sup>2</sup> By taking into account Western and Chinese primary sources and secondary literature, I will show by means of a few selected examples that no contradictions at all exist between the indications in Polo's account and the data obtained from Chinese primary sources and general research literature about tigers in China. The Venetian was probably the first European who provided substantial information about the tigers of East Asia and especially those of China which – though hard for many people nowadays to imagine – is the cradle and original habitat of the *Panthera tigris* specie.

From the point of view of Chinese cultural history, it makes sense to approach these two "animals" together, because, for instance, during the flourishing period of cosmological thought in the Han dynasty (206 BC-

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of an article which was published under the title "I draghi accovacciate e le tigri camufate di Marco Polo" in Andreose (ed.) (2019), 47-71.

<sup>2</sup> Follow, e.g., the entries on "tigers" in the index of Yule (1903/1993), vol. 2, 657. See also Olschki (1960), 152n14 ("... With the term 'lion' Marco and his contemporaries also designated tigers, which were better known in China than lions." ...) and 16 ("... tigers (always called 'lions') ..."), and Haw (2020), 287 (... "Clearly, at least as far as 'lions' in China are concerned, he really meant 'tigers'. ..."). Strangely, Brunello (1986), 63, thinks that Marco referred to the *Panthera leo persica*, a lion specie whose habitat reached as far as Bengal in the nineteenth century. For this specie cf. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asiatic\\_lion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asiatic_lion) (accessed 17/06/2023).

220 AD) centring on Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) and *yin/yang* (陰陽) concepts dragon and tiger were two of the Four Divine Animals (*si shenshou* 四神獸) symbolizing the Four Directions (Azure Dragon for the east, White Tiger for the west, Scarlet Bird for the south, and Sombre Tortoise for the north).<sup>3</sup> According to Daoist thought, dragon and tiger were the two divine animals in charge of the *yang* (Heaven and Fire) and the *yin* (Earth and Water) world respectively.<sup>4</sup> Dragon and tiger were also emblematic symbols in Chinese practical laboratory alchemy, as represented by a key text written between the eighth and tenth centuries, the “Scripture on the Golden Elixir of the Dragon and Tiger” (*Jindan longhu jing* 金丹龍虎經). There, for instance, a passage centers on amalgamating refined forms of lead and mercury as the key alchemical process for the production of an elixir, with Dragon and Tiger as two corporeal counterparts for lead and mercury respectively, linking them moreover to the most fundamental aspects of the cosmos, namely *yang* and *yin* and their manifold correlates.<sup>5</sup> This all helps us to understand why the dragon-tiger pair became an important decorative theme in Daoist and other temples, and which also explains why painters specialized in the subjects of dragon and tiger.<sup>6</sup>

## 1 Dragons

When taking a look at Marco Polo’s report, one will notice that the topics of dragon and tiger are treated differently, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. In entries related to China, dragons are mentioned only in four places, that is, as an artistic as well as architectural element of the columns of the Great Khan’s bamboo palace in Ciandu (Shangdu 上都),<sup>7</sup> as decorative elements of the walls of the Great Khan’s palace in Canbalu

<sup>3</sup> As has been shown by Pankenier (2013), 76-77, 212-213, this cosmological-correlative concept was already well established by the end of the second millennium BC.

<sup>4</sup> Sung Hou-mei (1998), 1-16.

<sup>5</sup> Skar (2005), 429-432.

<sup>6</sup> Sung Hou-mei (1998), 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Not mentioned in F, but in R, Libro Primo, 55, “dragone”, and in L, 65, “draco”. For these redactions see the excellent “Digital Ramusio” (hereafter: DR), i.e. Simion and Burgio, eds. (2015).

For toponyms, I use the basic spellings in the F manuscript, as they are indicated in Burgio (2018), 321-325. For the identification of place names, I refer to Haw (2006), ch. 6-8.

(Dadu 大都)<sup>8</sup> (cf. Fig. 1), as a cyclical sign used for the designation of years by astrologers in Canbalu,<sup>9</sup> and together with “lions” as one of the tattoo designs of the people in the province of Caugigu (Jiaozhi Guo 交趾國, i.e. Annam, the northern part of today’s Vietnam).<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 1: The Great Khan’s Palace in Canbalu, with Detail Showing Wall Decorations**

Source: *Le livre des merveilles*, fifteenth century, f. 37r, BNF, F 2810; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., F, i.e. the edition of Eusebi (2018), 104, “dragons”. F is also available in DR. Moreover, there is now available its English translation by Kinoshita (2016).

<sup>9</sup> Not in F, but only in Z, 43, “dracone”, and R, Libro Secondo, 25, “dragone”. See DR.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., F in Eusebi (2018), 150, “drag”.



**Figure 2: Body-tattoos of Dai 傣 People in Mengding 孟定, Southwestern Yunnan, 1936**

Source: Photo made by Yong Shiheng 勇士衡, February 1936; courtesy of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Nankang, Taipei, Republic of China; URL [http://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/race\\_public/System/frame\\_1.htm](http://ndweb.iis.sinica.edu.tw/race_public/System/frame_1.htm) (accessed 17/08/2023).

That dragons were used as decorative elements on columns (known e.g. as “dragon columns” (*longzhu* 龍柱) or “columns with entwining dragons” (*panlongzhu* 盤龍柱)) of Chinese palaces and temples is a well-documented feature, though so far I could not find an arrangement exactly in the way described by Marco Polo. Dragon paintings or carvings were, and still are, very often used for the decoration of all kinds of walls in temples and palaces.

Another artistic but at the same time apotropaic use of dragon depiction is for tattooing mentioned by the Venetian for the province of Caugigu. Tattoos covering large parts of the body are well documented, for instance, for the Dai 傣 people living in the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture 西双版纳傣族自治州 (cf. Fig. 2), but also for Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and Myanmar.<sup>11</sup>

And finally, it is well known that the dragon was one of the twelve animals of the zoomorphical cycle which had a long history in China and which was also taken over by the Mongols. Already Yule noted that Marco Polo's sequence of "Lion", Ox, Dragon, Dog, etc. is not correct, but should run as follows: 1. Rat; 2. Ox; 3. Tiger; 4. Hare; 5. Dragon; 6. Serpent; 7. Horse; 8. Sheep; 9. Ape; 10. Cock; 11. Dog; 12. Swine.<sup>12</sup>

Compared with the case of the "lion" (i.e. tiger), Marco Polo's mentionings of dragons are rare, and they do not crop up as real animals in his book. Even the "great serpents" of Carajan, probably crocodiles,<sup>13</sup> were not designated by the Venetian as "dragons", though they might have come nearest to the perception of those mythical and divine animals. Thus, Marco Polo never thought he had ever seen an animal resembling a dragon, and hence there was no need for him to differentiate between the real and the legendary, as he did in the case of the unicorn, salamander, and musk deer. Moreover, dragons were familiar to him from Europe and therefore he might have not seen the need to dwell on them. Although he was aware of artistic, decorative, apotropaic and astrological depictions, he was – as it seems – not interested in, or had no further access to, the rich iconography and lore of this mythical animal in China. Yet, at least in two instances he shows some, though rather unconscious, awareness of the pairing of dragons with "lions". This holds true for the tattooing passage as well as for the one on the zoomorphic cycle. In both cases the "lions" mentioned there are clearly tigers. But also in the use of the dragon as artistic and decorative elements for adorning the walls of the Great Khan's palace in

---

<sup>11</sup> See the index in Yule (1903/1993), vol. 2, 656, "tattooing".

<sup>12</sup> Yule (1903/1993), vol. 1, 454.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Haw (2006), 135-137.



Canbalu we may assume that lions and/or tigers belonged to the set of animals used for this purpose. While, the F version only points in this direction (“... et autres deverses jeneration des bestes ...”<sup>14</sup>), the V redaction speaks explicitly also of “lioni”.<sup>15</sup>

## 2 Lions

But let us turn now gradually to the topic of tigers, which, though under a different name, are frequently mentioned and described by our traveller as real, though savage and wild, animals. In reference to the Great Khan’s dominion, I found in the most important redactions twenty-two passages referring to “lions”, of which eighteen for certain meant tigers. One clear-cut exception is surely the passage about the Pulisanghin bridge, where the decorative marble lions (“lion de marbre”)<sup>16</sup> were certainly meant to be lions (cf. Fig. 3).

Apart from this one exception of the Pulisanghin Bridge, there are three cases with an ambiguous nature. Two concern the use of lions and/or tigers as artistic decoration, one together with dragons and other animals as decorative elements of the walls of the Great Khan’s palace in Canbalu,<sup>17</sup> the other in the context of the New Year’s festivities, when there took place a procession of 5,000 elephants which were covered with beautiful cloths embroidered with birds, “lions” and other animals.<sup>18</sup>

Another instance of inconclusive nature is in the chapter which describes how the “twelve thousand barons” are presenting themselves with precious robes during the feast days. There, Marco Polo mentions that during festivals a great tame and unchained “lion” is led to the emperor’s presence and lies down before him as soon as it sees him, with every sign of veneration and as if it acknowledged him as lord:

---

<sup>14</sup> Eusebi (2018), 104.

<sup>15</sup> See V, 41, in DR. On the relatively high position of the V redaction in the *stemma codicum* cf. the contribution of Simion, Eusebi and Burgio in this volume.

<sup>16</sup> Eusebi (2018), 126.

<sup>17</sup> Only mentioned in V, 41, “lioni”. See DR.

<sup>18</sup> “Lioni” are again mentioned only in V, 43. See DR.

... car sachiés qe un grant lion est moiné devant le Gran Sire; et le lion tantost{0} qu'il le voit, se jete a jecir devant lui et fait seingne <de> grant humilité et semble qu'il le conoisse por seingnor. Il demore devant lui sanç nulle chaene ...<sup>19</sup>



**Figure 3: The Pulisanghin Bridge, with Details of the Marble Lions Adorning the Railings**

Sources: *Le livre des merveilles*, fifteenth century, f. 49r, BNF F 2810; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, gallica.bnf.fr / BnF. Photo of a stone lion of the Marco Polo Bridge taken by the author of this article in August 2014.

Also Odorico de Pardenone describes a similar scene when writing the following: "... Then come mummers leading lions, which they cause to salute the Lord with reverence. ..."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Eusebi (2018), 111.

<sup>20</sup> Yule (1913), 143.

Thomas T. Allsen opines that it was rather a lion than a tiger that laid down reverently and submissively in front of Qubilai,<sup>21</sup> though I think that this cannot be taken for granted. Lions had no natural habitat in China, but were indeed imported into the Middle Kingdom already in the early centuries of the Common Era. After the fall of the Han dynasty, the traffic of lions from Persia was continued to be reported during the Northern Wei period (386-535), and during the Tang period (617-907) they were presented as tributes from Samarkand, the Tocharians, Persia, and from the Arabs.<sup>22</sup> During the Song period (960-1279) lions came from India. Imports continued in the Yuan period, during which the Mongol rulers over China received them, together with tigers, from their ally, the Mongolian court of Iran.<sup>23</sup>

At any rate, the presence of both tigers and lions at the Yuan court is testified by the mid-fourteenth-century *Nancun chuogeng lu* 南村輟耕錄 (Records of Nancun while Ceasing Farm Work) of Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1329-1410), who mentions that it was the custom of the Mongol emperors to give feasts in honour of the Princes and High Officials at the Ten Thousand Years' Hill (Wanshoushan 萬壽山; i.e. the Green Mound<sup>24</sup>). On these occasions all the beasts, that is tigers, leopards, bears, and elephants, were first paraded in front of the guests, followed thereafter by lions, being described as small and short in body. However, when all the other animals saw them, they were terrified and did not deare to look up at them.<sup>25</sup>

Not only in China, but elsewhere too, the lion was firmly associated with kingship. Therefore, tamed lions, together with tigers and other felines, served as court pets already in ancient Egypt and at many other courts thereafter. A "lion" which showed himself reverent and submissive in front of a ruler, as this was the case in Marco Polo's description, was a clear political message in the sense that the king or emperor was not only lord

---

<sup>21</sup> Allsen (2006), 150.

<sup>22</sup> Schafer (1963), 85.

<sup>23</sup> Allsen (2006), 236.

<sup>24</sup> On this location see the contribution of Dang Baohai in this volume.

<sup>25</sup> *Nancun chuogeng lu*, ch. 24, 1b; Collier (1921), 134.

over humans, but by his spiritual and magical powers even controlled animals and thus wild nature.<sup>26</sup>

### 3 Tigers

Apart from the exception of the Pulisanghin Bridge and the three inconclusive passages mentioned above, in all the remaining eighteen mentionings of “lions” in China proper the Venetian did not refer to *Panthera leo* but actually to tigers. By means of comparison, differentiation and clarification, the Venetian makes it crystal-clear in two passages that he had another beast in mind than the lion. The first time he does so is in the chapter on “des lionç et des liopars et de leus curvier” used by the Great Khan for hunting. For instance, in the F redaction we can read that these “lions” are bigger than those of Babylonia and have a most beautiful colored skin, striped all along the sides with black, red and white:

... Il ha plosors lyons grandisme, greingnors aseç que celz de Babilonie: il sunt de mout biaux poil et de mout biaux coleor, car il sunt tout vergés por lonc noir et vermoil et blanche; ...<sup>27</sup>

The second time is when describing the Great Khan’s hunting at Cacciar Modun<sup>28</sup> together with the two audience tents and the tent for sleeping he used there. These tents were covered with “cuir de lionz” of the same pattern and colors.<sup>29</sup> In other words, in both passages the pattern and colours of the skin make clear that we have to do it with tigers.

#### 3.1 Classification of Marco Polo’s Passages on Tigers

Marco Polo’s passages about tigers in China can be classified as belonging to three main categories, namely, depictions and designs of cosmological, magical, artistic and political meanings related to tigers, artificial presence of tigers, and natural occurrences of tigers.

---

<sup>26</sup> Allsen (2006), 148-150.

<sup>27</sup> Eusebi (2018), 112.

<sup>28</sup> On Cacciar Modun see the contribution of Dang Baohai in this volume.

<sup>29</sup> Eusebi (2018), 115.

### 3.2 Depictions and Designs of Cosmological, Magical, Artistic and Political Meanings Related to Tigers

This category of Marco Polo's tiger descriptions can be subdivided into seven items:

- the tiger as one of the twelve animals of the zoomorphical cycle used for the designation of years by astrologers in Canbalu
- tigers depicted in tattoos of indigenous people in Caugigu province
- tigers (and/or lions) depicted in paintings on the walls of the Great Khan's palace in Canbalu
- tiger (and/or lion) embroideries on the beautiful cloths which covered the elephants that were paraded in front of guests during the New Year's festivities
- the tiger design on tablets of authority
- tiger skins covering the wooden chamber in which Qubilai is carried by four elephants on his hunting expedition in direction to the Ocean Sea
- the tiger skin tent set up during the Great Khan's hunting activities in Cacciar Modun

As the first item was already discussed above in the context of the dragon, let us shortly dwell on the second item, the description of the custom of the Caugigu people tattooing their bodies with "lions", dragons, birds and other things as a token of elegance evoking admiration amongst themselves. Given the existence of tigers in this region, we can be sure that these were images of tigers, and not lions. Apart from being an expression of elegance, we may assume that the motive of the Caugigu people for tattooing tigers on their bodies was derived from experiences with these fierce animals within their own living environment. In view of the powerful image of the tiger, these depictions doubtless had religious, magical and apotropaic functions.

The third and fourth topic relates to the depiction of tigers in works of art and decoration. That Marco Polo was aware of animal images in oriental art is highlighted by Brian J. Lévy who refers to numerous passages in

the work of the Venetian.<sup>30</sup> We have already mentioned above that at least in the V rendering “lioni”, i.e. either tigers or lions or both, are indicated as being depicted on the palace walls of the Great Khan in Canbalu as well as on the embroidered cloths covering the elephants of the New Year’s parade.

Let us now shortly discuss the fifth item, i.e. the tiger design on tablets of authority. At least for the Chinese tablets we can state with confidence that those depicting a feline were intended to refer to tigers. This is also the reason why in Chinese sources the *paizi* 牌子 are called *hufu* 虎符 or “tiger tallies”, and not *shifu* 獅符, “lion tallies”. Under the Yuan dynasty tablets for official positions, especially for military officials were as follows:

The myriarchs, chiliarchs and centurions are divided into superior, middle and inferior categories. The myriarch girds a tiger tablet of gold. There is a figure of a crouching tiger engraved in the lower part of the tablet and glittering pearls encrusted in the upper part. And these tablets stand out by one, two or three pearls encrusted on them. ...<sup>31</sup>

Another question is whether it was possible for Marco Polo to draw a clear difference between tiger and lion because the tigers depicted on the Chinese *paizi* may have been highly stylized.

The sixth and seventh mentionings refer to tiger skins, in the one case used as cover for Qubilai’s wooden travel chamber in which four elephants carried him to the hunting grounds at the Ocean Sea, the other the tiger skin tent set up during the Great Khan’s hunting activities in Cacciar Modun. With regard to the latter topic, we may refer to a, though smaller, tent of that kind exhibited in the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing in 2014. It is said that its history can be dated back to around 600 years ago, i.e. indeed almost to the Yuan dynasty. The top of this splendid and noble craftwork is circular, and its top and sides consist of 108 pieces of pure tiger skins (cf. Fig. 4). Apart from impressing by their beauty (and, we may add, being a sign of emperorship), the Venetian highlights the practical side of tiger skins, in the sense that the cover of the Cacciar Modun tent

---

<sup>30</sup> See Lévy (1997), 170-171.

<sup>31</sup> See Dang Baohai (2001), 41.

was so well arranged that neither wind nor rain could cause harm or damage.<sup>32</sup>



**Figure 4. Six-hundred-year Old Tiger Skin Tent Given to the Third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso (1543-1588) by the Mongol King at Lithang (Litang 理塘), Eastern Tibet in Sichuan Province, Exhibited in the Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing, 2014**

Source: Tenzin Woebom, 11 November 2014, China Tibet Online; URL [http://www.vtibet.com/en/culture/popular/201411/t20141116\\_255987.html](http://www.vtibet.com/en/culture/popular/201411/t20141116_255987.html) (accessed 07/07/2019).

### 3.3 Artificial Presence of Tigers

Apart from the possibility that the “lion” that was made to present and bow itself in front of the Great Khan may have been a tiger, this category of tiger description concentrates on the topic related to hunting with the help of *Panthera tigris*:

---

<sup>32</sup> Eusebi (2018), 115.

- during festivals a great tame and unchained “lion” is led to the Great Khan’s presence and lies down before him as soon as it sees him
- tigers, together with cheetas and caracals, were used for the Great Khan’s hunting expeditions; comparison in size and skin pattern with the lions of Babylon; trained to catch boars and wild cattle, bears, wild asses, stags, and other great or fierce beasts; taken out in a covered cart, each tiger being accompanied by a little doggie; hunting against the wind

In a prominent chapter of his report, the Venetian enumerates and describes the use of felines for Qubilai’s hunting parties. Apart from cheetas and caracals also unambiguously tigers with their typical striped and coloured skin were employed. They made a special impression on Marco as tigers are said to have brought down large beasts, such as bears, wild cattle, asses, deers, and boars:

... il sunt afaités a prandre sengler sauvajes et les buef sauvajes et orses et asnes sauvajes et cerf et cavriolz et autres bestes. ...<sup>33</sup>

In the wild, tigers mostly feed on large and medium-sized animals, preferring native ungulates weighing at least 90 kg (200 lb).<sup>34</sup> Prey species of Siberian tigers include Manchurian wapiti, Siberian musk deer, long-tailed goral, moose, Siberian roe deer, Manchurian sika deer, wild boar, even sometimes small size Asian black bear and Ussuri brown bear, also smaller species like hares, rabbits, pikas and salmon.<sup>35</sup> In the former range of the South China tiger possible tiger prey species comprised muntjac, wild pig, serow, tufted deer and sambar.<sup>36</sup> Sambar deer, wild pigs, serow, and large bovids such as banteng and juvenile gaur constitute the majority of the Indochinese tiger’s diet.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Eusebi (2018), 112.

<sup>34</sup> See URL [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger#Hunting\\_and\\_diet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger#Hunting_and_diet) (accessed 25/10/2023).

<sup>35</sup> URL [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siberian\\_tiger#Feeding\\_ecology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siberian_tiger#Feeding_ecology) (accessed 25/10/2023).

<sup>36</sup> URL [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South\\_China\\_tiger#Ecology\\_and\\_behavior](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_China_tiger#Ecology_and_behavior) (accessed 25/10/2023).

<sup>37</sup> URL [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indochinese\\_tiger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indochinese_tiger) (accessed 25/10/2023).



From Ramusio's version we learn that tigers approach the game against the wind as otherwise the beasts would scent them. Compare this to the following statement: "If the prey catches wind of the tiger's presence before this, the tiger usually abandons the hunt rather than chase prey or battle it head-on."<sup>38</sup>

Marco Polo also noted that the tigers were taken along in a covered cart, each "lion" being accompanied by a small dog. As we are not given more details on how the hunting with tigers was carried out, we do not know what the function of the small dogs was. Perhaps they had to support the tiger in hunting by chasing the game into the direction of it. Or they were trained in such a way as to guide the tiger back to his master hunter.



**Figure 5: The Great Khan Hunting with "lionç", "liopars" and "leus curvier"**  
 Source: *Le livre des merveilles*, fifteenth century, f. 42r, BNF F 2810; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

Although Allsen appears to harbour some doubt about the accurateness of the Venetian's account, he nonetheless writes that if it was truly historical, then hunting with tigers was of demonstrative purpose, i.e. to show that

<sup>38</sup> URL [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger#Hunting\\_and\\_diet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger#Hunting_and_diet) (accessed 25/10/2023).

such a thing could be done. Moreover, it also points to the degree of experimentation so often found among royal hunters.<sup>39</sup> At any rate, the early fifteenth-century French illustrator commits the usual “error” in the relevant picture, as with other relevant illustrations related to Asia, of depicting tigers as lions (cf. Fig. 5).

The passage of the tigers as hunting partners as well as the one on the tame “lion” and the use of tiger skins for Qubilai’s tents during his hunting expeditions belong to those extensive passages in Marco Polo’s book in which the amazing wealth and lifestyle of the Mongol emperor are described. Among the Hundred Beasts that occurred naturally in China the tiger was their king (*baishou zhi wang* 百獸之王), an image that in correlative terms symbolized the rule of the Mongols’ Great Khan over the hundred nations. In almost identical terms as the lion, the tiger stood for powerful political and fierce military authority and was often used in literary expressions in those senses, like *hushi* 虎士, *huchen* 虎臣 or *hujiang* 虎將, for describing brave scholar-officials or eminent generals.<sup>40</sup> We can also find similar patterns of symbolism in other parts of Asia. For instance, the Muslim Sultans of Java kept live tigers at their court. By this they intended to show that they, the lords of the land and of civilisation, were superior to the lord of the forest or, in other words, of wilderness and chaos. Tigers were seen as captive rivals that should be treated well, because they were equals in rank to the sultan.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.4 Natural Occurrences of Tigers

The natural occurrence of “lions” is frequently mentioned in the Venetian’s report.<sup>42</sup> We may distinguish a first group of entries which are rather short and in which “lions” are very often listed together with other wild animals, and a second group specifically dedicated to tigers and thus providing

<sup>39</sup> Allsen (2006), 271.

<sup>40</sup> Sung Hou-mei (1998a), 23.

<sup>41</sup> P. Boomgard, *Frontiers of Fear: Tigers and People in the Malay World, 1600-1950* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 105-106, quoted by Marks (2006), 73.

<sup>42</sup> Most of the following references can be easily found in F when entering “lion” or “lyon” in the F transcription available on DR. See also Burgio (2018), 187, “lion”.

much more details, namely those of Tebet province, Ciugiu province and Fugiu city, dealing with deterring, catching and/or killing these beasts:

- provinces of Cuncun,<sup>43</sup> Acbalec Mangi,<sup>44</sup> Sindinfu,<sup>45</sup> Gaindu,<sup>46</sup> and Nanghin,<sup>47</sup> the regions southeast of Chingiu/Chiugiu city<sup>48</sup> and south of Cugiu city,<sup>49</sup> and Fugiu kingdom<sup>50</sup>: with the exception of Sindinfu province existence of tigers more or less explicitly related to hunting activities of the population, especially Cuncun, Acbalec Mangi and Cugiu
- region around Canbalu<sup>51</sup>: in January and February grand animals, including tigers,<sup>52</sup> have to be hunted down by the population within a radius of a 40 days' journey from Canbalu, with skin and meat – the latter only within 20 to 30 days' journey – to be delivered to the Great Khan who has the skins used for army equipment
- Carajan province<sup>53</sup>: tigers as prey of great snakes or serpents (possibly crocodiles)
- west of Quenlifu city<sup>54</sup>: tigers as dangers for travellers overland

---

<sup>43</sup> Atwood (2020), 436-438, argues for the region around Gongchang 鞏昌 (i.e. modern-day Longxi 隴西 in today's Gansu province), while Pelliot (1959-1973), vol. 1, 574, thinks that this perhaps referred to the Hanzhong Surveillance Commission (Hanzhong lianfangsi 漢中廉訪司) with its seat in Fengxiang Prefecture 鳳翔府 in today's western Shaanxi. Haw (2006), 98, writes that this denoted Hanzhong 漢中, a commandery (*jun* 郡) of the Northern Song period. Chinese administrative designations refer to the jurisdictional territory, but also to the seat of the respective governmental seat.

<sup>44</sup> The region around modern-day Hanzhong city 漢中市 in southwestern Shaanxi, i.e. Xingyuan Route 興元路 of the Yuan period.

<sup>45</sup> Chengdu Route 成都路 in central Sichuan.

<sup>46</sup> Jiandu 建都, that is, Jianchang Route 建昌路 or the region around modern-day Xichang 西昌 in southern Sichuan.

<sup>47</sup> Anqing Route 安慶路 in southwestern Anhui.

<sup>48</sup> Quzhou Route 衢州路 in western Zhejiang.

<sup>49</sup> Chuzhou Route 處州路, i.e. the area around modern-day Lishui City 麗水市 in southern Zhejiang.

<sup>50</sup> Yuan-period Fujian Province 福建行省.

<sup>51</sup> Beijing.

<sup>52</sup> "Lyons" are only explicitly mentioned in the Fr redactions, while other versions, like e.g. F, speak of "other beasts", besides wild boars, different types of deer, and bears.

<sup>53</sup> Region of Dali 大理 in western Yunnan.

<sup>54</sup> Jianning Route 建寧路 in central Fujian.

- Tebet province<sup>55</sup>: region damaged by war, tigers as danger for merchants or other travellers overland, and the deterrence of tigers by means of bonfires fed with green bamboo canes serving as fuel and as explosive and thus noisy crackers<sup>56</sup>
- along the [Wujiang 乌江] river on the way to Sinugul city<sup>57</sup>: tigers as danger for inhabitants and even travellers on waterways; horse-man hunting tiger with the help of two dogs and killing the beast with bow and arrow
- near Fugiu city<sup>58</sup>: catching a tiger in a pit trap with a small white dog as bait, killing then the trapped tiger or taking it out alive; meat is good and is eaten, while skins are expensive and are sold

For Westerners travelling now in East Asia it often comes as a surprise that once tigers lived in China. This even holds true for Chinese themselves, as is assured by Huang Hongzhao writing about records of tiger disasters in the region of Xiangshan 香山 near Macau. As hundreds of other places Xiangshan has a record of sightings of tigers, “sudden tiger ravages” (*hobao* 虎暴), “tiger harms” (*huhai* 虎害) or “tiger calamities” (*huhuan* 虎患), in Xiangshan’s case with reports dating from the mid-fifteenth up to the early twentieth centuries.<sup>59</sup>

China is indeed tigerland (cf. Map 1). On the basis of genetic analyses it has been argued that the Middle Kingdom is the center of tiger evolution.<sup>60</sup> The oldest remains of an extinct tiger relative living about 2 million years ago at the beginning of the Pleistocene and considered to be a sister

---

<sup>55</sup> Western Sichuan.

<sup>56</sup> See also Quereuil’s article in this volume.

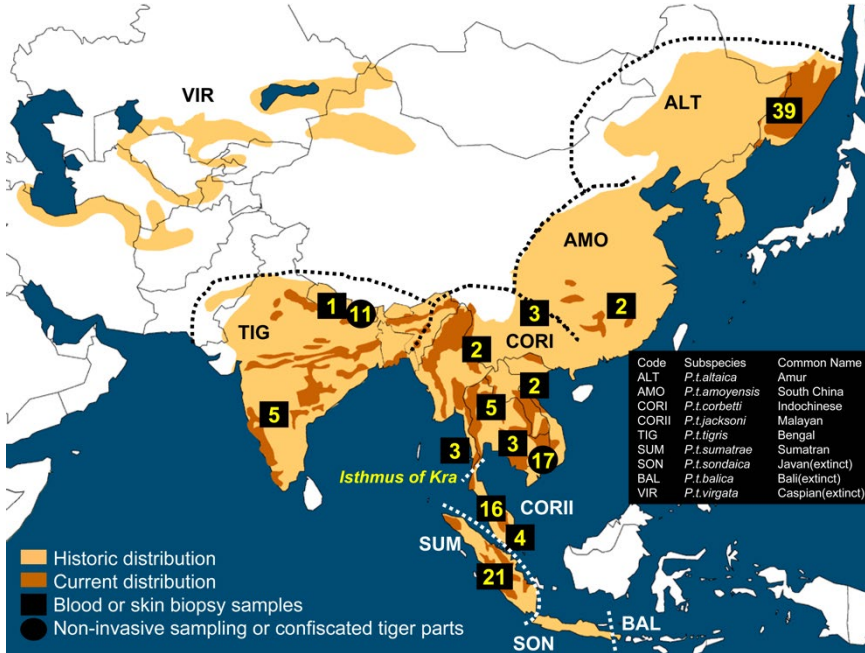
<sup>57</sup> Eusebi (2018), 152, in his transcription of F has Ciugiu, but indeed F has Sinugul, which is identified by Haw (2020), 450-454, as Fuzhou 涪州, i.e. modern-day Fuling 涪陵, north-east-east of Chongqing.

<sup>58</sup> Fuzhou Route 福州路 in eastern Fujian.

<sup>59</sup> Huang Hongzhao (2013), 100-101.

<sup>60</sup> Kang Aili et al. (2010), 335.

taxon to the extant tigers was found in Gansu province in northwestern China.<sup>61</sup>



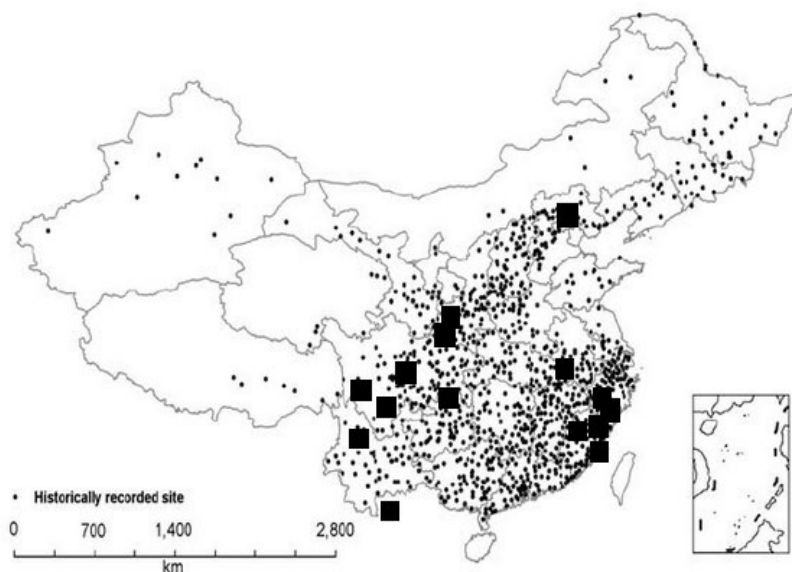
**Map 1: Historic and Current Distribution of Tiger Subspecies**

Source: Luo Shu-Jin et al. (2004), 2276.

That China was tigerland is clearly demonstrated in Map 2 which gives a spatial distribution of historical tiger records from 604 BC to 1990 AD. It represents a total of 2635 tiger records, 85 percent of them reporting about tiger tracks, 9 percent tiger attacks, and 6 percent tiger hunting. Most of the historical records come from central, east-central and south-east China.<sup>62</sup> In view of such a huge amount of historical data, it is not surprising that Marco Polo's much more selective entries about tiger localities can be easily integrated into this general picture (cf. Map 2).

<sup>61</sup> Mazák et al. (2011).

<sup>62</sup> Kang Aili et al. (2010), 337.



**Map 2: Spatial Distribution of Historical Tiger Records in China, 604 BC-1990 AD, with Marco Polo's Tiger Localities Marked with Large Black Squares**

Source: Based on Kang Aili et al. (2010), 336. Large black squares representing Polo's indications added by the author of this article.

Due to the limitation of space, I will only present a limited number of examples with a nice fit between entries in the *Le Devisement dou monde* and information obtained from other primary sources:

### **Tiger Hunting in the region around Canbalu:**

Although only the Fr redactions mention explicitly “lions” among the beasts hunted in winter by the population on order of Qubilai, we have an account in Odorico da Pordenone's early fourteenth-century report that confirms that, of course, tigers were one of the targets of hunting activities, though within a completely different social and organisational context:

When the Great Khan goes a hunting 'tis thus ordered. At some twenty days' journey from Cambalech, there is a fine forest of eight days' journey in compass; and in it are such multitudes and varieties of animals as are truly wonderful. All round this forest there be keepers posted on

account of the Khan, to take diligent charge thereof; and every third or fourth year he goeth with his people to this forest. On such occasions they first surround the whole forest with beaters, and let slip the dogs [and lions and lionesses and other tamed beasts trained to this business]<sup>63</sup> and the hawks trained to this sport, and then gradually closing in upon the game, they drive it to a certain fine open spot that there is in the middle of the wood. Here there becomes massed together an extraordinary multitude of wild beasts, such as lions, wild oxen, bears, stags, and a great variety of others, and all in a state of the greatest alarm. For there is such a prodigious noise and uproar raised by the birds and the dogs that have been let slip into the wood, that a person cannot hear what his neighbour says; and all the [unfortunate] wild beasts quiver with terror at the disturbance. And when they have all been driven together into that open glade, the Great Khan comes up on three elephants and shoots five arrows at the game. As soon as he has shot, the whole of his retinue do likewise. And when all have shot their arrows (each man's arrows having a token by which they may be discerned), then the Great Emperor causeth to be called out "*Syo!*" which is to say as it were *Quarter!* to the beasts (to wit) that have been driven from the wood. Then [the huntsmen sound the recall, and call in the dogs and hawks from the prey and] the animals which have escaped with life are allowed to go back into the forest, and all the barons come forward to view the game that has been killed and to recover the arrows that they have shot (which they can well do by the marks on them); and everyone has what his arrow has stuck. And such is the order of the Khan's hunting.<sup>64</sup>

### **Tiger hunting in the province of Acbaiec Mangi:**

Towards the end of the Song dynasty, when Li Xin 李新, a scholar from Sichuan, travelled on the gallery roads between Hanzhong and Meixian 眉縣 in Shaanxi, he came across several hundred people hunting tigers. They

---

<sup>63</sup> "Lions" and "lionesses" only mentioned in the Ramusian redaction.

<sup>64</sup> Yule (1913), 234-236.

were equipped with weapons, gongs and drums, banners and flags, and the noise of killing rushed against cliffs and valleys.<sup>65</sup>

### **Bonfires fed with green bamboo to deter tigers in Tebet:**

The degree of noise created by exploding bamboo crackers was certainly exaggerated by Marco Polo, but if we assume that large canes of *maozhu* 毛竹 bamboo (*Phyllostachys heterocyclus* (Carr.) Mitford cv. *Pubescens*) were used, then we can be sure that the noise was more impressive than that created by smaller types of bamboo canes.

So far I have not yet found a historical record in Chinese or other sources reporting the use of such bonfires with exploding bamboo crackers, but we have accounts that tell us about the use of fires and noises for deterring and chasing away tigers. One example comes from a place near Hanzhong 漢中, i.e. Acbalec Mangi, in modern-day Shaanxi from the beginning of the Qing period (1644-1911):

Whenever it became dark, tigers strolled through the markets and terrorized the streets and highways, injuring [and killing] people and domestic animals. One had to beat gongs and make fires, and this the whole night, as only then they would leave.<sup>66</sup>

### **Tiger hunting with dogs along the [Wujiang 乌江] river on the way to Sinugul city:**

The Venetian describes with quite some details how along the river on the way to Sinugul city in Ciugiu province (Kuizhoulu 夔州路) a horseman accompanied by two large dogs would hunt down and kill a tiger with bow and arrows (cf. Fig. 6). We are informed that these ferocious animals were considered dangerous for both inhabitants and even for travellers on waterways. From the passage of Odorico da Pordenone quoted above we know that dogs were used in the Great Khan's mass hunting of tigers and other beasts, but we may also mention that hunting with dogs was one of

<sup>65</sup> Li Xin 李新, *Kua'ao ji* 跨鳌集 (Collected Writings of [Li] Kua'ao), ch. 30, "Chihu wen" 痴虎文, quoted by Cheng Minsheng (2010), 65.

<sup>66</sup> Yao Xiaoxian 姚效先, *Xixiang shengji lu* 西乡胜迹录 (Records of Scenic Beauties of Xixiang), quoted by Tao Yuzhi (1997), 51.



the methods practiced later by the Manchus, as is testified by a painting from the eighteenth century showing two dogs pursuing a tiger in the hunting grounds near the summer palace at Rehe 熱河 in northwestern China (cf. Fig. 7). In that case it probably was a Siberian tiger, and not one from South China, like in the *Devisement*. The dogs of Ciugiu belonged perhaps to the *tugou* 土狗 or “indigenous dog” stock, a diverse group of various dog breeds kept by non-Han ethnic groups of China.<sup>67</sup>



**Figure 6: Hunting “Lions” with the Help of Dogs in Ciugiu Province**

Source: *Le livre des merveilles*, fifteenth century, f. 61r, BNF F 2810; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

### **Tigers attacking travellers in the provinces of Chingiu/Chiugiu and Quenlifu:**

Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), the great synthesizer of Neo-Confucianism, reports the following from his travels through western Zhejiang:

<sup>67</sup> Cf. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tugou> (accessed 20/10/2023).

When travelling successive days through the region of Qu[zhou] 衢[州], Xin[zhou] 信[州] and Jianning 建寧, I also heard that groups of wild tigers are going around in broad daylight and that many inhabitants along the roads are eaten by them. The people are weeping and crying to each other as they have no place to go to complain.<sup>68</sup>



**Figure 7: Dogs Pursuing a Tiger in the Imperial Hunting Grounds near Rehe 熱河, Qianlong Period (1736-1795)**

Source: Collier (1921), 78ff.

### **Tiger trap used near Fugiu city:**

Fujian province was especially famous for its tiger population. The Venetian reports from there how with a small white dog serving as bait a tiger

<sup>68</sup> *Zhu Xi ji* 朱熹集 (Collected Writings of Zhu Xi), ch. 27, “Yu Zhou chengxiang shu” 與周丞相書, quoted by Cheng Minsheng (2010), 68.

was caught in a pit trap, which was then killed or taken out alive, and that the good meat was eaten and the expensive skins sold. Compare this with a regulation that was granted in Sept./Oct. 1284:

At all places which suffer harm by tigers and leopards the authorities have strictly to enforce that governmental soldiers and [professional tiger] catchers catch [and kill] them by means of various methods. If among them are people that are not obligated to catch them, but who by themselves are able to set up contrivences (*she ji* 設機) and catch them, then skin and meat have not to be handed over to the officials, but should be given them as a reward. ...<sup>69</sup>

#### 4 Some Preliminary Conclusions

Tigers are often mentioned by Marco Polo though only shortly and following a standard pattern, i.e. within the framework of the description of places, landscapes, peoples, and products. However, besides the topics of abundance of resources and of animals as commodities and as causes for the interruption of circulation of men and products, there are four passages which are longer and contain much more detailed information. All of them were not accidentally selected by our traveller, but are artificial or natural tiger hotspots for different reasons and thus represent a hidden and rather systematic agenda.

One certainly can say that the Venetian has his own autonomous position in the description of tigers. His account of these animals is neutral, objective, realistic, and correct. Tigers are for him a natural phenomenon to be described with some precision and therefore his entries on this topic do not contain much hyperbole with regard to number, size, kinds and colours. No anthropomorphisation, demystification or refutation is at play, and no moral, didactic or religious meanings and symbolisms are attributed to tigers, as this was current with respects to tigers and other fierce felines both in China and the West.

---

<sup>69</sup> See *Yuanshi* 元史, 2686.

Like in the case of other topics, Polo's book provides us only with glimpses of the tigers' political, economic, social and cultural dimensions in Yuan China. While his account contains some information on tiger hotspots, measures against tigers, and their cosmological, magical, artistic, political and economic meanings, he is mute with respect to the rich tiger themes in Chinese myths, legends, folklore, fables, fiction, historical writing and art. This certainly had to do with his own preferences in the selection and treatment of themes, but also with the fact that he was mainly allied with the Mongol powerholders and their political trustees and may have had fewer contact and access to their Chinese subjects. It is therefore hardly surprising that he missed another important tiger topic that arose in Chinese literature and art during the Yuan period, namely, that tigers became a metaphor for the Mongols' atrocities. Sung Hou-mei informs us that during the Yuan period tiger paintings in China underwent drastic changes. Without imperial patronage tiger painting declined, like many other painting subjects of the Song period. Moreover, Yuan scholar-painters incorporated in tiger paintings a new political symbolism which served to vent their indignation and frustration with Mongol rule. Thus, tigers typically came to represent the harsh and cruel rule of the Mongols and the machinations of their barbarian allies of "evil foxes" (*yaohu* 妖狐) serving them. A clear cut example of this political metaphor alluding to the Mongols' destructive force is found in a poem authored by Wang Xu 王旭 (1245-1310):

Against the green cliff, the [tiger's] body appears like a brocade screen,  
 its eyes shine like golden stars shooting from the bright sun.  
 Wherever it passes, the paths are marked with disturbed hoofprints,  
 wherever it roars, the wind is tinged with the smell of blood.  
 The ignorant "ghosts of the tiger's victims" (*changgui* 佹鬼) are at its  
 service,  
 and the "evil foxes" (*yaohu*) learn to borrow from its authority

When will it cease guarding the celestial gate,  
and let me pass through the clouds to visit the imperial court?<sup>70</sup>

Yet, while on the one hand many aspects of Chinese tiger culture escaped the Venetian's attention or was simply not accessible to him, it has to be highlighted that on the other hand his work contains some unique information not to be found elsewhere, such as the deterrence of tigers by means of burning bamboo canes or the use of tigers for hunting. What is also to be stressed is that Marco Polo was probably the first European providing substantial information about the natural, political, economic and cultural significance of Asian tigers.

## References

- Allsen, Thomas T. (2006). *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).
- Andreose, Alvise, ed. (2019). *La strada per il Catai: Contatti tra Oriente e Occidente al tempo di Marco Polo* (Milano: Guerini e Associati).
- Atwood, Christopher P. (2020). "Three Yuan Administrative Units in Marco Polo: Kinjin Talas, Silingjiu, and Kungchang", *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, 49: 417-442.
- Brunello, Franco (1986). *Marco Polo e le merci dell'Oriente* (Vincenza: Neri Pozza Editore).
- Burgio, Eugenio (2018). *Marco Polo: Le Devisement dou monde; 2. Glossario* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari).
- Cheng Minsheng 程民生 (2010). "Songdai laohu de dili fenbu" 宋代老虎的地理分布 (Geographical Distribution of Tigers during the Song Period), *Shehui kexue zhanxian 社会科学战线* (Social Sciences Frontline), 3: 64-73.
- Collier, V. W. F. (1921). *Dogs of China and Japan in Nature and Art* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company).
- Dang Baohai 党宝海 (2001). "The Paizi of the Mongol Empire", *Zentralasiatische Studien*, 31: 31-62.
- DR, i.e. "Digital Ramusio", see Simion and Burgio, eds. (2015).

---

<sup>70</sup> Sung Hou-mei (1999), 34.

- Eusebi, Mario (2018). *Marco Polo: Le Devisement dou monde; I. Testo, secondo la lezione del codice fr. 1116 della Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari).
- Haw, Stephen G. (2006). *Marco Polo's China: A Venetian in the Realm of Kubilai Khan* (London and New York: Routledge).
- Haw, Stephen G. (2020). "Some Problematic Animals in Marco Polo's Description of the World", *Imago Temporis: Medium Aevum*, 14: 277-295.
- Haw, Stephen G. (2020a). "Marco Polo in 'Mangi': Kuizhou, Fuling, Houguan, and the Pontoon Bridge at Fuzhou", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 170.2: 445-466.
- Huang Hongzhao 黃鴻釗 (2013). "Xiangshan guwenxian zhong guanyu huhuan de jizai" 香山古文獻中關於虎患的記載 (Records about Tiger Calamities in Ancient Documents from Xiangshan), *Aomen wenxian xinxi xuekan* 澳門文獻信息學刊 (Journal of Macau Documentation and Information), 8: 99-101.
- Kang Aili; Xie Yan; Tang Jirong; Sanderson, Eric W.; Ginsberg, Joshua R.; Zhang Endi (2010). "Historic Distribution and Recent Loss of Tigers in China", *Integrative Zoology*, 5.4: 335-341; URL <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1749-4877.2010.00221.x> (accessed 20/07/2019).
- Kinoshita, Sharon (2016). *Marco Polo: The Description of the World* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company).
- Lévy, Brian J. (1997). "Un bestiaire oriental? Le monde animal dans *Le Devisement dou monde*", in Matsubara Hideichi, Suzuki Satoru, Fukumoto Naoyuki, and Harano Noboru, eds. *Les animaux dans la littérature* (Tokyo: Keio University Press), 159-178.
- Luo Shu-Jin; Kim Jae-Heup; Johnson, Warren E.; van der Walt, Joelle, et al. (2004). "Phylogeography and Genetic Ancestry of Tigers (*Panthera tigris*)", *PLoS Biology*, 2.12, e442: 2275-2293; URL <https://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.0020442> (accessed 25/10/2023).
- Marks, Robert B. (2006). "Asian Tigers: The Real, the Symbolic, the Commodity", *Nature and Culture*, 1.1: 63-87.
- Mazák, Ji H.; Christiansen, Per; Kitchener, Andrew C. (2011). "Oldest Known Pantherine Skull and Evolution of the Tiger", *PLoS ONE*, 6.10, e25483 (2011): 1-11; URL <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0025483> (accessed 19/07/2019).
- Nancun chuogeng lu* 南村輟耕錄 (Records of Nancun [i.e. Tao Zongyi] while Ceasing Farm Work), comp. by Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, c. mid-fourteenth century

- (ed. *Liufu wencang* 六府文藏, in Diaolong Database, CrossAsia Projekt of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin).
- Olschki, Leonardo; transl. by John A. Scott (1960). *Marco Polo's Asia: An Introduction to his "Description of the World", Called "Il milione"* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press).
- Pankenier, David W. (2013). *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Pelliot, Paul (1959-1973). *Notes on Marco Polo: Ouvrage posthume*, 3 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, Librairie Adrien-Maisonneuve).
- Schafer, Edward H. (1963). *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of T'ang Exotics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press).
- Simion, Samuela; Burgio, Eugenio, eds. (2015). *Ramusio, Giovanni Battista: Dei viaggi di Messer Marco Polo; Edizione critica digitale progettata e coordinata da Eugenio Burgio, Marina Buzzoni, and Antonella Ghersetti* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari); URL <http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni/libri/978-88-6969-00-06/> (accessed 25/10/2023).
- Skar, Lowell (2005). "Dragons, Tigers, and Elixirs: Alchemy in Medieval China", in Victor H. Mair, Nancy S. Steinhardt, and Paul R. Goldin (eds.). *Hawai'i Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), 429-432.
- Sung Hou-mei (1998). "Chinese Tiger Painting and its Symbolic Meanings; Part I: Tiger Painting of the Sung Dynasty", *National Palace Museum Bulletin*, 33.4: 1-16.
- Sung Hou-mei (1998a). "Chinese Tiger Painting and its Symbolic Meanings; Part I: Tiger Painting of the Sung Dynasty (Continued)", *National Palace Museum Bulletin*, 33.5: 17-32.
- Sung Hou-mei (1999). "Chinese Tiger Painting and its Symbolic Meanings; Part II: Tiger Painting of the Yüan and Ming Dynasties (Continued)", *National Palace Museum Bulletin*, 34.1: 45-60.
- Tao Yuzhi 陶喻之 (1997). "Hanzhong lidai huhuan gouchen" 汉中历代虎患钩沉 (In Search of Tiger Calamities in Hanzhong through the Ages), *Hanzhong shifan xueyuan xuebao (shehui kexue)* 汉中师范学院学报 (社会科学) (Journal of Hanzhong Teachers College (Social Sciences)), 15.3: 62-65, 80.
- Vogel, Hans Ulrich (2019). "I draghi accovacciate e le tigri camufate di Marco Polo", in Alvise Andreose, ed. *La strada per il Catai: Contatti tra Oriente e Occidente al tempo di Marco Polo* (Milano: Guerini e Associati), 47-71.

- Yuanshi* 元史 (History of the Yuan [Dynasty]), comp. by Song Lian 宋濂 et al. (ed. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976).
- Yule, Henry (1903/1993). *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Complete Yule-Cordier Edition*, 2 vols. (repr. New York: Dover Publications, 1993).
- Yule, Henry (1913). *Cathay and the Way thither, Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China; New Edition, Revised throughout in the Light of Recent Discoveries by Henri Cordier; Vol. II: Odoric of Pordenone* (London: The Hakluyt Society).



# Marco Polo Research Past, Present, Future

This collective volume on Marco Polo's (1254-1324) travels attempts to integrate the fragmented research landscape by bringing together individual disciplines which usually work separately, like philology, comparative literature, text and reception history, Romance linguistics, as well as geography, anthropology, the history of religion, science, military, economics, etc. It is thus one of but a few works that go beyond singular aspects of Marco Polo's journey and his observations and thus shows that Polo's *Description of the World* is much more than just a travelogue.

The international contributors to this volume, who are leading scholars in their fields, make use of different, sometimes unique sources and thus help us better understand the Venetian's report and the times it was created, and also to verify and elucidate statements in the many versions and editions in which it came down to us. In addition, the essays published here are meant to be a contribution to the celebrations commemorating the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Marco Polo's death.

