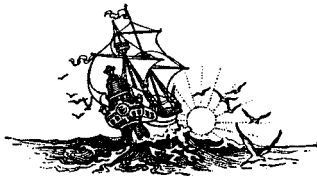


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THE TRAVELS OF MARCO POLO



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MARCO POLO



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THE TRAVELS OF MARCO POLO

L F BENEDETTO

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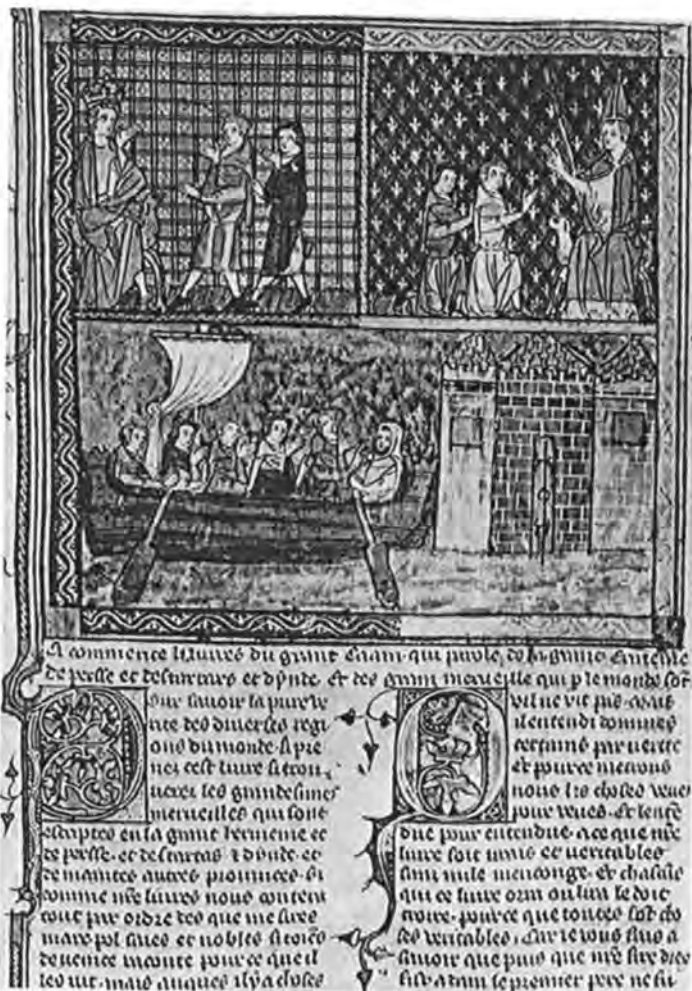
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MINIATURE IN THREE COMPARTMENTS

- (a) The Emperor Baldwin and the Brothers Niccolò and Matteo Polo in Constantinople
 (b) The Brothers Polo before the Legate Tebaldo de Vicenza
 (c) The Brothers Polo set sail for the Black sea
- From the French manuscript containing the recension used by Pauthier and Yule, dating from the middle of the Fourteenth Century

[B.M. Royal Manuscript 19, D, I, fol. 58(a)]

THE BROADWAY TRAVELLERS

EDITED BY SIR E. DENISON ROSS
AND EILEEN POWER

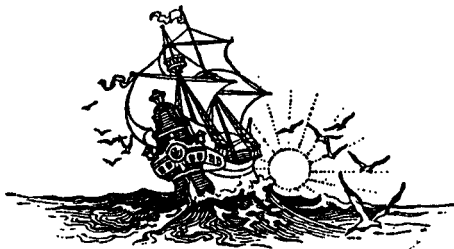


THE TRAVELS OF
MARCO POLO

Translated into English from the text of
L. F. BENEDETTO

by
PROFESSOR ALDO RICCI

With an Introduction and Index by
SIR E. DENISON ROSS



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This seal has the form of a rat in bronze



成吉思汗

SEAL OF CHINGIZ KHAN [Ch'êng-chi-ssü-han]

This seal has the form of a tortoise in black jade

TWO SEALS BEARING THE NAMES OF CHINGIZ KHAN AND KUBILAI KAAH RECENTLY BROUGHT FROM CHINA

INTRODUCTION

MARCO POLO, the son of Niccolò Polo, was born in Venice in 1254. Soon after this date Niccolò Polo and his brother Matteo set out on a journey for the purposes of trade in the East which eventually led them via Bukhara to the court of the Great Kaan Kubilai in Cathay. Kubilai was so well pleased with these Venetians that he despatched them on a mission to the Pope with letters inviting His Holiness to send one hundred educated missionaries who might convert his people to Christianity.

When the brothers, on their return journey, reached Acre in April 1269, they learnt that there was no Pope: for Clement IV had died in the previous year (29th November 1268) and no new Pope had been elected. When, in the middle of 1271, the cardinals had still not made their choice of Pope, the Polos set out again for Cathay, taking the seventeen-year-old Marco with them. They had not gone far when news came that a new Pope had at last been elected (1st September 1271). The new Pope, Gregory X, instead of complying with Kubilai's request for one hundred missionaries, sent only two Dominicans, who, losing heart, turned back when they had gone only a very short distance.

The first objective of the Polos was Hormuz, whence they intended to proceed by sea: On reaching the Persian Gulf they changed their plans and set out overland for China, via Kerman, Khurasan, Balkh, Badakhshan, Kashghar, Yarkand, Khotan, and Lop Nor, eventually arriving about May 1275 in the presence of

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Kubilai Kaan, who was in his summer retreat at K'ai-p'ing-fu or Chandu (Coleridge's Xanadu).

During the long residence of the Polos in China, Marco was employed in various capacities (none probably as exalted as he would have us believe) and was sent on several distant missions, including one to Yün-nan and Burma and another to the Eastern provinces of China.

Kubilai became so attached to the Polos that it was only by chance that, at the end of seventeen years, they were able to leave the court, where they were virtual prisoners. It so happened that about the year 1289 envoys arrived from Arghun Khan, the Il-Khan or provincial ruler of Persia (A.D. 1284-1291), reporting the death of his favourite wife, Bolgana, and requesting the Great Kaan to send to Persia another lady of her kin. A suitable bride was found in the person of the seventeen-year-old Princess Cocachin, and the question was how to convey her in safety to Persia. It was a choice of evils. The long sea route naturally involved risks for the clumsy Chinese junks, while the land route presented no less serious dangers on account of the disturbed state of the provinces which lay on the route to Persia.

When at length the sea route was chosen, the envoys requested that they might be accompanied by the three Venetians, whose maritime experience would minimise the dangers of the voyage. Kubilai, though most reluctant to part with the Polos, set the safety of the Princess Cocachin above his own personal feelings and consented to let them go. Early in 1292 the little fleet, composed of 14 ships and carrying 600 passengers in addition to the crews, set sail from the port of Zayton.

The whole journey to Hormuz lasted over two years. The course followed is fairly well-established, and included Champa, Java, Sondur and Condur, the Straits of Singapore, the Straits of Malacca, the Nicobar

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Islands, Ceylon, Malabar, Makran, and so on to Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. It seems evident that if Marco Polo visited the Western littoral of India, it was during one of his missions and not on this particular journey to Persia.

By the time the Polos reached Hormuz their numbers had been sadly depleted, for according to Marco Polo only eighteen passengers had survived the hardships of the journey, though this is probably an exaggeration. He tells us that Arghun had already died—as a matter of fact he had died before they left China in 1291. Princess Cocachin was placed under the protection of Kaikhatu who had succeeded his brother, and she was eventually given in marriage to Ghazan Khan, the son of Arghun, who in 1295 became Il-Khan of Persia.

The Polos after spending nine months at the court of Kaikhatu proceeded homewards via Trebizond, Constantinople and Negropont, finally reaching Venice some time in 1295, after 25 years absence.

Ramusio tells us how the three Polos on arrival at their house found it occupied by relatives, who having supposed them long since dead refused to recognise them. Indeed their appearance was much changed and they had, we are told, "a certain indescribable smack of the Tartar both in air and accent" (*che rappresentava un non so che del Tartaro nel volto, e nel parlare*).

Not many months after their arrival in Venice news came that Lamba Doria, captain of the Genoese fleet, had arrived with 70 galleys at the Island of Curzola, and in the expedition now sent out from Venice to attack them, Marco Polo, according to Ramusio, commanded a galley. A battle took place in September in which the Venetian fleet was defeated and Marco Polo, while displaying the greatest courage in an attempt to save the situation, was wounded and taken prisoner. He was sent to Genoa where Ramusio tells us how, the

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fame of his rare qualities and his wonderful journey having been spread abroad, all the city assembled to see and speak to him, treating him not as a prisoner, but as a dear friend and a highly honoured gentleman. He grew so tired of telling his adventures that he was advised to put them into writing. In order to refresh his memory he sent a letter asking his father in Venice to send him the notes and memoranda which he had brought with him from the East. The narrative thus dictated was put into literary form by a man of letters from Pisa called Rustichello, who was one of Marco's fellow-prisoners. It seems to be definitely proved that none of the manuscripts which have come down to us represent the original form of the narrative, but that certain texts show a greater nearness to this lost original than others.

Almost all the MSS. and early printed editions known to us may be grouped in one or other of two main categories; namely, Group A, those resembling the so-called Paris Geographic text, and Group B, those related to the Italian version prepared by Ramusio and printed in 1559—two years after his death.

Group A includes almost all the known remodellings, translations and editions, especially important being the MS. fr. 1116 of the Bibliothèque Nationale. But they all descend from a prototype which was already far removed from the original as we know from the many lacunae and errors.

Group B is represented by Ramusio, by certain Venetian MSS. and by a Latin MS. recently discovered in the Ambrosian Library, Milan, by Professor Benedetto, now known as Codex Z. This MS. is a copy made in 1795 of a manuscript written in the XIV-XVth centuries and belonging to Cardinal Zelada. It is obviously derived from a Franco-Italian version infinitely superior to Group A but it is not complete, for about one-third of the text consists of arbitrary abridgements, though the remaining two-thirds re-

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produce faithfully the text of fr. 1116 where they coincide. It contains no less than 200 passages not met with in Group A and three-fifths of these are found in Ramusio, who obviously had a "brother" of "Z" before him. But Codex Z is certainly not the Latin manuscript "di maravigliosa antichità" belonging to the family of Ghisi which Ramusio said he had seen and thought *might* be a copy of the *original*, for there is still much in Ramusio which is to be found neither in the other known versions nor in "Z." The original of "Z" is said to be in Toledo, but Professor Benedetto has been unable to obtain any news of it, and until this MS. is forthcoming the Milan copy must be received with a certain amount of caution.

With reference to the discovery of Codex "Z" it should be mentioned that some years ago Professor Benedetto was entrusted by the Comitato Geografico Nazionale Italiano in Florence with the task of preparing a new national edition of Marco Polo. He travelled all over Europe in order to study the known MSS. and if possible to discover others; and in the course of his visits to about fifty libraries he discovered many hitherto unknown MSS. of Marco Polo.

It has been Benedetto's difficult task to reconsider the whole question of Marco Polo texts in the light of newly-discovered manuscripts, and the result of his labours is given in a magnificent edition of the most famous of all manuscripts, namely the Geographic text (fr. 1116) carefully edited for the first time and collated with all the best known texts. To this text he has added at the foot of the page in their original form all those passages occurring in Ramusio, in "Z" and in other texts which seem to furnish valuable additions, and in some cases important variants.

Those who are unable to consult Benedetto's great edition, which was limited to 300 copies, are recom-

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mended to turn to the excellent introduction prefixed by Mr Penzer to his reprint of John Frampton's translation.¹ Here will be found, set out in very clear detail, a resumé of Benedetto's conclusions. In this place I have only given the briefest summary of this strange story.

The famous Gregoire group based on a lost Franco-Italian prototype and known as FG which formed the basis of both Pauthier's and Yule's versions was little utilized by Benedetto in his edition for reasons which at the time seemed to him sufficient.

Since the publication of his fine edition Benedetto has made a translation of the Geographic text and embodied in it the most important additional passages from the other texts. While making his Italian translation he has frequently had recourse to readings in the FG family of MSS. not noted in his edition. The present volume represents in the main the English translation of his Modern Italian version made by the late Signor Aldo Ricci whose untimely death occurred shortly after he had completed it. This English rendering has since been checked with the original texts by myself in consultation with Professor Benedetto.

Among the more important additions to Marco Polo's narrative furnished by MS. "Z" may be mentioned the following:—

1. On p. 72 there is a new chapter on the province of Icoгурistan with its capital Carachoco. These are the old kingdom of the Uighurs and the ruined city of Qara Khoja.

2. On pp. 261–263 there will be found translated a long passage from MS. "Z" (see Benedetto's edition, p. 158) describing "a race of people" living

¹ The Most Noble and Famous Travels of Marco Polo, together with the Travels of Nicolo de' Conti. Edited from the Elizabethan Translation of John Frampton, with Introduction, Notes, and Appendixes, by N. M. Penzer. pp. lx, 381, London, The Argonaut Press, 1929.

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in Fu-chien, who professed what Marco Polo believed to be a peculiar kind of Christianity. Monsieur Pelliot in a notice of Benedetto's edition (*Journal des Savants*, January 1929, p. 42) points out that this passage undoubtedly refers to the Manichaeans who were very numerous in this province, and did not altogether disappear till the beginning of the seventeenth century.

3. On pp. 301, 302 there is a passage in connection with Malabar, derived from MS. "Z" (Benedetto's edition, p. 183), which constitutes a fresh tribute to the accuracy of Marco Polo's notes: "Again, in every day in the week they say there is an unlucky hour, that they call *choiach*; thus, for example, they say on Monday it is the hour of half-tierce; on Tuesday the hour of tierce; on Wednesday the hour of none; and so on for each day, the whole year through." I have not been able to trace the origin of the word *choiach*, but the superstition is still preserved in Malabar to-day under the name of *Ragu Kalam*, and the various times of the day correspond exactly with Marco Polo's description. They are, as I have learnt from a Malabari gentleman, as follows: Monday, 7.30 a.m. to 9 a.m.; Tuesday, 3 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.; Wednesday, 12 noon to 1.30 p.m.; Thursday, 1.30 p.m. to 3 p.m.; Friday, 10.30 a.m. to 12 noon; Saturday, 9 a.m. to 10.30 a.m.; Sunday, 4.30 p.m. to 6 p.m. The passage in "Z" begins: "Item pro qualibet die in ebdomada dicunt esse unam horam infelicem que uciacham (sic) quam appellant choiach. . . ." In Ramusio the passage begins: "Item per ciascun giorno della settimana hanno un' hora infelice, qual chiamano Choiach. . . ." It is therefore possible that the original word resembles *uciacham* rather than *choiach*. Mr Moule suggests that *que uciacham* represents an insufficiently erased lapse into some modern language occurring in some progenitor of "Z." The Dravidian expression for the evil hour is *Karippu Kal* which would be pronounced

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Kachukka by a low-caste Tamil or Malayalim. *Karippu* means the act of propitiating malignant deities.

4. A passage beginning on p. 389, line 18, "I wish, however, to tell you first . . ." and continuing down to p. 392, line 18, ". . . martens' heads." (Benedetto's edition, pp. 233, 234) constitutes a curious addition to the chapter on Russia found in the Geographic text.

I have not myself seen the Italian version from which Signor Ricci made his translation, but from my correspondence with Professor Benedetto I gather that certain differences will be found to exist between that version and the English translation as it now stands. This is especially the case in regard to obvious errors in matters of fact, for whereas Professor Benedetto has corrected these in his translation with a view to accuracy in the narrative, I have persuaded him to allow me in such cases to adhere to the original readings, however faulty, with a view to accuracy in the text. I have, however, agreed to change the date on p. 8 from 1260 as given in fr. 1116 to 1269, as the former date is historically absurd. The date on p. 3, 1250, though probably a mistake for 1260, has been allowed to stand. Many such errors occur in connection with the names and genealogies of the Mongol Khans. On p. 83, for example, the list of the successors of Chingiz Khan to the overlordship of the Mongol Empire is full of errors. The correct list down to Kubilai should run as follows: Chingiz 1206-1227, Ögödei 1227-1241, Küyük 1246-1248, Möngkä 1248-1259, Kubilai 1260-1294. Between 1241 and 1246 there was an interregnum during which the lady Turakina acted as regent for her eldest son Küyük. Ögödei is omitted altogether, and neither Batu nor Hulagu (here represented by Alton, *see* Index) were Great Kaans.

On p. 116 Marco Polo says the eldest son of Kubilai was "called Chingis in memory of the good Chingis

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Kaan." This is an error of which Marco Polo was obviously not aware, for if we change the name of this prince to Chinkim, his correct name, the sentence loses its meaning. In Yule (third edition, Vol. I, p. 359) we read: "The Emperor hath, by these four wives of his, twenty-two male children; the eldest of whom was called *Chinkin* for the love of the good Chinghis Kaan." A note on the following page says: "Marco was probably wrong in connecting the name of the latter (*i.e.* Chinkim) with that of Chinghiz." Of course Marco did nothing of the kind, he mistook the prince's name and thinking it was Chingiz naturally thought he received it in memory of his illustrious ancestor. Charignon (Vol. II, p. 41) says that the Polo MSS. always give the two names Chinkim and Chingiz with identical spelling, and presumes that Marco Polo was too well informed to take these names as identical. Ramusio has *Cingis* in both cases. I think it is evident that these represent not errors of the MSS. but rather errors made in his notes on the spot by Marco Polo and as such are worth preserving.

The four outstanding editions of the nineteenth century are the Geographic Text published in 1814 and the translations of Marsden (1818), or Pauthier (1865), and of Henry Yule (First edition 1871). The most comprehensive edition is the second edition of Yule revised by Cordier and published in 1903, and as far as regards the elucidation of the narrative this is likely long to remain the standard work on Marco Polo, although fresh light is constantly being thrown by scholars on some particular identification or difficulty. Most valuable notes of this kind have, for example, been contributed recently by Monsieur Paul Pelliot, the Rev. A. C. Moule, and Sir Aurel Stein, to mention only a few. It may now be claimed that most of the places mentioned by Marco Polo have been identified, in spite of peculiar spellings and of apparent inconsistencies. The difficulty of following

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him on his many journeys has been much simplified by the process of distinguishing whenever possible between those places which lay on his main route to China and his return journey by sea to Persia, and those which he visited during his stay in China and those which he never visited at all.

It will be observed that I have not added annotations to this translation. I have, however, with the aid of Miss Stella Buchanan, prepared a full index in which will be found all the identifications which have been made with some degree of certainty by Yule and his successors in the field of Poliana.

Had Signor Aldo Ricci been alive he would no doubt have contributed a preface describing the methods by which he was guided in his translation. In default of this I may be permitted to quote from a letter he wrote me dated from Florence the 31st August 1929:—

“ Please allow me now to take this opportunity of submitting a small matter to you in connection with the translation. Quite apart from the question of the texts Yule used for his version, his style of translating does not seem to me perfectly satisfactory, alternating as it does between archaisms and forms and expressions redolent of the fairy tale. Doubtless Yule intended by means of the latter to reproduce the ingenuousness of the author, but surely the ingenuousness of Marco Polo is not that of the child, and still less that of the grown-up telling a tale to children, which is the impression Yule so often leaves on one. It is, of course, a purely literary ingenuousness, so to speak, the inability to express oneself clearly at a time when a vernacular prose style did not yet exist, and on the part of a person who was by no means a “ clerk.” But the mentality is naturally far from being that of the child, except perhaps in the sense in which the middle ages are popularly considered childish.

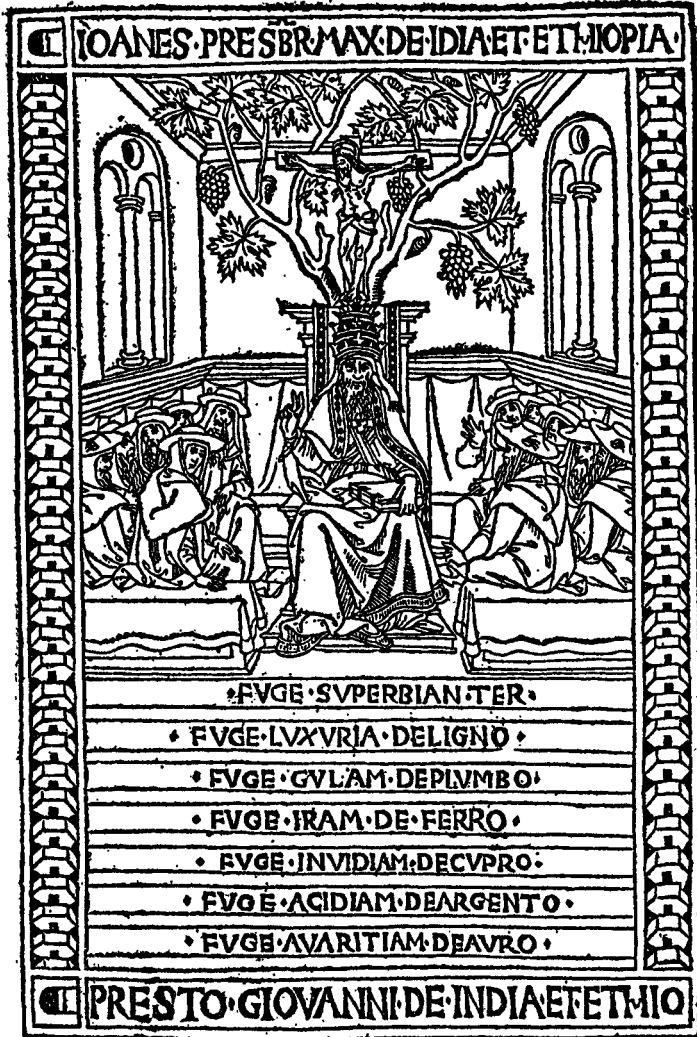
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“ After making several experiments, I have come to the conclusion that the only really legitimate way of translating Polo is to be as literal as the difference between the two languages will allow. In this way his mentality, if I may say so, is allowed to speak for itself, and his constant visible effort to express his meaning—which is extremely interesting from so many points of view, both literary and psychological—is in no way disguised. For this same reason I also believe that Yule was ill-advised in compressing and even suppressing so many passages and sentences of repetitions, not to mention the “ formulae ” at the end of chapters which he often passes over.”

In conclusion I desire to thank Monsieur Pelliot, the Rev. A. C. Moule, and Mr W. Perceval Yetts, for the help and advice they were kind enough to give me while this book was passing through the press.

E. DENISON ROSS.

**CLagran Magnificenta del Prete Ianni Signore dellIndia
Maggiore e della Echiopia**



THE GREAT MAGNIFICENCE OF PRESTER JOHN, LORD OF GREATER INDIA
AND OF ETHIOPIA

Frontispiece to a popular Italian poem on Prester John written by
Giuliano Dati (1445-1524), Bishop of Saint-Leon in Calabria.

This poem, containing fifty-nine verses of eight lines, was printed in
Florence at the end of the Fifteenth Century, but bears no date.

The Copy in the British Museum is numbered C20.C23.

The Travels of Marco Polo

EMPERORS and Kings, dukes and marquesses, counts, knights and burgesses, and all ye, who-ever ye be, who wish to know of the various races of men, and of the diversities of the different regions of the world, take this book and have it read to you. You shall find in it all the mighty wonders, all the great singularities of the vast regions of the East—of the Greater Armenia, of Persia, of Tartary, and of India, and of many a country besides—set down by us clearly and in due order, as they were recounted by Messer Marco Polo, called *Milione*, a wise and noble citizen of Venice, who saw them with his own eyes. Some things there will, in truth, be that he did not see, but only heard tell of by men worthy of credit. And we will set down the things seen as seen, and those heard as heard, that our book may be correct and truthful, without any falsehood.

And all who read this book or hear it read, must believe it, as all the things contained in it are true. For I tell you that ever since the Lord our God did with his own hands mould our first Father Adam, there never was up to the present day any man, Christian or Pagan, Tartar or Indian or of any other race whatsoever, who knew and explored so great a part of the various regions of the world and of its great marvels, as this Messer Marco knew and explored. Hence, it seemed to him, it were too great a pity, did he not cause to be written down all the great marvels he had seen or heard tell of as true, that others also, who had neither seen nor heard of them, might acquire knowledge of them by means of this book.

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And you must know that, to learn so many things, he lived no less than twenty-six years in those regions and provinces. When afterwards he was a captive in the prison of Genoa, he had all these things recorded in writing by Master Rustichello of Pisa, who was in the same prison, in the year 1298 from the birth of Jesus. And he only set down a small part of the things he had learnt—namely those that he could remember.

*How Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo left
Constantinople to explore the world*

YOU must know that, in the year 1250 after Christ's Incarnation, when Baldwin was emperor of Constantinople, and Messer Ponte the Venetian Podestà in that city, there were two brothers there, Messer Niccolò Polo, the father of Messer Marco, and Messer Matteo, brother to Messer Niccolò, who had gone thither from Venice with their merchandise. They were in truth most noble and wise and prudent men. They took counsel together, and decided to go to the Greater Sea with a view to their own gains and profits. Therefore they purchased a quantity of jewels, and sailed from Constantinople in a ship, and went to Soldaia.

How Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo left Soldaia

After remaining some time at Soldaia, they decided to proceed yet further. What more shall I tell you? They left Soldaia and set out, riding until, without encountering any adventure worthy of mention, they reached the Court of Barca Khan, Lord of a part of the Tartars, who resided at that time at Bolgara and Sarai. This Barca treated Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo with great honour, and greatly rejoiced at their arrival. The two brothers gave him all the jewels they had brought. Barca accepted them willingly, being immeasurably pleased with them, and had twice their value given to the brothers. He sent the jewels to be set in various places, and they were very well set.

When they had been a year in the land of Barca, war broke out between him and Alau, Lord of the

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Tartars of the Levant; and each marched against the other with all his men. They came to grips, and there was great slaughter on both sides, but Alau ended by remaining victorious. And on account of that battle and of the war, no one could travel along the roads without being taken. But this was in the direction whence the brothers had come, whereas forward they could go. Hence the two brothers reasoned among themselves: "As we cannot return to Constantinople with our wares, let us go forward by way of the east; we may be able to return by an indirect route." They made ready and left Bolgara, proceeding to a city called Uaca, where the Kingdom of Barca, Lord of the Ponent, came to an end. Departing from Uaca, and crossing the river Tigris, they traversed a desert which extended for seventeen days' journey. They found neither cities nor towns, but only Tartars living in tents on the produce of their cattle.

How the two brothers crossed a desert and arrived at the city of Bucara

Having crossed the desert, they reached a very noble and large city, called Bucara. The province, also called Bucara, was ruled by a King called Barac. The city was the finest in the whole of Persia. The two brothers, once they had reached it, could proceed no further, nor could they turn back, and so they remained there three years.

And while they were living there, an envoy arrived, sent by Alau, Lord of the Levant, to the Lord of all the Tartars, namely Cublai, who lived at the extremity of the earth between east and north-east. When the envoy saw Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo, he marvelled greatly, no Latin having ever been seen in those parts. He said to the two brothers: "Gentlemen, if you but place trust in me, you will receive

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great profit and honour thereby." The two brothers said they would willingly place trust in him; as long as what was to be done lay in their power. And the envoy said: "Gentlemen, know that the Great Lord of the Tartars has never seen any Latins, and is filled with the greatest desire of seeing some; hence if you will come to him with me, I assure you that he will see you with great pleasure, and will treat you most honourably and generously. And with me you can travel in safety and without difficulty."

How the two brothers followed the advice of the envoy to the Great Kaan

On hearing the envoy's words, the two brothers rejoiced and declared they would willingly go with him. Hence they set out together with the envoy, and journeyed for one year to the north and north-east before reaching the land where the Lord lived. They met with great marvels and many novelties, that we shall not deal with here, because Messer Marco, the son of Messer Niccolò, who also saw all these things, will relate them to you at length further on in this book.

How the brothers reached the Court of the Great Kaan

When Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo reached the Court of the Great Lord, he received them honourably; and gave them a joyful and hospitable welcome. He was greatly pleased by their arrival. Many questions he asked them: first about their emperors, how they governed their lands according to justice, and how they went out to battle, and about all their other actions. After that, he asked them about their kings and princes and other lords.

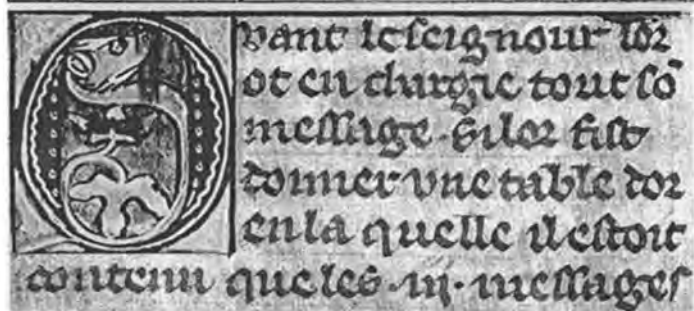
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How the Great Kaan questioned the two brothers concerning the Christians

After that, he questioned them concerning the Lord Pope and all the affairs of the Roman Church, and all the customs of the Latins. And Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo told him the whole truth about everything, in an orderly fashion and well and wisely, as befits wise men like them, who well knew the Tartar and Turkish languages.

How the Great Kaan sent the two brothers as envoys to the Roman Pontiff

When the Great King called Cublai Kaan, who was Lord of all the Tartars of the world, and of all the provinces and kingdoms and territories of that immense region of the earth, had heard about all the affairs of the Latins, even as the two brothers had excellently and clearly explained them to him, he was greatly pleased. He decided to send envoys to the Pope; and so he begged the two brothers to go on this mission together with one of his barons. They answered that they would execute all his commands as those of their liege Lord. Then the Great Lord summoned to his presence one of his barons, who was called Cogatal, and said to him that he wished him to go to the Pope, together with the two brothers. And the baron answered: "Sire, I am your servant, and am ready to carry out all your commands to the best of my ability." After this, the Great Lord had letters written out in the Turkish language from himself to the Pope, and entrusted them to the two brothers and to his baron, whom he charged with what he wished them to say to the Pope on his behalf. Know, then, that the purport of the letters and of the embassy he sent was as you shall hear: he made his request to



KUBILAI GIVES THE GOLDEN TABLET (PAÏZAH) TO THE BROTHERS POLO

[B.M. Royal Manuscript 19. D. I, fol. 59(b)]

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the Pope that he should send him some hundred wise men, learned in the law of Christ, conversant in the Seven Arts, and fully capable of entering into discussions, and clearly proving to idolaters and to people of other persuasions that their laws were anything but divinely inspired, and that all the idols they kept in their houses, and worshipped, were things of the devil; in a word, he desired that the Pope should send him men able to show clearly, in the light of reason, that the Christian Law was better than their own. The Great Lord further bade the two brothers bring him some oil from the lamp that burns above God's Sepulchre in Jerusalem. This, even as you have heard, was the purport of the embassy sent by the Great Lord to the Pope by means of the two brothers.

How the Great Kaan gave the two brothers the Golden Tablet of Authority

When the Great Lord had duly instructed the two brothers and his baron as to the message he was sending to the Pope, he caused a golden tablet to be given them, the purport of which was that, where-soever they went, they were to be furnished with all the necessary quarters, and with horses and men to escort them from one town to another. And when Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo, together with the other envoy, duly provided themselves with all that was needful to them, they took leave of the Great Lord, and, mounting their horses, set out on their journey. When they had ridden some distance, the Tartar baron who was going with them fell sick, and, being unable to continue the journey, remained behind in a certain city. When Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo saw that he was ill, they left him, and proceeded on their way. And I assure you that, wherever they went, they were honoured and furnished with all they

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wished to command. What more shall I tell you? They rode so long, day after day, that they reached Laias. And I tell you that they toiled three years on the way. And this was due to the fact that they could not always ride on account of foul weather or snow or rivers that were big.

How the two brothers reached the city of Acre

They left Laias and went to Acre, reaching it in the month of April, in the year 1269 after Christ's Incarnation. And they found that the Lord Pope was dead. And when Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo found that the Pope (Clement by name) was dead, they went to a wise clerk who was Legate of the Church of Rome for the whole kingdom of Egypt. He was a man of great authority and his name was Tebaldo of Piacenza. They told him of the mission upon which the Great Lord of the Tartars had sent them to the Pope. And when the Legate had heard what the two brothers told him, he marvelled greatly, and thought that it was very much to the honour and advantage of Christendom. He said to the two brothers: "Gentlemen, ye see that the Pope is dead; ye must therefore needs wait until there be another. And when there is a Pope, ye shall then be able to execute your mission." The two brothers, seeing that what the Legate said was right, declared that, while waiting for the election of the Pope, they would proceed to Venice to see their family. So they left Acre and went to Negropont. From Negropont they departed in a ship, and sailed until they reached Venice. Messer Niccolò found that his wife was dead, and had left a son of fifteen years of age, whose name was Marco; and this is the Marco of whom the present book relates. Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo remained at Venice about two years, waiting until there should be a Pope.

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How the two brothers left Venice to return to the Great Kaan, and took with them Marco, the son of Messer Niccolò.

When the two brothers had waited as long as you have heard, seeing that no Pope was being made, they thought they should delay no longer in returning to the Great Kaan. So they departed from Venice, taking with them the boy Marco, and went straight to Acre, where they found the Legate of whom I have told you above. They spoke at length of these matters with him, and asked him leave to go to Jerusalem to fetch some of the oil from the lamp of Christ's Sepulchre, that the Great Kaan had asked them for, being desirous of having it because his mother was a Christian. The Legate gave them leave to go. So the brothers left Acre and proceeded to Jerusalem, and took of the oil of the lamp of Christ's Sepulchre. They returned to the Legate at Acre, and said to him: "Sir, as we see that no Pope is being elected, we wish to return to the Great Lord, for we have tarried too long." And the Lord Legate, who was one of the greatest lords of the Church of Rome, said to them: "Since you wish to return to the Great Lord, I am content." So he prepared his letters and his message to send to the Great Kaan, witnessing that Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo had come to perform their commission, but that, as there was no Pope, they had been unable to do so.

How the two brothers and Marco left Acre

When the two brothers had received the Legate's letters, they departed from Acre and set out on their journey to return to the Great Lord; and they journeyed until they reached Laias. They had hardly arrived there, when that same Legate was elected Pope,

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assuming the name of Gregory. The two brothers were greatly pleased. And a short time after, a messenger reached Laias, sent by the Legate who had been elected Pope, to Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo, to tell them, should they not have already left, to return to him. The two brothers were still in that city because at that time the roads along which they were to travel were closed and ravaged by a nephew of the Great Kaan, who had been a Christian, and having fought against the Great Kaan had taken flight. They greatly rejoiced at this message and said they would return willingly. What more shall I tell you? The King of Armenia had a galley armed for the two brothers, and sent them with all due honours to the Legate.

How the two brothers went to the Roman Pontiff

When they had come to Acre, they went to the Lord Pope, and most humbly paid him their respects. The Lord Pope received them honourably, and gave them his blessing, welcoming them with joyful hospitality. Then he caused new letters to be prepared for the Great Lord, in which, among other things, he requested that the Great Lord's nephew Abaga, namely the Lord of the Tartars of the Levant, might vouchsafe his aid and favour to the Christians, so as to make their passage overseas possible. The Pope further appointed many splendid gifts of crystal and of other substances for the Great Kaan. Then he gave Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo two preaching friars, the wisest that were to be found in the whole province. The one was called Fra Niccolò of Vicenza, and the other Fra Guglielmo of Tripoli. He endowed the two friars with the necessary authority, that they might do everything in those countries with full powers, ordain priests and consecrate bishops, and bind and

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unbind even as he himself. He gave them their written credentials and letters, and entrusted them with the message he wished to send to the Great Kaan. And when Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo and the two preaching friars had received the credentials and letters and the message of the Lord Pope, they asked him to give them his blessing; then all four set out, and with them went Marco, the son of Messer Niccolò. They went straight to Laias. When they had arrived there, Bondocdaire, who was the Soldan of Babylon, came to Armenia with a large host, doing great damage throughout the country. And the messengers ran the risk of being killed. When the two preaching friars saw this, they were greatly afraid to proceed further. So they said that they would not go. They consigned to Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo all the credentials and letters that they had, and left them, going away with the Master of the Temple.

How the two brothers and Marco reached the city of Kemenfu, where the Great Kaan was

And Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo, with Marco, the son of Niccolò, set out on their journey, riding so long, winter and summer, that they reached the Court of the Great Kaan, who at that moment was in a large and wealthy city, called Kemenfu. Of what they found on their journey we will make no mention at present, because we shall tell you about it further on in this book, all in due order. But you must know that they toiled no less than three and a half years on the way, on account of the snows, and the rains, and the vast rivers and the furious winds, and because they could not ride in winter as in summer. And I assure you that when the Great Kaan heard that Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo were coming, he sent messengers to meet them at the distance of

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forty days' journey, so that they were excellently honoured and provided with everything.

How the two brothers and Marco came to the presence of the Great Kaan in his palace

And what more shall I tell you? When Messer Niccolò and Messer Matteo, together with Marco, had come to that great city, they went to the Royal Palace, where they found the Great Kaan surrounded by a large company of barons. So they kneeled before him and paid him their respects in the humblest possible manner. The Great Kaan made them rise, and received them honourably, giving them a joyful and hospitable welcome. And much did he question them concerning their condition and how they had fared. The two brothers told him that they had fared very well, seeing that they had found him in good health and prosperous. Then they presented the credentials and letters the Pope sent him, which pleased him exceedingly. They then consigned the holy oil, over which he rejoiced very much, setting great store by it. When the Great Kaan saw Marco, who was a young man, he asked who he was. "Sire," said Messer Niccolò, "he is my son and your servant." "He is welcome," said the Great Kaan. But why should I make a long story of it? Know that truly there was great rejoicing and good cheer made by the Great Kaan and all his Court over the arrival of these envoys. And they were much honoured, and furnished with everything. They remained at the Court, and received marks of honour above the other barons.

How the Great Kaan sent Marco as an envoy

Now it happened that Marco, the son of Messer Niccolò, learnt so well the customs, languages and manners of writing of the Tartars, that it was truly a

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wonder, for I tell you in sooth that, not long after he had reached the Court of the Great Lord, he knew four languages, and their alphabets, and manner of writing. He was exceedingly wise and prudent, and the Great Kaan loved him very much for the goodness and the worth that he saw in him. And when the Great Kaan saw that Marco was so wise, he sent him as envoy to a land called Carajan, on the way to which he toiled no less than six months. The young man performed his mission well and wisely. Now, he was aware, because he had often seen and heard it, that, when the envoys sent to the various parts of the world returned and spoke of the mission upon which they had been sent, without being able to give other information about the countries to which they had gone, the Great Kaan used to call them fools and ignorant men, asserting that he preferred to hear of the novelties, and customs, and habits of those foreign countries, than of the mission upon which he had sent them. So Marco, knowing this full well, when he went upon this mission, paid attention to all the novelties and strange things he came across, in order to be able to repeat them to the Great Kaan. He further collected sundry wonderful things to present them to the Great Kaan, who appreciated them greatly.

How Marco returned from his mission, and reported upon it to the Great Kaan

On his return from his mission, Marco presented himself before the Great Kaan, and reported on the mission on which he had been sent, and which he had accomplished excellently well; then he told of all the novelties and strange things that he had seen on this journey, and he did so in such a pleasant and wise manner that the Great Kaan and all the others that were listening, marvelled greatly, and said to one

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another: "If this young man lives, in sooth he cannot but become a man of great discretion and worth." What more shall I tell you? From the time of this mission, the young man was called *Messer Marco Polo*, and so he shall henceforward be called in this book. And this was most just, for he was so wise and courteous.

But why should I make a long story of it? Know in truth that *Messer Marco* lived with the Great Kaan no less than seventeen years, and during all that time never ceased going upon missions. For, seeing that *Messer Marco* brought so much news from every country and accomplished so well all the tasks he was charged with, the Great Kaan entrusted him with all the important and distant missions. And *Messer Marco* carried out his missions very well, and knew how to relate many novelties and strange things. And the Great Kaan was so delighted with *Messer Marco's* ways, that he loved him dearly, and did him such great honour, keeping him so near him, that the other barons were aggrieved thereat.

The reason why *Messer Marco* came to know as no one ever knew, the features of these regions, was because he explored more of those strange lands than any man that was ever born, and because he paid greater attention to the acquisition of this knowledge.

How Messer Niccolò, Messer Matteo, and Messer Marco asked leave of the Great Kaan to depart.

When *Messer Niccolò*, *Messer Matteo*, and *Messer Marco* had lived with the Great Kaan for all the time that you have heard, they decided among themselves to return to their own country. More than once they asked leave of the Great Kaan and, with the kindest words, begged him grant it. But the Great Kaan loved them so much, and kept them about him so

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willingly, that he would not give them leave, for anything on earth.

Now it happened that Queen Bolgana, who was wife to Argon, Lord of the Levant, died, and this queen left it stated in her will that no lady should sit on her throne or be the wife of Argon, unless she were of her own lineage. So Argon took three of his barons, who were called, the first Oulatai, the second Apusca, and the third Coja. He sent them, with a splendid retinue, to the Great Kaan, begging him to send him a lady of the lineage of his wife, Queen Bolgana, who had died. When these three barons reached the Court of the Great Kaan, they told him the reason of their coming. The Great Kaan received them honourably, and gave them a joyful and hospitable welcome. Then he summoned a lady called Cocachin, who was of the lineage of Queen Bolgana, and was seventeen years old, and most beautiful and charming. He said to the three barons that this was the lady whom they sought. They replied that they were content. The Great Kaan then gave them a large and splendid retinue to accompany the bride to King Argon. And when all the necessary preparations had been made, the three envoys took leave of the Great Kaan and set out in the same direction whence they had come. They rode for eight months, when a war broke out between certain Tartar Kings, so that the roads were closed. As it was no longer possible to proceed, the three envoys were obliged against their will to return to the Great Kaan, to whom they related all that had happened to them.

At that time, Messer Marco had returned from India, after traversing many strange seas, and had told many novelties of those lands. The three barons, when they saw that Messer Niccolò, Messer Matteo, and Messer Marco were Latins and wise men, said among themselves that they wished that they might accompany them by sea. They went to the Great Kaan and begged him, of his grace, to be sent back

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by sea and to have the three Latins as companions. The Great Kaan who had so great an affection for these three, as I have told you, granted this request most unwillingly, and allowed the three Latins to accompany the lady together with the three barons.

*Here is told how Messer Niccolò, Messer Matteo,
and Messer Marco left the Great Kaan*

And when the Great Kaan saw Messer Niccolò, Messer Matteo, and Messer Marco about to depart, he summoned all three to his presence and gave them two Tablets of Authority, containing orders that they should be free from all restraint throughout the whole of his domains, and should receive, whithersoever they went, victuals for themselves and for their company. He charged them with missions to the Pope, to the King of France, the King of Spain and other Kings of Christendom. Then he had fourteen ships prepared, each of which had four masts, and often spread twelve sails. (Well could we explain to you how, but, as the subject is too vast, I will say nothing of it at present.) And I also tell you that among those ships there were at least four or five that were manned by 250 to 260 sailors.

When the ships were ready, the three barons and the Lady, together with Messer Niccolò, Messer Matteo, and Messer Marco, took leave of the Great Kaan, and went on board the ships with a large following. And the Kaan furnished them with food for two years. What more shall I tell you? They put out to sea, and sailed for no less than three months, until they reached an island called Java, lying to the south: in this island there are sundry marvellous things, of which I will tell you in this book. Then they left this island; and you must know that they sailed across the Sea of India for as many as eighteen months before

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they arrived at the place they wished to reach. (And they came across many great marvels which we will also tell you of in this book.) And when they had arrived, they found that Argon was dead.

And I assure you, in very truth, that when they went on board the ships, they were no less than six hundred, without counting the sailors. And all died except eighteen. Of Argon's three envoys, only one survived, he whose name was Coja; of all the ladies and damsels of the retinue, one alone was left.

As, after the death of Argon, the lordship was held by one Kiacatu, the lady was placed under his protection, and the mission was executed to him. He ordered the lady to be given to Casan, son of Argon, who at that time was in the region of the Arbre Sol on the confines of Persia, garrisoning certain passes with sixty thousand men. Thus it was done. After this, Messer Niccolò, Messer Matteo, and Messer Marco returned to Kiacatu, as their road lay through his city. Here they remained nine months. And when Messer Niccolò, Messer Matteo, and Messer Marco had accomplished all their mission in regard to the lady and delivered all the messages entrusted to them by the Great Kaan, they took leave and left, setting out on their journey. And you must also know that Kiacatu gave them four gold Tablets of Authority, each of which was a cubit long and five fingers in breadth, and weighed three or four pounds; and they bore an inscription ordering that, by virtue of the Eternal God, the name of the Great Kaan should be honoured and praised, and if anyone disobeyed, he should be put to death, and his property confiscated. Of the four gold tablets, two bore gerfalcons, one a lion, and the fourth was smooth; and the purport of their inscription was that the same honour and service should be rendered to the three envoys throughout the Kaan's lands as to the Kaan himself, and that the envoys should be provided with horses and all the necessary victuals and escorts.

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And truly so it was done, for throughout the Kaan's states they were freely supplied with horses and victuals and all that was needful. For I assure you, in truth, that they were often given two hundred horsemen, or more or less, according to their needs, to escort them, that they might journey in safety from one town to another. And this was most necessary for, as Kiacatu was no rightful lord, the people did not hesitate to do mischief, as would have been the case had they had a legitimate prince.

One thing should, I think, be particularly mentioned to the honour of the three envoys. For in truth the Great Kaan placed so much confidence in Messer Niccolò, Messer Matteo, and Messer Marco, and so dearly did he love them, that he conferred upon them such great authority as to entrust them with Queen Cocachin, and also with the daughter of the King of Manji that they might conduct them to Argon, the Lord of all the Levant. And they did so. They conducted them by sea, as I related above, with all that retinue and that immense amount of provisions. And those two great ladies were at the mercy of the three envoys. The latter watched over their safety, as if the ladies had been their daughters, and the two ladies, both very young and most beautiful, looked upon them as fathers, and obeyed them as such. And the three envoys gave them into the hands of their lord. I tell you in very truth that Queen Cocachin, wife to Casan, now reigning, was so attached to the three envoys (and her husband Casan no less than she), that there is nothing she would not have done for them, as if they had been her fathers. And you must know that when these three envoys left her to return to their country, she wept for sorrow at their departure.

Honourable indeed is this that I have just told you, namely that two such ladies should have been entrusted to these three envoys, to be conducted to their lord from so distant a land. Now we will leave this, and

PLATE III



CA' POLO, VENICE

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proceed with our narrative. What more shall I tell you? When the three envoys had left Kiacatu, they set out on their way, and rode so long day after day, that they reached Trebizond; from Trebizond they passed to Constantinople; from Constantinople to Negropont; and from Negropont to Venice. And this was in the year 1295 after Christ's Incarnation.

And now that I have told you all the prologue, even as you have heard, let us pass to the book, to the description of the wonderful things seen by Messer Niccolò, Messer Matteo, and Messer Marco in the various countries in which they have been.

Here is told of Lesser Armenia

You must know that there are two Armenias: the Greater and the Lesser. The Lord of Lesser Armenia is a king who governs his state wisely, and is subject to the Tartar. There are many cities and towns. There is great abundance of everything. It is further a land that offers much sport in every kind of chase, both of beasts and of birds. But I tell you that it is no healthy country; on the contrary it is most harmful to the health. Once its nobles were valiant men, full of prowess, but nowadays they are weak and vile, and have no other quality than that of being good drinkers. On the sea-shore, there is a city called Laias, which is a great centre of trade; for you must know in sooth that all spices, and cloths of silk and gold, and all manner of precious goods of the interior are brought thither; and the merchants of Venice, and Genoa, and other countries, flock there, and buy them and distribute them all over the world. And all the merchants and others who would go into the interior begin their journey from this city.

Bordering on this Kingdom of Lesser Armenia, there is, to the south, the Promised Land, which is in the

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hands of the Saracens; to the north, that part of Turcomania called Caramania; to the east and north-east, Turcomania, with Cæsaria Sevaſta and many other cities, all ſubject to the Tartars; to the weſt, the ſea, by which one goes to the countries of the Chriſtians.

We have now told you of Lesser Armenia, and we will next tell you of Turcomania.

Here is told of the province of Turcomania

In Turcomania, there are people of three races. In the firſt place there are the Turcomans, worſhippers of Mahomet and followers of his Law. They are ſimple folk, ſpeaking an uncouth language. They inhabit mountains and prairies, where they know there is good paſture, becauſe they live by breeding cattle. Good Turcoman horſes and excellent mules of great value are produced in the country. The other races are Armenians and, mixed with them, Greeks, who inhabit the cities and towns, living by trade and handicrafts. For you muſt know that the fineſt carpets in the world, and the moſt beautiful, are manufactured there. Moſt ſplendid and rich ſilk cloths, both crimſon and of other colours, are alſo made there, together with many other things. The moſt important cities are Conia, Cæsaria, and Sevaſta. There are alſo many other cities and towns, of which I ſhall make no mention, for it were too long a matter to go into. They are ſubject to the Tartar of the Levant, who governs them by means of lords of his own choice.

We will now ceaſe ſpeaking of this province, and tell of Greater Armenia.

Here is told of Greater Armenia

Greater Armenia is a large country. It begins at a city called Arzingan, in which the beſt buckram in the world is made, and all kinds of other crafts flouriſh.

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There are the finest and best spring-water baths to be found on earth. The people are Armenians, and subject to the Tartar. There are many cities and towns. The finest is Arzingan, which is the seat of an Archbishop. Then there is Arziron—a large city where silver is mined in abundance—and Arzizi. An important silver mine is also found in a village called Paipurth, on the way from Trebizond to Toris. It is a very vast province. And you must know that in summer the whole host of the Tartars of the Levant sojourns in it, for, at that season, there is excellent pasture for animals in the province; on this account the Tartars live there in summer, but in winter they do not, for the cattle would have nothing to live on by reason of the cold, due to the snow that falls there in immense quantities; hence in winter the Tartars leave this country and go to warmer lands where they find abundant grass and good pasture for their cattle. And I will tell you, too, that, in the centre of Greater Armenia, there is a very great and high cup-shaped mountain, on which it is said that Noah's Ark rested; for which reason it is called the Mountain of Noah's Ark. It is so broad and vast that one cannot go round it in two days; and the summit is everlastingly covered with so much snow that no one can climb it. But on account of the water that flows from this snow, the mountain is so rich in grass on its lower slopes, that from all the neighbouring districts cattle are brought to graze there in summer.

On the south, towards the east, Greater Armenia borders on a kingdom called Mosul, inhabited by Christians, namely by Nestorians and Jacobites, of whom I shall tell you more later on; on the south, too, are the lands of Mus and Meridin, of which we shall speak afterwards, and many others, with which it were too long to deal. On the north, the country borders on Georgia, of which I shall also tell presently. On this frontier towards Georgia, there is a spring from

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which flows oil in such abundance that a hundred ships at a time may be loaded with it. The oil is not good to eat, but it is good to burn and to anoint camels with, against mange and dandruff. People come from great distances to fetch this oil, and in the whole district no other oil is burnt but this.

We will now cease speaking of Greater Armenia, and tell you of the province of Georgia.

Here is told of the Georgians, of their King, and of other things concerning them

The Georgians have a king whose name is always David Melik, that is, in our language, David King. He is subject to the Tartar. In ancient days, all the kings of that province were born with the mark of an eagle on the right shoulder. They are a handsome people, brave, good archers, and excellent soldiers in battle. They are Christians, and follow the Greek rite. They wear their hair cropped like clerks. This is the province Alexander was unable to traverse when he wished to go to the Ponent, because the road was narrow and dangerous. For on the one side there is the sea, and on the other vast mountains and forests, impassable to horsemen. The road between the mountain and the sea is exceedingly narrow and stretches for over four leagues, so that a few men could hold the pass against the whole world. This was the reason why Alexander could not pass. And you must know that Alexander raised a tower there and built a fortress, in order to prevent those people from passing and attacking him; this was called the Iron Gate, and is the place the *Book of Alexander* means, when it tells how Alexander shut up the Tartars between two mountains. (It is not, however, true that they were Tartars, but a people called Comanians and others besides, for there were no Tartars in those days.)