

Arts of Asia Lecture Series Fall 2017
Art on the Move Across Asia and Beyond – Part I
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Marco Polo and the Advent of Global Trade

Marco Polo (1254-1324): *Le Livre des Merveilles du Monde*, ca. 1300, describing his travels across Asia (1271-95) with his father, Niccolò, and uncle, Maffeo.

Timeline:

1260: Niccolò and Maffeo Polo, leave Constantinople for the Great Khanate of Khubilai Khan.

1269: The brothers return to the West on a mission from Khubilai to the Pope, stopping in Acre and continuing on to Venice to await the election of a new pope.

1271: Niccolò, Maffeo, and Niccolò's son, the 17-year-old Marco, return to the Great Khanate.

1295: The three Polos return to Venice after delivering the lady Kōkeqin to the Ilkhan Ghazan.

1296: Marco is captured during a sea battle between Venice and Genoa, imprisoned in Genoa together with Rustichello da Pisa, who records the story of Marco's travels.

Departure from Venice, from Li Livres du Graunt Caam, c. 1400 (Bodleian Library, Oxford)

Le Livre des Merveilles du Monde (Book of the Wonders of the World, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2810). Bound together with the travels of Odoric de Pordenone, translations of letters from the Yuan-dynasty khans to the pope and European rulers, *De l'estat du gouvernement du grant Kaan de Cathay*, the book of John of Mandeville, etc. 265 illuminations by various artists. Given by Jean sans Peur to his uncle Jean de Berry in 1419. (Digitized reproduction: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52000858n>)

Synopsis of the Book:

Part 1: Niccolò and Maffeo's travels to the court of Khubilai Khan and their return mission on behalf of Khubilai to the Pope. Their return to the Yuan empire with Marco and their departure 24 years later as escorts to the lady Kōkeqin 闊闊真, betrothed to the Ilkhan Arghun but, finding him already deceased, was wed to his son Ghazan instead.

Part 2: Flashback to the trio's return to Khubilai's court across Asia in 1271: stories and marvels they heard about along the way, a description of Shangdu (Xanadu) and Khanbaliq (Dadu/Beijing), the customs of the Mongols, the cities of Mangi (southern China, especially Quinsay/Hangzhou), Tibet, Java, Burma, India, Madagascar, Persia, Armenia, Georgia, etc.

Marco Polo as Cultural Geographer: What he noticed (and what he didn't)

Shangdu hunting grounds (Liu Guandao, *Khubilai and Chabi Hunting* (Palace Museum, Beijing), the Yuan capital at Dadu (Khanbaliq), and Quinsay (Hangzhou).

Paiza (imperial metal passes), “bamboo palaces,” and paper currency.

Court clothing: *Panni tartarici*—cloth of gold (*nasīj*), inscribed robes and rugs, color-coding.

Mongols in trecento Italian art—the global fad for gold:

Master of the Trecento, *Crucifixion*, ca. 1350 (Fresco, Upper Church, Subiaco)

Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Martyrdom of the Franciscans at Ceuto (or Tana)*, 1336 (Basilica of San Francesco, Siena)

Giotto, *Crucifixion*, ca. 1330, with guard wearing helmet with Phagpa script (?)

Paolo Veneziano, *Coronation of the Virgin*, ca. 1350 (Gallerie Accademia, Venice)

Cangrande (“Big Dog”) della Scala (1291-1329): Tomb (Santa Maria Antica, Verona), equestrian portrait, and robe (Castelvecchio, Verona)

Horses: Zhou Lang, *The Heavenly Horse*, 1342 (Palace Museum, Beijing). Presented by Giovanni Marignolli as a gift from Pope Benedict XII to Toghon Temür in 1342.

Mongol Officials with (Arkhal-Teke?) Horse (Topkapı Serayı, Istanbul)

Porcelain: Marco Polo’s jar, Yuan-dynasty *qingbai* and *shufu* ware.

The Fonthill-Gagnières Vase (National Museum of Ireland). Gift of Nestorian Christians to King Louis the Great of Hungary.

Women as objects of exchange: Hulagu Khan and Doquz Qatun, Abaqa Khan and Maria Paliologina (St. Mary of the Mongols Church, Istanbul), the Lady Kökeqin.

Two Cultural Emissaries: Marco Polo 馬可波羅 / 孛羅 and Bolad 孛羅

The Mongol Lord Bolad (1240-1313) and Rashid al-Din Hamadani’s (1247-1318) *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh* (Compendium of Chronicles): Illuminated manuscript, dated 1314 (University of Edinburgh Library and Nasser D. Khalili Collection).

The Sandalwood Buddha: Rubbing of 1597 stele assigns the movement of the Buddha-image to someone named the Great Lord Boluo 大臣孛羅.

Suggested reading: Thomas Allsen, *Commodity & Exchange in the Mongol Empire* (Cambridge, 1997); John Larner, *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World* (Yale, 1999); Lauren Arnold, *Princely Gifts and Papal Treasures* (San Francisco: Desiderata Press, 1999)