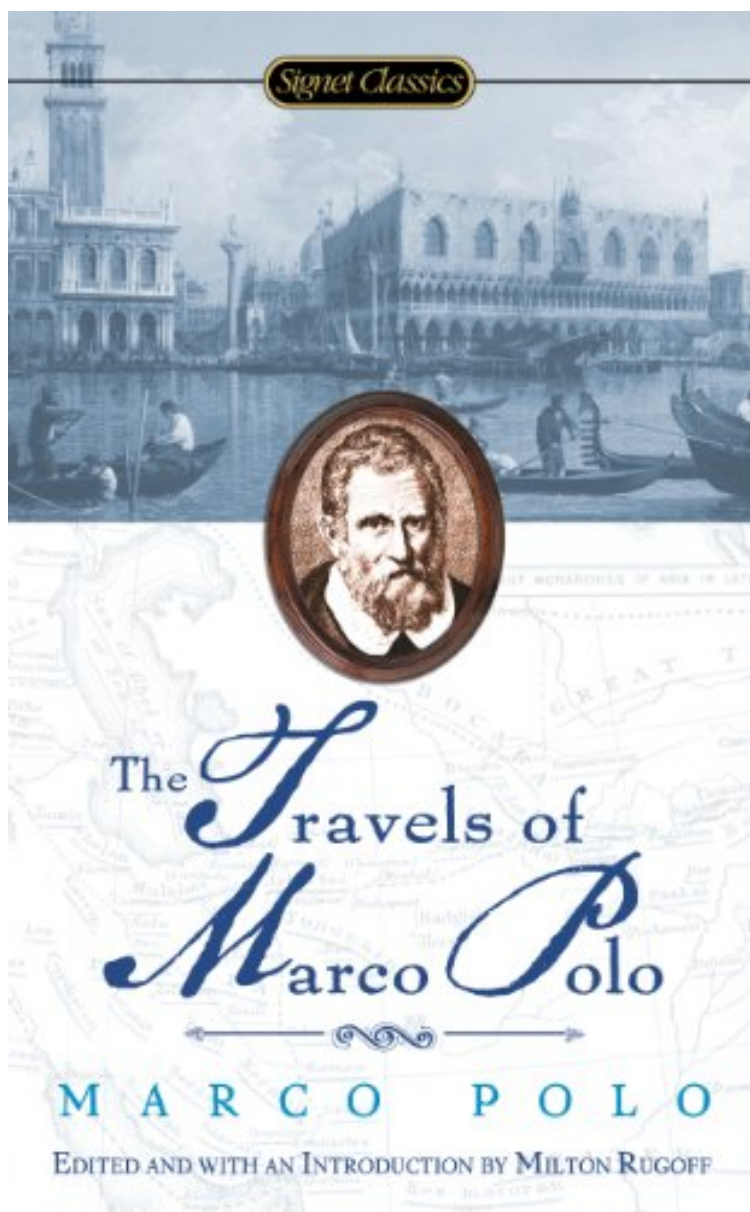


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# Travels of Marco Polo



*Par Marco Polo*  
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**Description :** Description du produitHis pilgrimage through the East began in 1271 when, still a teenager, he found himself traversing the most exotic lands-from the dazzling Mongol empire to Tibet and Burma. This fascinating chronicle still serves as the most vivid depiction of the mysterious East in the Middle Ages.

Prsentation de l'diteurHis journey through the East began in 1271when, still a teenager, he set out of Venice and found himself traversing the most exotic countries. His acceptance into the court of the great emperor Kublai Khan, and his service to the vast and dazzling Mongol empire, led him to places as far away as Tibet and Burma, lands rich with gems and gold and silk, but virtually unknown to Europeans.Later, as a prisoner of war, Marco Polo would record the details of his remarkable travels across harsh deserts, great mountain

ranges, and dangerous seas, as well as of his encounters with beasts and birds, plants and people. His amazing chronicle is both fascinating and awe-inspiring and still serves as the most vivid depiction of the mysterious East in the Middle Ages. Edited and with an Introduction by Milton Rugoff and an Afterword by Howard Mittelmark. Prologue. Ye Emperors, Kings, Dukes, Marquises, Earls, and Knights, and all other people desirous of knowing the diversities of the races of mankind, as well as the diversities of kingdoms, provinces, and regions of all parts of the East, read through this book, and ye will find in it the greatest and most marvellous characteristics of the peoples especially of Armenia, Persia, India, and Tartary, as they are severally related in the present work by Marco Polo, a wise and learned citizen of Venice, who states distinctly what things he saw and what things he heard from others. For this book will be a truthful one. It must be known, then, that from the creation of Adam to the present day, no man, whether Pagan, or Saracen, or Christian, or other, of whatever progeny or generation he may have been, ever saw or inquired into so many and such great things as Marco Polo above mentioned. Who, wishing in his secret thoughts that the things he had seen and heard should be made public by the present work, for the benefit of those who could not see them with their own eyes, he himself being in the year of our Lord 1298 in prison at Genoa, caused the things which are contained in the present work to be written by master Rustiglielo, a citizen of Pisa, who was with him in the same prison at Genoa;\* and he divided it into three parts.

CHAPTER I How the Two Brothers Polo Set Forth from Constantinople to Traverse the World

It should be known to the reader that, at the time when Baldwin II. was emperor of Constantinople where a magistrate representing the doge of Venice then resided, and in the year of our Lord 1260, Nicolo Polo, the father of the said Marco, and Maffeo, the brother of Nicolo, respectable and well-informed men, embarked in a ship of their own, with a rich and varied cargo of merchandise, and reached Constantinople in safety. After mature deliberation on the subject of their proceedings, it was determined, as the measure most likely to improve their trading capital, that they should prosecute their voyage into the Euxine or Black Sea. With this view they made purchases of many fine and costly jewels, and taking their departure from Constantinople, navigated that sea to a port named Soldaia, from whence they travelled on horseback many days until they reached the court of a powerful chief of the Western Tartars, named Barka, who dwelt in the cities of Bolgara and Sarra, and had the reputation of being one of the most liberal and civilized princes hitherto known amongst the tribes of Tartary. He expressed much satisfaction at the arrival of these travellers, and received them with marks of distinction. In return for which courtesy, when they had laid before him the jewels they brought with them, and perceived that their beauty pleased him, they presented them for his acceptance. The liberality of this conduct on the part of the two brothers struck him with admiration; and being unwilling that they should surpass him in generosity, he not only directed double the value of\* A truce between Genoa and Venice, signed in July 1299, undoubtedly released both Marco Polo and his scribe Rustiglielo. (See Sir Henry Yules introduction to his great scholarly work *Ser Marco Polo*.) Baldwin II. reigned from 1237 to 1261. the jewels to be paid to them, but made them in addition several rich presents. The brothers having resided a year in the dominions of this prince, they became desirous of revisiting their native country, but were impeded by the sudden breaking out of a war between him and another chief, named Ala, who ruled over the Eastern Tartars. In a fierce and very sanguinary battle that ensued between their respective armies, Ala was victorious, in consequence of which, the roads being rendered unsafe for travellers, the brothers could not attempt to return by the way they came; and it was recommended to them, as the only practicable mode of reaching Constantinople, to proceed in an easterly direction, by an unfrequented route, so as to skirt the limits of Barkas territories. Accordingly they made their way to a town named Oukaka, situated on the confines of the kingdom of the Western Tartars. Leaving that place, and advancing still further, they crossed the Tigris [Volga], one of the four rivers of Paradise, and came to a desert, the extent of which was seventeen days journey, wherein they found neither town, castle, nor any substantial building, but only Tartars with their herds, dwelling in tents on the plain. Having passed this tract they arrived at length at a well-built city called Bokhara, in a province of that name, belonging to the dominions of Persia, and the noblest city of that kingdom, but governed by a prince whose name was Barak. Here, from inability to proceed further, they remained three years. It happened while these brothers were in Bokhara, that a person of consequence and gifted with eminent talents made his appearance there. He was proceeding as ambassador from Ala before mentioned, to the Great Khan,\* supreme chief of all the Tartars, named Kublai, whose residence was at the extremity of the continent, in a direction between north-east and east. Not having ever before had an opportunity, although he wished it, of seeing any natives of Italy, he was gratified in a high degree at meeting and con-\*

Khan 5 Lord. Kublai was also called the Great Kaan. Kaan 5 Supreme Sovereign (Lord

of Lords). Polo always referred to Kublai in writing as the Great Khan and to lesser princes as Khan, versing with these brothers, who had now become proficient in the Tartar language; and after associating with them

for several days, and finding their manners agreeable to him, he proposed to them that they should accompany him to the presence of the Great Khan, who would be pleased by their appearance at his court, which had not hitherto been visited by any person from their country; adding assurances that they would be honourably received, and recompensed with many gifts. Convinced as they were that their endeavours to return homeward would expose them to the most imminent risks, they agreed to this proposal, and recommending themselves to the protection of the Almighty, they set out on their journey in the suite of the ambassador, attended by several Christian servants whom they had brought with them from Venice. The course they took at first was between the north-east and north, and an entire year was consumed before they were enabled to reach the imperial residence, in consequence of the extraordinary delays occasioned by the snows and the swelling of the rivers, which obliged them to halt until the former had melted and the floods had subsided. Many things worthy of admiration were observed by them in the progress of their journey, but which are here omitted, as they will be described by Marco Polo, in the sequel of the book.

CHAPTER 2  
How the Great Khan Sent the Two Brothers as His Envoys to the Pope  
Being introduced to the presence of the Great Khan, Kublai, the travellers were received by him with the condescension and affability that belonged to his character, and as they were the first Latins who had made their appearance in that country, they were entertained with feasts and honoured with other marks of distinction. Entering graciously into conversation with them, he made earnest inquiries on the subject of the western parts of the world, of the Emperor of the Romans, and of other Christian kings and princes. He wished to be informed of their relative consequence, the extent of their possessions, the manner in which justice was administered in their several kingdoms and principalities, how they conducted themselves in warfare, and above all he questioned them particularly respecting the Pope, the affairs of the Church, and the religious worship and doctrine of the Christians. Being well instructed and discreet men, they gave appropriate answers upon all these points, and as they were perfectly acquainted with the Tartar language, they expressed themselves always in becoming terms; insomuch that the Great Khan, holding them in high estimation, frequently commanded their attendance. When he had obtained all the information that the two brothers communicated with so much good sense, he expressed himself well satisfied, and having formed in his mind the design of employing them as his ambassadors to the Pope, after consulting with his ministers on the subject, he proposed to them, with many kind entreaties, that they should accompany one of his Barons, named Khogatal, on a mission to the See of Rome. His object, he told them, was to make a request to his Holiness that he would send to him a hundred men of learning, thoroughly acquainted with the principles of the Christian religion, as well as with the seven arts,\* and qualified to prove to the learned of his dominions by just and fair argument, that the faith professed by Christians is superior to, and founded upon more evident truth than, any other; that the gods of the Tartars and the idols worshipped in their houses were only evil spirits, and that they and the people of the East in general were under an error in reverencing them as divinities. He, moreover, signified his pleasure that upon their return they should bring with them, from Jerusalem, some of the Holy Oil from the lamp which is kept burning over the Sepulchre of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom he professed to hold in veneration and to consider as the true God. Having heard these\* The seven arts of the time were: Rhetoric, Logic, Grammar, Arithmetic, Astronomy, Music, and Geometry. . . . and that if they would prove this, he and all under him would become Christians and the Churchs liegemen (from Yules translation).

commands addressed to them by the Great Khan they humbly prostrated themselves before him, declaring their willingness and instant readiness to perform, to the utmost of their ability, whatever might be the royal will. Upon which he caused letters, in the Tartarian language, to be written in his name to the Pope of Rome, and these he delivered into their hands. He likewise gave orders that they should be furnished with a golden tablet displaying the imperial cipher, according to the usage established by his majesty; in virtue of which the person bearing it, together with his whole suite, are safely conveyed and escorted from station to station by the governors of all places within the imperial dominions, and are entitled, during the time of their residing in any city, castle, town, or village, to a supply of provisions and everything necessary for their accommodation. Being thus honourably commissioned they took their leave of the Great Khan, and set out on their journey, but had not proceeded more than twenty days when the officer, named Khogatal, their companion, fell dangerously ill, and unable to proceed further, he halted at a certain city. In this dilemma it was determined, upon consulting all who were present, and with the approbation of the man himself, that they should leave him behind. In the prosecution of their journey they derived essential benefit from being

provided with the royal tablet, which procured them attention in every place through which they passed. Their expenses were defrayed, and escorts were furnished. But notwithstanding these advantages, so great were the natural difficulties they had to encounter, from the extreme cold, the snow, the ice, and the flooding of the rivers, that their progress was unavoidably tedious, and three years elapsed before they were enabled to reach a sea-port town in the lesser Armenia, named Laiassus. From AudioFileHere's a case in which the spoken version holds the listener's attention better than the written one. George Guidall's superb narration takes archaic settings and ideas and infuses them with life. His well-paced voice is full of expression as he moves from one exotic locale to another. Latham's nicely phrased translation contributes to Guidall's success. The book itself is a first-person account of travels from Venice to the East, beginning in 1271; it is a seminal work on the expansion of Western civilization, fundamental in the study of the history, anthropology and ethnology of the various regions. D.W. (c)AudioFile, Portland, Maine