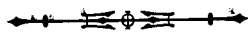


# The Longman Anthology of World Literature



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VOLUME B

THE MEDIEVAL ERA

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## ❖ CROSSCURRENTS ❖

## Contact, Conflict, and Conversion

The world was a vast and mysterious place in the medieval period. Most people lived their entire lives in the village or town of their birth, rarely if ever venturing more than a few miles from home. Travel was slow, difficult, and expensive. Roads were bad, maps were inaccurate, and even the basic necessities of food and lodging could be a struggle to find. As the monk I-ching says in the first selection below, "There was no fixed place for us to settle down. We had to move from place to place like a blade of grass swept by wind." Travelers on foot or horseback were liable to perish in burning deserts or at the hands of bandits; our phrase "highway robbery" harkens back to this era, when bandits' favorite victims were travelers, who could be caught on the high road, far from any town or aid. Ships could move about more freely, but they were at the mercy of storms, hidden rocks, and pirates—if they weren't swallowed up whole by the vast sea monsters who would sometimes float deceptively on the surface of the open ocean, disguised as islands, waiting for their prey to land. If they could be reached at all, distant cultures were populated by barbarians speaking incomprehensible languages, eating, dressing, and making love in strange ways, worshipping false gods, and liable to give visitors a hostile or even fatal reception.

These very dangers, though, offered special rewards for the hardy few who ventured far from home, and prominent among these rewards was a fund of remarkable stories to tell back home. Throughout the period, travelers' tales provided most people with their best sense of the wider world beyond their borders, and these tales often mixed factual reportage with highly imaginative elaborations of marvels glimpsed, or guessed, or reported at third hand. Selections from some of the period's most vivid travelers' tales are given here, some of them direct accounts by the travelers themselves, others fanciful retellings of the adventures of travelers from the past.

Restlessness and sheer curiosity impelled some to travel and acquire these tales, but more often the motives were commercial, or religious, or often both at once. A trickle of exotic goods flowed back and forth between Europe and East Asia, usually through the hands of many middlemen, but some adventurers went far along these routes, seeking spices, jewels, and other highly profitable, readily transportable goods. Others sought wisdom. Chinese monks would travel to India in search of holy Buddhist texts, while Christian pilgrims journeyed to distant holy sites in their own lands (as when Chaucer's pilgrims head toward Canterbury, telling tales all the way), and ventured abroad as far as the Holy Land. Missionaries would go farther still, spreading the sacred knowledge they possessed in far-flung pagan lands.

In the travelers' reports home, and in the tales of travel that derived from them, contact with radically different cultures often provides an opportunity for profound self-reflection. The foreign locale becomes at once a place of danger and of freedom, of challenge to one's own values or affirmation of them, in foreign societies seen as shockingly savage or exceptionally civilized—or both. Particularly for the more spiritually minded voyagers, travel itself becomes a prime metaphor for spiritual questing and growth, as in the Korean poems given here. Even the most mercantile of travelers, Marco Polo, is deeply interested in foreign religious practices and beliefs, and he claims that the Chinese emperor Kublai Khan is similarly fascinated by what he knows of Christianity and is eager to receive missionaries to tell him more. Conversely, even the most pious travelers, such as the Muslim world traveler Ibn Battuta, are fully alive to the material splendors of the countries they visit, and they can be appropriately honored by their hosts with lavish presents.

The arrival of travelers can profoundly affect a host country's fortunes as well—favorably or otherwise. The tales given here provide a prehistory for the widespread voyages of exploration and colonial conquest that would be inaugurated by Christopher Columbus in 1492. The



Marco Polo tasting pepper picked by South Indians, illumination from a French manuscript of his *Travels*, 14th century.

two thirteenth-century Icelandic texts included here reflect back on the tumultuous time of the conversion of Iceland in the year 1000. The Christian authors of these texts celebrate this change, but they are also concerned to uphold the integrity of the old local culture and to convey the wonder and power of the pagan worldview. One of these authors, Snorri Sturluson, does this in part by prefacing his collection of Norse myths with a historical account of travel and migration that he believes linked Iceland and Asia long before the coming of Christianity.

All of the texts given here show the writers' complex, shifting reactions to the many challenges the foreign cultures offer to their sense of themselves and the world, and together they show us the utter strangeness that awaited the bold medieval travelers who ventured beyond their own familiar borders.



*I-ching*  
635-713

It was not just South Asian teachers who carried the Word of the Buddha to the outside; pilgrims also came from the outside to India. One such traveler was the Chinese monk I-ching, or Yijing, who journeyed to India at the end of the seventh century, one of a number of celebrated Chinese visitors, including Hsüan-Chuang, or Xuanzang, whose pilgrimage formed the basis of the famed Chinese novel *Journey to the West* a thousand years later (see Volume C). It was a perilous journey, but the rewards were great: the chance to see with one's own eyes the very places where the Buddha himself had been born, achieved enlightenment, and taught; to collect precious Sanskrit manuscripts for later translation; and to return home with a knowledge of the Law perfected at one of the great Buddhist universities such as Nalanda (once located in what is present-day Bihar), which would enable one to start one's own lineage of pupils. I-ching's dramatic account of his journey provided his students with an object lesson in spiritual striving amid the dangers of the ephemeral world.

right for me to eat any food after hearing an invocation of the Lord Buddha's name."<sup>4</sup> Then he began to think, "If I suddenly close my mouth right now, this ship will be driven back by the water current and destroyed. Many people will lose their lives. I know. I should close my mouth gently and ever so slowly." Then the Timingila monster closed his mouth gently and ever so slowly.

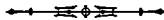
Once their ship was freed from the jaws of that great monster, it found a favorable wind and soon arrived at shore. When the merchants came to shore, they loaded their goods on carts, camels, bulls, donkeys, and so on, and after passing through marketplaces, villages, towns, and trading-centers, one after another, they arrived in Śrāvastī. Once there, they reflected, "It's only proper that if a ship successfully completes its voyage because of the power of someone's name, all its treasures should go to him. Therefore, let's give these treasures to the Lord Buddha."

Then they collected those treasures and went before the Blessed One. Having each, in turn, venerated with their heads the feet of the Blessed One, they then said to him, "Blessed One, we set sail in the ocean in a ship, and then when our ship was being carried off by the Timingila monster and the end of our lives was before us, we spoke the name of the Blessed One, concentrating our awareness on him, and were thus freed from the jaws of that great monster. Now that we have successfully completed our voyage, Blessed One, we have come here, safe and sound. It's only proper that if people successfully complete a voyage on a ship because of the power of someone's name, the treasures of that ship should go to him. By speaking the name of the Blessed One, we escaped from that deadly danger. Therefore, the Blessed One should take these treasures of ours."

The Blessed One said, "I have obtained the treasures of the moral faculties, their corresponding powers, and the factors of awakening.<sup>5</sup> What more than this can natural treasures do for the Transcendent One? My sons, if you want to go forth as monks in my order, come with me!"

The merchants reflected, "Whatever life we have is completely due to the power of the Lord Buddha. Let us abandon these treasures and go forth as monks in the Blessed One's presence."

Then they distributed their treasures, according to custom, to their mothers, fathers, wives, and sons, servants, maids, and workers, friends, companions, kinsmen, and relatives, and went forth as monks. Having gone forth as monks, they continued striving, struggling, and straining until they directly experienced *arhatship*.<sup>6</sup>



## Tibetan Death Rituals and Dream Visions

9th–11th centuries

Conversion as an experience of intellectual conviction did of course occur in Buddhism, and nowhere more dramatically than in Tibet in the late eighth century, when the king of the country invited two celebrated Indian Buddhist scholars, Shantarakshita and Padmasambhava, to

4. That is, it would be inappropriate to commit an act of violence, since killing sentient beings earns one very bad karma. The decision to refrain from eating is the issue that drives the rest of the story. In what follows Dharmaruci is reborn as a child who can't ever eat enough, and then he becomes a monk who eats everything he can get his hands on.

5. The moral faculties, which are also considered powers, are confidence, strength, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. The awakening factors are mindfulness, discrimination of *dharmas*, strength, joy, calmness, concentration, and equanimity.

6. The state of being a "worthy one," an adept who has attained the final stage of spiritual development.

build the first monastic institution in the country. The progress of Buddhism in the larger Tibetan world seems to have been very gradual, with beliefs of the indigenous religion (Bon) inflecting Buddhist doctrine for some time. The *Way of the Dead*, a ninth-century text connected with funerary ritual, exemplifies this well. The direct address to the dead, unknown in Buddhist works, probably reflects archaic Tibetan practices. Moreover, the purpose of the text is to help beings achieve divine rebirth, not, as in Indian Buddhism, to escape the cycle of transmigration altogether, whereas the ultimate beneficent state is a kind of paradise rather than the extinction of existence (nirvana). *Mar-pa's Dream Vision*, composed by a renowned spiritual adept and translator (1012–1097), illustrates the continuing representation of an imaginary India as the one true source of all authentic spiritual knowledge: it describes how Mar-pa receives in a dream the esoteric teachings of the "Great Master," the Brahman Saraha. But it does so in a style that is entirely Tibetan, in character, and with a double narrative framing, of the song of Saraha within a dream episode of Mar-pa's, and Mar-pa's dream as a whole within the context of a communal feast—a framing that is closely related to ancient Tibetan oratorical practices.

#### PRONUNCIATIONS:

*Pādmāsambhava*: PUHD-muh-SUM-bhuh-vuh

*Shāntarakṣita*: SHAHN-tuh-RUHK-shi-tuh

### The Way of the Dead<sup>1</sup>

Now, then, the teaching of the path of the deceased:

May all the Buddhas, transcendent lords, endowed with unsurpassed and inconceivable gnosis, and with the pure eye of divinity, gaze upon us!

May the Bodhisattvas, great heroes, who protect all sentient beings equally, like unto your own progeny, gaze upon us!

May the exalted Arhats, [who possess] right discernment and who have uprooted all the afflictions of the three realms, and so have attained the great state of liberation from both aspects [of obscuration], gaze upon us!<sup>2</sup>

Now listen, you who are deceased! Fickle impermanence, the real nature of the whole world, has at this time befallen you, the deceased. The illusion of the five conditioned bundles<sup>3</sup> has been undone. It's time to provide you with the great refuge for one who journeys from this world to the next. Your lords and refuges, in journeying as one without a second to uncertain domains, are the Buddhas, who are transcendent lords, the bodhisattvas, who are great heroes, and the exalted arhats. None are greater than these. Therefore, you who are deceased, do not let your mind stray, do not allow your thoughts to rebel, but at all times think on the Three Precious Jewels,<sup>4</sup> and, turning to those Precious Jewels, let the mind's path tend to nothing else whatsoever! Do not unbalance the scales of thought!

Hear more, you who are deceased! Obtaining illusory bodies in this prison of the three realms, all who are born die in the end. No one is free from that! Journeying thus from one birth to the next, the path of birth and death is oppressive. Remember that that's how it is!

1. Translated by Matthew Kapstein.

2. Buddhas have ascended to complete enlightenment and are free of all phenomenal existence; Bodhisattvas, on the brink of enlightenment themselves, resolve to use their powers to assist suffering humans to attain salvation; arhats are adepts who have reached the final stage of spiritual development. The three realms are the world of desire,

the world of form, and the formless world.

3. The psychological components of the human personality—form, sensation, conception, volition, and consciousness. They are to become purified through the dissolution of the self in the light of true being.

4. The Buddha; the teaching that leads to enlightenment; and the community of Buddhists.



## The Dhārma in Korea 8th–10th centuries

Buddhism spread to Korea from China, becoming established in 528 C.E. as the dominant religion of the early Korean kingdom of Silla, and thereafter of the medieval kingdom of Koryŏ, from which "Korea" takes its name. Korean monks regularly went as pilgrims to study Buddhist scriptures in China and in India, and they were often accomplished poets as well as religious thinkers. Much poetry was written in Korea in Chinese in the early periods, but the following three poems were all written in Korean, using a common verse form of two four-line stanzas and a concluding couplet. In these poems, life is metaphorically seen as a journey to the "Pure Land" of enlightenment, the realm of dharma, the Sanskrit term for law or sacred duty, and more generally signifying the cosmic order, a union of natural and moral harmonies.

The first of these poems was written by a poet known as Master Wŏlmyŏng (fl. 750 C.E.), whose pen name means "Moon's Radiance." This poem is an elegy for his sister, and beautifully combines the image of the road of life, leading to the land of enlightenment, with the very different image of lives as leaves scattered in the wind. These themes are also found in medieval European poetry: Dante begins his *Divine Comedy* "in the middle of our life's road," while a singer in the *Carmina Burana* describes being "like a leaf, played with by the wind."

The second poem, written by a monk named Yŏngjae (fl. 790 C.E.), involves an actual journey, though as in Dante's opening lines, the poet's wandering in the dark seems to reflect a spiritual state as much as a physical situation. According to an old tradition handed down with the poem, Yŏngjae was crossing an isolated mountain ridge when he was set upon by bandits. They recognized him as a great poet, and asked him to compose a poem on the spot as the price of his release. The result is said to have been this poem, which wittily contrasts the bandits' bright swords to the higher enlightenment both he and his captors should seek.

Finally, a meditative verse by Great Master Kyūnyŏ (923–973 C.E.) transposes earthly nature to the divine realm of dharma and then to the mind itself, making explicit the link between interior and exterior landscape.

### PRONUNCIATIONS:

*Kyūnyŏ*: KEWN-yoh

*Wŏlmyŏng*: WOHLM-yawng

*Yŏngjae*: YAWNG-jay

### *Master Wŏlmyŏng: Requiem*<sup>1</sup>

On the hard road of life and death  
That is near our land,  
You went, afraid,  
Without words.

5 We know not where we go,  
Leaves blown, scattered,  
Though fallen from the same tree,  
By the first winds of autumn.

10 Abide, Sister, perfect your ways,  
Until we meet in the Pure Land.

1. Translated by Peter H. Lee.



## Snorri Sturluson

1178–1241

From the time of its settlement in the ninth century until its eventual absorption by Norway four hundred years later, Iceland was a rarity in medieval Europe: a country without a king. The farmers, fishermen, and traders who lived there were grouped in independent households and clans, with no overall government apart from an annual assembly, the Althing. There people would gather to feast, trade, and settle disputes under the guidance of the “law speaker,” a man deeply versed in history and legal custom. Snorri was twice chosen as law speaker, a mark of his wealth and influence as well as of his legal knowledge and verbal skill. Son of a powerful chieftain, Snorri was a talented poet, but he became famous as a historian and writer of historical tales or sagas. He composed a major early history of Norway, as well as a saga concerning Norway’s patron saint Olaf, and he is also the likely author of *Egil’s Saga*, a richly nuanced tale of an early Icelandic chieftain who was a poet as well as a fighter.

Snorri was a committed Christian, but he was also devoted to the traditional mode of Norse poetry, filled with allusions to the old gods and to mythic events. In *The Prose Edda*—“*edda*” means “poetic art”—Snorri discusses poetic devices and metaphors as a guide and resource to young poets, prefacing his discussion of poetic language with a long account of the old myths on which many metaphors were based. To clear himself of any suspicion of promoting pagan belief, Snorri prefaces the legends with a tale of travel, arguing that the supposed Germanic gods were really Greek heroes who journeyed north after the fall of Troy, and were so powerful that people mistook them for gods. He then proceeds to give the fullest and most eloquent surviving account of pagan Germanic beliefs about the gods and the origins and end of the world. Snorri claims these legends are told inside a haunted castle as a joke on a visiting Swedish king, but even after he has distanced himself from the old myths, Snorri then retells them with grim relish, detailing the violent lives and fated deaths of the pagan gods.

### PRONUNCIATIONS:

*Aesir*: AY-seer

*Gylfi*: GILL-fee

*Asgard*: AHS-gard

*Snorri Sturluson*: SNOH-ree STIR-loo-son

*Gangleri*: GAHN-glair-ee

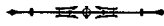
### from *The Prose Edda*<sup>1</sup> from *Prologue*

In the beginning Almighty God created heaven and earth and everything that goes with them and, last of all, two human beings, Adam and Eve, from whom have come families. Their progeny multiplied and spread over all the world. As time went on, however, inequalities sprang up amongst peoples—some were good and righteous but by far the greater number, disregarding God’s commandments, turned to the lusts of the world. For this reason God drowned the world and all creatures living in it—with the exception of those who were with Noah in the ark. Eight persons survived Noah’s flood and these peopled the world and founded families. As the population of the world increased, however, and a larger area became inhabited, the same thing happened again; the great majority of mankind, loving the pursuit of money and power, left off paying homage to God. This grew to such a pitch that they boycotted any reference to God, and then how could anyone tell their sons about the marvels connected

1. Translated by Jean I. Young.



The next thing was that Gangleri heard a tremendous noise on all sides and turned about; and when he had looked all round him he found that he was standing in the open air on a level plain. He saw neither hall nor stronghold. Then he went on his way and coming home to his kingdom related the tidings he had seen and heard, and after him these stories have been handed down from one man to another.



### *Njal's Saga*

c. 1280

Among the great medieval travelers were the Vikings, the raiders and traders whose long, narrow boats took them from Scandinavia as far south as Italy and North Africa, and as far west as Greenland and the coast of Canada. Far out in the North Atlantic, Iceland had been a deserted island until it was settled in the 800s by farmers and fishermen from Norway. They established prosperous farms and a two-tiered society of independent free men and their families, and a larger number of thralls or slaves; by the year 1000 Iceland had a population of some sixty thousand. The Scandinavian kings on the mainland often wished to bring Iceland under their control, particularly after they accepted Christianity while Iceland remained pagan. In 1000 the Norwegian king Olaf Tryggvason sent a missionary named Thangbrand to convert the island, which he did with spectacular success. A detailed account of the conversion was recorded a little over a century later by a historian named Ari the Learned, based on the recollections of his own foster-father and others whom Thangbrand had baptized. Ari's account in turn became the basis for the vivid account of resistance and conversion given here.

Icelanders excelled at two literary forms: dense, allusive lyric poetry, and expansive tales or sagas ("things said," "stories"). Prominent among these narratives were the "family sagas," originally oral accounts of the doings of great figures in the earlier history of the island's clans. The greatest of the family sagas were recorded or composed in the thirteenth century, often focusing on events of the early years of settlement. The longest and richest of all the sagas is *Njal's Saga*, whose anonymous author paints a panoramic portrait of Icelandic society in the years before and after Iceland's conversion. The story centers on the family of a chieftain named Njal, who seeks to advance his family's power while also mediating the feuds that constantly threaten to tear Iceland apart. The saga is written with a spare intensity, showing the violence always about to break out as individuals and clans jockey for influence, honor, and sexual conquests. Njal and his sons thrive at first, yet ultimately they can't withstand the forces of violence around—and within—them, and their enemies burn them alive in their house. This shocking event is fated from the start, and comes as no surprise to the reader—in Icelandic the saga is called *Brennu-Njáls Saga*, "The Saga of Burnt Njal." Yet the author is clearly concerned to understand why even so wise and good a figure as Njal couldn't avert this doom.

A pivotal event in the story is the conversion of Iceland. The saga's author inserted this self-contained tale into the middle of his saga to point up the shift from pagan times to the new Christian order that should have supplanted the old patterns of revenge and feud. The violence continued, however, and worsened in the thirteenth century, giving the Norwegian court an opportunity to come in and assert control: Iceland lost its independence in 1262, some two decades before this saga was written. The author weaves several of his characters into the conversion story, and significantly, his villains consistently oppose the missionary Thangbrand, while his favored characters welcome him. The story shows the forces at play as the pagans—and, it seems, their gods—resist the new faith, while Thangbrand combines preaching, miracle-working, swordplay, and intense politicking to achieve his goal.

## PRONUNCIATIONS:

*Hjalti*: HYALL-tea*Njal*: NYALL*Thangbrand*: THAHNG-brahnd*Thorleif*: THOR-lafe*from Njal's Saga*<sup>1</sup>.

In Norway there had been a change of rulers. Earl Hakon was in his grave, and Olaf Trygvason had succeeded to the throne. Hakon had met his death at the hands of the slave Karf, who slit his throat at Rimul in Gauldale.

It was also learnt that there had been a change of religion in Norway. The old faith had been discarded, and King Olaf had also converted to Christianity the western lands—Shetland, Orkney, and the Farøe Islands.

Njal heard many people say that it was monstrous to forsake the old beliefs. But Njal replied, "In my opinion the new faith is much better; happy the man who receives it. And if the men who spread this faith come out to Iceland, I shall do all I can to further it."

He said this on many occasions; and often he would leave the company of others and meditate aloud.

That same autumn a ship put in to land in the Eastfjords at Berufjord, at a place called Gautavik. The captain was called Thangbrand, the son of Count Willibald of Saxony. Thangbrand had been sent out to Iceland by King Olaf Trygvason as a missionary. He was accompanied by an Icelander called Gudleif Arason, an extremely brave and formidable warrior.

At Beruness lived two brothers, called Thorleif and Ketil Holmsteinsson. They summoned a district meeting and forbade anyone to trade with the newcomers.

Hall of Sida, who lived at Thvatriver in Alptafjord, learnt about this. He rode to the ship with thirty men and went at once to meet Thangbrand.

"Is the trading going badly?" asked Hall.

Thangbrand said that it was.

"I shall tell you why I came here," said Hall. "I want to invite you all to stay at my house, and I shall take the responsibility for marketing your goods."

Thangbrand thanked him, and went to Thvatriver.

One morning that autumn, Thangbrand went out early and ordered a tent to be pitched. Then he sang Mass with great ceremony, for it was an important feast-day.

Hall asked him, "In whose honour are you celebrating this day?"

"The angel Michael," replied Thangbrand.

"What power has this angel?" asked Hall.

"Great power," said Thangbrand. "He weighs everything you do, both good and evil, and he is so merciful that the good weighs more heavily with him than the evil."

"I would like to have him as my friend," said Hall.

"You can do that easily," said Thangbrand. "Give yourself to him in God's name this very day."

Hall said, "I want to stipulate that you pledge your word on his behalf that he shall become my guardian angel."

1. Translated by Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson.

He walked out of the booth. At the door he turned once more, and at that moment his eyes opened.

"Praise be to the Lord my God," he said. "His will is revealed."

He ran back into the booth right up to Lyting, and sank his axe up to the hammer, into Lyting's head; then he wrenched the axe out, and Lyting fell forward, dead.

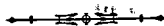
Amundi walked back to the door of the booth. When he reached the exact place where his eyes had opened, they closed again, and he remained blind for the rest of his life.

He asked to be taken to Njal and his sons, and told them of the killing of Lyting.

"No one can blame you for what you did," said Njal, "for such things are fore-ordained. It is a warning to others in similar circumstances never to rebuff those who are so close of kin."

Then Njal offered terms to Lyting's kinsmen. Hoskuld Hvitane's Priest helped to persuade them to accept compensation, and it was put to arbitration. Half of the compensation was remitted because of the just claim that Amundi was found to have had against Lyting. After that, pledges were exchanged, and Lyting's kinsmen gave pledges of peace to Amundi.

People then rode home from the Assembly, and there was peace for a long time.



*Marco Polo*

c. 1254-1324

One of the greatest travelers of his era, the Venetian merchant Marco Polo would be unknown today if he hadn't been thrown into prison in his early forties, following a skirmish at sea between Venice and Genoa in 1295. At that point, Polo had recently returned home from twenty-five years in Asia, brimming over with stories but short on funds—his traveling party had been robbed and stripped of most of their possessions as they neared home. It so happened that a fellow prisoner named Rustichello was a prolific writer of romances, and between them they determined to write a book. Polo dictated his tale to Rustichello, who composed it (apparently with elaborations of his own, especially in the battle scenes at which he excelled), writing in a local dialect, a mixture of French and Italian. The book was an instant hit as it began to circulate in manuscript upon Polo's release from prison, and dozens of copies and translations were soon made. His book achieved printed form in 1477, not long after the invention of printing, and his enthusiastic description of Japan ("Zipangu," as he called it) gave Christopher Columbus a goal for his epochal voyage across the Atlantic in search of a readier trade route than the long and dangerous overland crossing that Polo so vividly described.

Marco Polo had ventured east at the age of fifteen or sixteen in the company of his father Niccolò and his uncle Maffeo, who had earlier established themselves as traders along the Asian Silk Route: They had even visited the Mongol emperor of China, Kubilai (or Kublai) Khan, at his lavish summer residence of Shang-tu—which became known, thanks to Marco's description of it, as the magical Xanadu, dream-palace beloved of Coleridge and other later European writers. When Marco accompanied his father and uncle on their second voyage east in 1271, they traveled through the predominantly Muslim lands of Persia, Afghanistan, and the northern regions of the Indian subcontinent before reaching northern China, arriving at the Mongol court in Shang-tu sometime in around 1275. Kubilai Khan liked to employ foreigners, as he was reluctant to rely solely on Chinese courtiers, who weren't necessarily entirely loyal to the Mongols who had conquered them under his grandfather Chinghiz (or Genghis) Khan sixty years before. He welcomed the Polos, who settled at the court for the next sixteen or seventeen

years, engaging in trade and probably also in administration of goods (Marco knows a great deal about the government's salt monopoly). Fluent in several languages, Marco served at times as an ambassador for the Khan, making fact-finding missions to distant parts of the empire and outlying regions, including southern China and Burma, before eventually returning to Italy with his father and uncle via the sea route around the Malay Peninsula and India.

In telling Rustichello the remarkable story of his life, Marco probably exaggerated his importance at the Chinese court, but he also gave detailed descriptions of the many lands he had passed through. His account provides sharp, realistic observation of commercially useful facts like the spices and goods produced in each area, while also retailing the many extraordinary customs and marvels he encountered or heard about. His *Travels* stimulated enormous interest in further exploration and trade. The book also produced an ambivalent view of Marco himself: he was seen by some as a bold adventurer and brilliant ambassador, but by others as an unreliable teller of tall tales, suspiciously unshocked by pagan practices and beliefs. In the second Resonance reading given here, the modern Italian novelist Italo Calvino plays on both images in his extraordinary *Invisible Cities*, cast as dialogues between Kublai Khan and his 'crafty Venetian ambassador. Marco's book, or rather Marco's and Rustichello's book, remains riveting reading today, a compelling blend of factual fiction and astonishing fact.

PRONUNCIATIONS:

*Kin-sai*: KEEN-sigh

*Kublai Khan*: COO-blai KAHN

*Rustichello*: ROOST-ih-CHEL-oh

from *The Travels of Marco Polo*<sup>1</sup>

[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 1295 in prison at Genoa, caused the things which are contained in the present work to be written by master Rustichello, a citizen of Pisa, who was with him in the same prison at Genoa; and he divided it into three parts.

[THE POLOS SET OUT]

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 1250, Nicolo Polo, the father of the said Marco, and Maffeo,

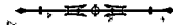
1. Translated by W. Marsden (slightly revised).

*"To distinguish the other cities' qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice."*

*"You should then begin each tale of your travels from the departure, describing Venice as it is, all of it, not omitting anything you remember of it."*

*The lake's surface was barely wrinkled; the copper reflection of the ancient palace of the Sung was shattered into sparkling glints like floating leaves.*

*"Memory's images, once they are fixed in words, are erased," Polo said. "Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little."*



*Ibn Battuta*

1304-1369

No one we know of in history had ever traveled as far as the Moroccan legal scholar Mohammed Ibn Abdallah Ibn Battuta. In a quarter-century of travels starting in 1325, Ibn Battuta covered a total of some seventy-five thousand miles, visiting what are now forty-four different countries from Mali in West Africa, to southern Europe, Asia Minor, Russia, Persia, Afghanistan, central Asia, China, India, Ceylon, and Sumatra. He also left an extraordinary record of his travels, like Marco Polo dictating it late in life. He was first moved to leave home at age twenty-one in order to perform the hajj, or pilgrimage, to Mecca and the holy sites associated with the birth of Islam. This major journey through northern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula only whetted his appetite, however, and fate had much more travel in store for him. So, in fact, a prophetic wise man tells him as he is first going toward Mecca, predicting that he'll eventually meet several of the wise man's relatives in distant India and China. He instructs Ibn Battuta to give his greetings to each of them.

This prophecy comes true, and Ibn Battuta does deliver the greetings, though not through any special divine intervention. Rather, his travels were made possible by the ongoing spread of Islam. Islamic empires formed a 'connected' chain from Asia Minor through Mesopotamia, Persia, Afghanistan, and northern India, and an extensive network of Muslim traders operated in these regions and beyond them into China and down to Indonesia. Prominent traders and officials in key locations along this network kept in steady contact. Ibn Battuta himself first went to India on hearing that the sultan of Delhi was hiring scholars trained in Islamic law. Ibn Battuta took his time reaching India, visiting many places on the way, particularly holy sites and renowned Muslim sages. Once in Delhi, he worked there as a judge for eight years, narrowly escaping death on two occasions that he recounts in selections given here—once, when an associate fell from royal favor, once when he was sent with an embassy abroad, only to have his party attacked by bandits. Eventually, Ibn Battuta left India and went south to Ceylon and then to the Maldiv Islands, where he served as a judge for the new Islamic sultanate there. Ibn Battuta's skill in law and in Qur'anic interpretation gave him employment and made him friends, while his deep piety allowed him to appreciate as God's gifts the wives, concubines, slaves, and lavish presents he received along the way.

Eventually Ibn Battuta returned to North Africa and settled at Fez in Morocco; whose sultan ordered one of his principal secretaries, Mohammed Ibn Juzayy, to record Ibn Battuta's travels. As with Rustichello's expansive treatment of Marco Polo's account, Ibn Juzayy's composition elaborated freely on Ibn Battuta's reminiscences, at times borrowing directly from earlier travel writing to flesh out the story. The work then circulated in manuscript in various forms; the one used here was revised by a scribe named El Bailuni, who gives a clear and

highly readable version that effectively conveys Ibn Battuta's dramatic adventures and his fascination with a wider world than any of his contemporaries had ever seen.

PRONUNCIATIONS:

*Abu'l Barakat*: ah-BOUL bar-ah-KAHT

*El Murshidi*: eII moor-SHE-dee

*Ibn Battuta*: IB'n bah-TOO-tah

*imam*: EE-mamm

from *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*<sup>1</sup>

In the name of the compassionate and merciful God. Praise be ascribed to God the lord of worlds; and the blessing of God be upon our Lord Mohammed, and upon all his posterity and companions. So to proceed: Mohammed Ibn Fatah Allah El Bailuni, poor and needy of the forgiveness of his bountiful lord, states that the following is what he extracted from the account of the scribe Mohammed Ibn Juzayy (upon whom be the mercy of God), from the travels of the theologian Mohammed Ibn Abdallah El Lawati of Tangier, known by the surname of Ibn Battuta. He only included what he himself considered as true, because of the traveler's veracity, and because he had written what he believed to be credible from histories of various nations and countries; and also because what has been reported by faithful witnesses generally receives credit. Some of his statements, indeed, are opposed to the statements of others; as, for instance, his accounts of what he saw of the aromatic plants of Hindustan, which differ from those given by the physicians, and yet his accounts are probably the true ones.

[IBN BATTUTA SETS OUT]

I left my native Tangier on the second of Rajab, 725;<sup>2</sup> I was twenty-two years old. I intended to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and the Tomb of the Prophet. I had no one to accompany me and lighten the journey with friendly discourse, and no traveling group to join. Yet moved by a powerful impulse within me and the long-held desire to visit those great holy places, I left friends and home behind. My parents were then still alive, and my going weighed heavily on both them and me.

[TRAVELS IN EGYPT]

One of the greatest saints in Alexandria at this time was the learned and pious imam<sup>3</sup> Borha ad-Din El Aaraj, a man who had the power of working miracles. One day when I went in to him he said, "I perceive that you are fond of traveling into various countries." I said yes, although I had at the time no intention of traveling into very distant parts. He replied, "You must visit my brother Farid ad-Din in India, and my brother Rokn ad-Din Ibn Zakarya in Sind, and also my brother Borhan ad-Din in China; and when you see them, give them my greetings." I was astonished at what he said and determined with myself to visit those countries, and I did not give up my purpose until I had met all three that he mentioned and gave his greetings to them.

\*\*\* In Alexandria, I heard of the character of Abu Abdallah El Murshidi, and that he was one of the great interpreting saints secluded in the country, where he had a

1. Translated by Samuel Lee (revised).

2. Muslims date events from the founding of Islam in 622 C.E. In this manuscript, the dates are an even 600

years off from the common European reckoning, so the date 725 corresponds to 1325 C.E.

3. Muslim religious leader.