

Research Project Template (Enhanced Academic Standard)

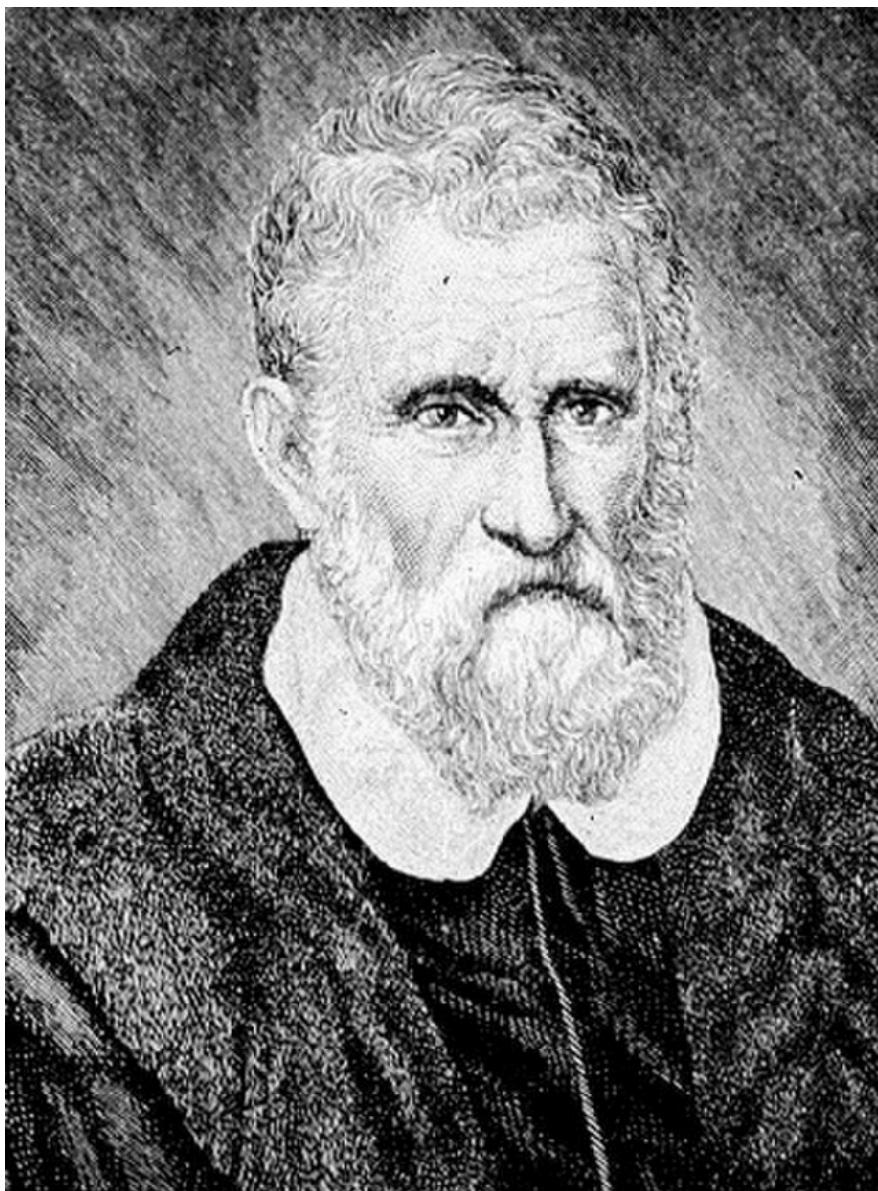
Cover Page

- **Course Title:** CIV 203
- **Instructor:** Dr. Bob
- **Project Title:** Marco Polo and his travels
- **Group Members:** Hamza salah, Shivan, Drud,

1. Introduction

- Marco Polo (1254–1324), a Venetian merchant and explorer.
- He produced the first comprehensive written record of China and the Mongol Empire by a European, bridging the information gap between East and West. He was the first person to produce a written record that connects europe with china and the mongol empire along the middle east and the rest of the known west at that time.
- Travelled everywhere throughout the middle east connecting an initial culture gap between europe and the middle east

- Also travelled throughout all of India creating an impression for it in the European sense and connecting the cultural gaps between Europeans and most of Asia.



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Marco Polo stands as one of the most influential figures in the history of exploration.

Marco Polo gained his fame from his famous manuscript *The Travels of Marco Polo* and was born in a Europe that had little to no actual information about the east. By

documenting the wealth, culture, and advanced administration of the Mongol Empire, Polo challenged the Eurocentric worldview of his time and planted the seeds for the global exploration that would follow two centuries later. Born in 1254 in the city of Venice to a rich merchant family. His father Niccolò Polo was a rich merchant who at the time of Marco Polo's birth was on an expedition with his uncle to Asia. His mother died when he was very young and he was raised by his extended family until his father came back in 1269 in which Marco Polo was 15. Two years later when Marco was 17 he began his travels with his father and uncle back to Asia.

2. The Journey Out: The Middle East & Central Asia

- **Observer of Trade:** Documented the pearl markets of the Persian Gulf and the horse trade. He specifically noted the port of Hormuz, intending to sail to China, but the ships were so poor (sewn together with twine) they decided to go overland instead.
- **Anthropologist:** Recorded the legend of the "Old Man of the Mountain" and the Order of Assassins in Persia.
- **Survivor:** Crossed the Gobi Desert and the Pamir Mountains ("The Roof of the World"), noting physical hardships like hallucinations caused by desert spirits.

The journey began as they sailed through the Mediterranean to Acre and then moved overland into what is now Turkey. He didn't just write about the landscape; he wrote

about what was for sale. As they passed through the province of "Turcomania," he noted the carpets being woven by the locals and the fine horses bred in the region. A trait commonly seen with Marco Polo as he came from a family of merchants.

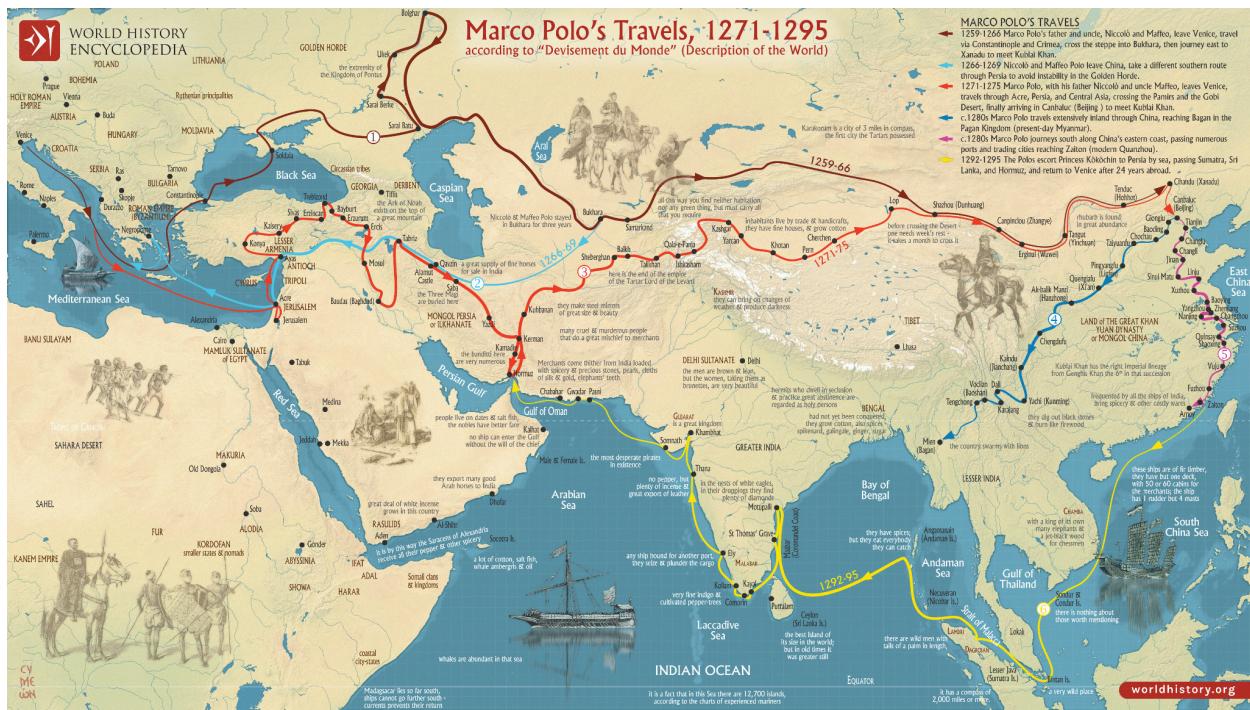
As they pushed deeper into Persia (modern-day Iran), the trip got more dangerous. This was a land of bandits and warring tribes, though the Mongol Empire (the Ilkhanate) technically controlled it, providing a thin layer of safety. He talked about one of his most famous stories about an "Old Man of the Mountain," a warlord who drugged young men into this paradise garden where then he would turn them into these fearless and dangerous assassins. It's one of the most famous parts of his book, showing that Marco was listening to the people he met, where he actually prioritized the local culture and history of the local people and everyone else.

The turning point of the entire expedition happened at the port city of Hormuz, on the Persian Gulf. The ships were not built with iron nails like European vessels; instead, the wood was stitched together with twine made from coconut husks. This caused concern for Marco Polo and his family so instead they decided to travel through the silk road.

This decision meant crossing the vast terrain of Afghanistan and the Pamir Mountains. It is an extremely difficult journey. At one point in Badakhshan (modern-day Afghanistan), Marco Polo got extremely sick to the point where his family had to wait a full year to recover. When they finally moved on, they had to cross the Pamirs, a region locals called the "Roof of the World." It was so high up that Marco Polo noticed something strange; he

wrote that fire didn't burn as brightly there and didn't cook food as well, a detail that confirms he really was at extreme altitudes where oxygen is thinner and supports the idea that he did travel the east to see these phenomena.

The final place to travel between him and China and the Mongols was the Gobi Desert, which Marco called the "Desert of Lop." He wrote that travelers had to stick together because if you fell behind, you might hear spirit voices calling your name, luring you off the path to die of thirst. These stories capture the very real psychological terror of crossing a wasteland like the gobi desert and the true danger of travels



World History Encyclopedia.

3. The Destination: China & The Court of Kublai Khan

- He served as a special envoy ("messager") for Kublai Khan for 17 years, traveling to remote provinces like Yunnan and Burma to report on local customs and loyalty.
- The Mongol administration gained reliable intelligence on their vast and diverse territories; Marco himself was transformed from a foreign guest into a trusted official.
- He documented technologies unknown to Europe, such as the use of coal ("black stones") for fuel and a state-backed paper currency system.
- His detailed reports on the wealth and organization of "Cathay" (North China) and "Mangi" (South China) shattered the European belief that they were the most advanced civilization on Earth.



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Upon arriving at the summer palace of Shangdu, Marco Polo and his family were received with honor by Kublai Khan, the founder of the Yuan Dynasty. Marco Polo was approximately twenty-one years old at this time. From the encyclopedias Marco Polo

immediately tried helping when he came to the Khans' court. This is where he began memorizing languages and alphabets, likely including Persian and Uighur, and the reason is that these languages were extremely important to the merchants and the travel of the silk road. The fact he knows how to speak these languages as well as his experience made him a high government official in the Khan's court.

From his travels it was stated that Marco Polo had a different way of reporting certain things to the khan by expressing cultures in his reports rather than the stale ones that khan would usually get. This prompted the khan to send Marco on long-range missions to distant provinces. One such mission took him to the southwest regions of Yunnan and Burma, where he documented local tribes such as the "Gold Teeth" (Zardandan), who covered their teeth with gold cases or describing certain areas and geographies unknown to the Mongols.

Marco Polo served the khan for 17 years, and with those 17 years came many high governmental positions he claimed he held. He claims in his book to have governed the city of Yangzhou for three years which was a major hub in the Grand Canal used as a post between ships to rest and for trade. While modern historians debate the specific title he held, he did know many things about that city; so his extreme knowledge could be enough input of at least him being there, less him being a full government official.

His time in China also allowed him to observe economic and social systems that were centuries ahead of Europe. He was particularly struck by the use of "black stones" (coal)

which as we know is a way more effective fuel source than wood. He also documented the Khan's use of paper money made from mulberry bark. He described how this currency was signed, sealed, and issued with the full backing of the Emperor's authority, effectively replacing heavy metal coins for trade. These observations provided a practical account of how the Mongol Empire maintained economic stability across such a vast territory.

4. The Return: India & The Indian Ocean

- The maritime escort of the Mongol Princess Kököchin to the Ilkhanate of Persia.
- Departed China in 1291; traveled via Champa (Vietnam), Sumatra, Sri Lanka, and India; arrived in Persia in 1293.
- Polo documented the distinct trade goods of the Indian Ocean network, specifically the diamond and pearl industries, which were largely unknown to Europe.



Marco Polo sought permission to return to Venice. The Khan granted their request on the condition that they escort a Mongol princess, Kōköchin, to Persia to marry the Il-Khan Arghun. This mission marked the beginning of their return journey, which shifted from the overland Silk Road to the maritime trade networks of the Indian Ocean. The fleet departed from Zaiton (modern Quanzhou) in 1291 with fourteen large vessels and a retinue of hundreds, a testament to the resources Kublai Khan put into foreign diplomacy as well as their value to the khan.

During this extended stay, Marco Polo began to see different versions of wildlife as he encountered the rhinoceros, which he described as having hair like a buffalo, feet like an elephant, and a single black horn in the middle of its forehead. He also described how the rhino fought not with its horn but spiked tongue. An extremely vivid description which might also talk about how these travels can be far from fabricated.

Following the stop in Sumatra, the fleet crossed the Bay of Bengal to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and the Coromandel Coast of India (Maabar). Polo's account of India talks mainly about commerce and religion. He provided a detailed report on the pearl fisheries, explaining the diving techniques used to harvest oysters and the certain rituals practiced to prevent shark attacks. He also vegetarians diets of certain tribes as well as their refusal to kill anyone. These observations served as Europe's first substantial introduction to Hindu practices.

5. Interaction With Other Historical Figures

- Kublai Khan (Emperor) and Rustichello da Pisa (Romance writer).



Marco Polo's legacy came from two historical figures. The first was with Kublai Khan, the most powerful man on earth at the time. The Khan's trust gave Marco Polo access to the "Paiza" (golden tablet), which was the main reason he was able to pursue so many of his travels around China and live to tell the tale and without this Tablet, Marco Polo would likely have been executed or enslaved. The second critical interaction was with Rustichello da Pisa. After returning to Italy, Marco was captured during a battle between Venice and Genoa. In prison, he met Rustichello, a writer of Arthurian romances. Marco

began telling his stories to Rustichello, who began writing them down. This collaboration ensured that *The Travels* which was the reason Marco Polo's stories can get told today.

6. Conclusion

Marco Polo remains a singular figure in the history of explorers. From the markets of Venice and the court of Kublai Khan and back marked an important cultural interaction between the West and the East for the first time. In the reflection of Marco Polo, the histories of the world changed, and the significance of European culture came to be understood as the culture of an empire that adjoined civilizations of untold wealth and delicacy.

The importance of his contributions lies in their practical applications. In essence, he presented the coming generations with a map that had the blanks filled for the cities, the resources, and the cultures of the continents. Although the Mongol Empire later disintegrated and the Silk Road was no longer safe, the information that Polo obtained was irreversible. He reinforced the fact that the world was an interconnected and accessible entity, which later motivated the globalizing process of the coming centuries.

7. Sources

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