

= Italian cruiser Marco Polo =

Marco Polo was an armored cruiser built for the Royal Italian Navy (Regia Marina) in the 1890s , the first of her type in Italian service . The ship spent the bulk of her career deployed in the Far East . Between deployments she participated in the Italo - Turkish War of 1911 - 12 during which she caused a diplomatic incident with the Austro - Hungarian Empire . After that affair Marco Polo was sent to Libya where she bombarded the towns of Homs , and Zuara and the defenses of the Dardanelles . In between these operations , the ship provided naval gunfire support to the Royal Italian Army in Libya . Due to her age , Marco Polo did not play a significant role in World War I , serving as an accommodation ship in Venice until she began conversion into a troopship in 1917 . After a series of renamings in 1920 - 21 , the ship was stricken from the naval register in 1922 and subsequently sold for scrap .

= = Design and description = =

Marco Polo was begun as an improved Etna - class protected cruiser , but she was modified while under construction into an armored cruiser , the first such ship in Italian service . The ship had a length between perpendiculars of 99 . 65 meters (326 ft 11 in) and an overall length of 106 . 05 meters (347 ft 11 in) . She had a beam of 14 . 67 meters (48 ft 2 in) and a draft of 5 . 88 meters (19 ft 3 in) . Marco Polo displaced 4 , 583 metric tons (4 , 511 long tons) at normal load , and about 4 , 900 metric tons (4 , 800 long tons) at deep load . The ship had a complement of 22 officers and 372 enlisted men .

She was powered by two vertical triple - expansion steam engines , each driving one propeller shaft . Steam for the engines was supplied by four Scotch marine boilers and their exhausts were trunked into a pair of funnels amidships . Rated at 10 , 000 indicated horsepower (7 , 500 kW) , her engines were designed to give Marco Polo a speed of 19 knots (35 km / h ; 22 mph) , but the ship only reached a speed of 17 . 8 knots (33 . 0 km / h ; 20 . 5 mph) during her sea trials even though the engines produced 10 , 663 ihp (7 , 951 kW) . She had a cruising radius of about 5 , 800 nautical miles (10 , 700 km ; 6 , 700 mi) at a speed of 10 knots (19 km / h ; 12 mph) .

Marco Polo 's main armament consisted of six 40 - caliber 152 mm (6 in) guns in single mounts . One of these guns was each mounted at the bow and stern and the remaining four at the corners of the central citadel in armored casemates . Ten 40 - caliber 120 mm (4 . 7 in) guns served as the ship 's secondary armament . They were all mounted on the broadside , four in unprotected embrasures in the hull sides and the other six on the upper deck protected by gun shields . For defense against torpedo boats , the ship carried nine quick - firing (QF) 57 mm (2 . 2 in) Hotchkiss guns and two QF 37 mm (1 . 5 in) Hotchkiss guns . The ship was also equipped with five 450 mm (17 . 7 in) torpedo tubes .

The ship was protected by a 100 - millimeter (3 . 9 in) armored belt that only protected the middle of her hull . The upper strake of armor was also 100 mm thick and protected just the middle of the ship , up to the height of the upper deck . The armored deck was 25 mm (0 . 98 in) thick . The armor of the conning tower and the gun shields were both 50 mm (2 . 0 in) thick .

= = Construction and career = =

Marco Polo , named after the eponymous explorer , was laid down on 1 July 1890 at the Royal Shipyard in Castellammare di Stabia . The ship was launched on 27 October 1892 and completed on 21 July 1894 . She visited Heraklion , Crete and Piraeus , Greece in May 1897 before departing for the Far East on 26 January 1898 . In May , Marco Polo sailed up the Yangtze River to make port visits at Nanking and Hankow before returning to Shanghai in July . She visited Japan from August to November and then sailed to Shanghai where she remained until August 1899 . The ship departed Shanghai on 27 August and arrived in Naples on 20 October 1899 . Marco Polo departed for China in October 1901 and remained there until February 1903 . A year later , she began her

third tour there in March 1904 and did not leave China until 14 January 1907 . En route home the ship visited Zanzibar , Mogadishu , Italian Somaliland , and Massawa , Eritrea before arriving at Taranto on 26 April . Marco Polo was rearmed in 1911 and her armament was reduced to six 152 mm , four 120 mm , six 57 mm , and two 37 mm guns . One torpedo tube was also removed during this refit .

When the Italo - Turkish War of 1911 - 12 began on 29 September 1911 , Marco Polo was assigned to the 2nd Division of the 1st Squadron of the Mediterranean Fleet . She was quickly transferred , however , to the command of Rear Admiral Prince Luigi Amedeo , Duke of the Abruzzi , Inspector of Torpedo Boats . His command was deployed in the Adriatic Sea and was patrolling the area for Ottoman ships . Marco Polo and two destroyers stopped an Austro - Hungarian ship on 5 October in the bay at San Giovanni di Medua , Albania , and when they sent a boat to board the merchant ship , Ottoman coastal artillery began firing at the boat . The Italian ships returned fire for 45 minutes and silenced the guns after nearly exhausting their ammunition . The incident prompted a diplomatic protest by Austria - Hungary and Italy ceased its operations against the Ottomans in Albania . Marco Polo was then transferred to the 4th Division of the 2nd Squadron , operating off the Libyan coast .

On 17 October , she arrived at Homs to support Italian forces attempting to occupy the town and bombarded it after the Ottoman commander refused to surrender . Bad weather prevented any landings until 21 October and the ship continued to provide fire support for the Italian troops . Marco Polo was tasked to provide fire support for the Royal Italian Army and remained at Homs after the bulk of the fleet returned to Italy to refit in December . In early April 1912 , the ship , together with the armored cruiser Carlo Alberto bombarded Zuara as a distraction while the army made an unopposed landing 40 kilometers (25 mi) away . About a week later , she rejoined the 4th Division as it , and the bulk of the Italian fleet , sailed east in a futile search for the Ottoman fleet in the Aegean Sea . Marco Polo joined the rest of the fleet in desultorily bombarding the defenses of the entrance to the Dardanelles on 18 April . The ship then returned to Libya where she resumed her previous task of providing fire support for the army . In June she supported the operation to capture Misrata and finally returned home on 16 July .

Marco Polo departed Taranto on 25 February 1913 for her fourth deployment to the Far East . When World War I began in August 1914 , she was in Kobe , Japan and the Italian declaration of neutrality on 2 August simplified the problems faced by the Allies in the Far East . The ship departed Shanghai on 7 December and was diverted to Hodeidah , Yemen , en route and finally reached Naples on 4 March 1915 . Thoroughly obsolete by the time Italy declared war on the Central Powers in May 1915 , Marco Polo was used as an accommodation ship at Venice , among who were the crews of the British submarines operating there from October 1915 through May 1917 . The ship began conversion into a troop transport at the Venetian Arsenal in 1917 . This required the removal of her armor , the replacement of her armament with some 76 mm (3 @ 0 in) guns and internal modifications to suit her new role . She was recommissioned with the new name of Cortellazo on 4 April 1918 . The ship was rechristened Europa on 1 October 1920 , discarded on 16 January 1921 , but simultaneously rechristened Volta , then discarded on 5 January 1922 . She was sold for scrap .