

Zheng He's Inscription

This inscription was carved on a stele erected at a temple to the goddess the Celestial Spouse at Changle in Fujian province in 1431. Message written before his last voyage.

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The Imperial Ming Dynasty unifying seas and continents, surpassing the three dynasties even goes beyond the Han and Tang dynasties. The countries beyond the horizon and from the ends of the earth have all become subjects and to the most western of the western or the most northern of the northern countries, however far they may be, [the distance and the routes may be calculated](#). Thus the barbarians from beyond the seas, though their countries are truly distant, "have come to audience [bearing precious objects and presents](#).

The Emperor, approving of their loyalty and sincerity, has ordered us [\(Zheng\) He](#) and others at the head of several tens of thousands of officers and flag-troops to ascend (use) more than one hundred [large ships](#) to go and confer presents on them in order to make manifest (make it happen) the transforming power of the (imperial) virtue and to treat distant people with kindness. From the third [year of Yongle](#) (1405) till now we have seven times received the commission (official permission) of ambassadors to countries of the western ocean. The [barbarian countries](#) which we have visited are: by way of Zhancheng (Champa Cambodia), Zhaowa (Java), Sanfoqi (Palembang- Indonesia) and Xianlo (Siam/Thailand) crossing straight over to Xilanshan (Ceylon- Sri Lanka) in South India, Guli (Calicut) [India], and Kezhi (Cochin India), we have gone to the western regions Hulumosi (Hormuz Between Oman and Iran), Adan (Aden), Mugudushu (Mogadishu- Somalia), altogether more than thirty countries large and small. We have traversed more than one hundred thousand [li](#) (distance of 500 meters) of immense water spaces and have beheld in the ocean huge waves like mountains rising sky-high, and we have set eyes on barbarian regions far away hidden in a blue transparency of light vapours, while our sails loftily unfurled like clouds day and night continued their course (rapid like that) of a star, traversing those savage waves as if we were treading a public thoroughfare. Truly this was due to the majesty and the good fortune of the Court and moreover we owe it to the protecting virtue of the divine Celestial Spouse.

The power of the goddess having indeed been manifested in previous times has been abundantly revealed in the present generation. When we arrived in the distant countries we captured alive those of the native kings who were not respectful and exterminated those barbarian robbers who were engaged in piracy, so that consequently the sea route was cleansed and pacified (to make

someone or something peaceful) and the natives put their trust in it. All this is due to the favours of the goddess.

We have respectfully received an Imperial commemorative composition (essay/piece of writing) exalting the miraculous favours, which is the highest recompense and praise indeed. However, the miraculous power of the goddess resides wherever one goes. As for the temporary palace on the southern mountain at [Changle](#), I have, at the head of the fleet, frequently resided there awaiting the (favorable) wind to set sail for the ocean.

We, Zheng He and others, on the one hand have received the high favour of a gracious commission of our Sacred Lord, and on the other hand carry to the distant barbarians the benefits of respect and good faith (on their part). Commanding the multitudes on the fleet and (being responsible for) a quantity of money and valuables in the face of the violence of the winds and the nights our one fear is not to be able to succeed; how should we then dare not to serve our dynasty with exertion of all our loyalty and the gods with the utmost sincerity? How would it be possible not to realize what is the source of the tranquility of the fleet and the troops and the salvation on the voyage both going and returning? Therefore we have made manifest the virtue of the goddess on [stone](#) and have moreover recorded the years and months of the voyages to the barbarian countries and the return in order to leave (the memory) for ever.

I. In the third year of Yongle (1405) commanding the fleet we went to Guli (Calicut- India) and other countries. At that time the pirate [Chen Zuyi](#) had gathered his followers in the country of Sanfoqi (Palembang- Indonesia), where he plundered the native merchants. When he also advanced to resist our fleet, supernatural soldiers secretly came to the rescue so that after one beating of the drum he was annihilated. In the fifth year (1407) we returned.

II. In the fifth year of Yongle (1407) commanding the fleet we went to Zhaowa (Java), Guli (Calicut), Kezhi (Cochin India) and Xianle (Siam- Thailand). The kings of these countries all sent as tribute precious objects, precious birds and rare animals. In the seventh year (1409) we returned.

III. In the seventh year of Yongle (1409) commanding the fleet we went to the countries (visited) before and took our route by the country of Xilanshan ([Ceylon](#) Sri Lanka). Its king [Yaliekunaier \(Alagakkonara\)](#) was guilty of a gross lack of respect and plotted against the fleet. Owing to the manifest answer to prayer of the goddess (the plot) was discovered and thereupon that king was captured alive. In the ninth year (1411) on our return the king was presented (to the throne) (as a prisoner); subsequently he received the Imperial favour of returning to his own country.

IV. In the eleventh year of Yongle (1413) commanding the fleet we went to Hulumosi (Ormuz between Oman and Iran) and other countries. In the country of Sumendala, Indonesia) there was a false king who was marauding and invading his country. Its king had sent an envoy to the Palace Gates in order to lodge a complaint. We went thither with the official troupes under our command and exterminated some and arrested (other rebels), and owing to the silent aid of the goddess we captured the false king alive. In the thirteenth year (1415) on our return he was presented (to the Emperor as a prisoner). In that year the king of the country of Manlajia (Malacca) came in person with his wife and son to present tribute.

V. In the fifteenth year of Yongle (1417) commanding the fleet we visited the western regions. The country of Hulumosi (Ormuz) presented lions, leopards with gold spots and large western horses. The country of Adan (Aden) presented qilin (giraffe) as well as the long-horned. The country of [Mugudushu \(Mogadishu\)](#) presented huafu lu ("striped" zebras) as well as lions. The country of [Bulawa \(Brava\)](#) (near Kenya) presented camels which run one thousand li as well as camel-birds (ostriches). They all vied in presenting the marvellous objects preserved in the mountains or hidden in the seas and the beautiful treasures buried in the sand or deposited on the shores. Some sent a maternal uncle of the king, others a paternal uncle or a younger brother of the king in order to present a letter of homage written on gold leaf as well as tribute.

VI. In the nineteenth year of Yongle (1421) commanding the fleet we conducted the ambassadors from Hulumosi (Ormuz) and the other countries who had been in attendance at the capital for a long time back to their countries. The kings of all these countries prepared even more tribute than previously.

VII. In the sixth year of Xuande (1431) once more commanding the fleet we have left for the barbarian countries in order to read to them (an Imperial edict) and to confer (give) presents.

We have anchored in this port awaiting a north wind to take the sea, and recalling how previously we have on several occasions received the benefits of the protection of the divine intelligence we have thus [recorded an inscription in stone.](#)

Sources: Teobaldo Filesi. David Morison trans. **China and Africa in the Middle Ages.** (London: Frank Cass, 1972). 57-61.