



# TRAVELS OF MARCO POLO

by Marco Polo and Rustichello of Pisa

## Prologue

Great princes, emperors and kings, dukes and marquises, counts, knights, and burgesses! and people of all degrees who desire to get knowledge of the various races of mankind and of the diversities of the sundry regions of the World, take this book and cause it to be read to you. For you shall find therein all kinds of wonderful things, and the divers histories of the great Armenia, and of Persia, and of the Land of the Tartar, and of India, and of many another country of which our book does speak particularly and in regular succession, according to the description of Messer Marco Polo, a wise and noble citizen of Venice, as he saw them with his own eyes. Some things indeed there be therein which he beheld not; but these he heard from men of credit and veracity. And we shall set down things seen as seen, and things heard as heard only, so that no jot of falsehood may mar the truth of our book, and that all who shall read it or hear it may put full faith in the truth of all its contents.

For let me tell you that since our Lord God did mold with His hands our first Father Adam, even until this day, never has there been Christian, or Pagan, or Tartar, or Indian, or any man of any nation, who in his own person has had so much knowledge and experience of the divers parts of the World and its Wonders as hath had this Messer Marco! And for that reason he bethought himself that it would be a very great pity did he not cause to be put in writing all the great marvels that he had seen, or on sure information heard of, so that other people who had not these advantages might, by his Book, get such knowledge. And I may tell you that in acquiring this knowledge he spent in those various parts of the World good twenty-six years. Now, being thereafter an inmate of the Prison at Genoa, he caused Messer Rusticiano of Pisa, who was in the said Prison likewise, to reduce the whole to writing; and this befell in the year 1298 from the birth of Jesus.

## Chapter I

### How The Two Brothers Polo Set Forth From Constantinople To Traverse The World

It came to pass in the year of Christ 1260, when Baldwin was reigning at Constantinople, that Messer Nicolas Polo, the father of my lord Mark, and Messer Maffeo Polo, the brother of Messer Nicolas, were at the said city of Constantinople, whither they had gone from Venice with their merchants' wares.

Now these two brothers, men singularly noble, wise, and provident, took counsel together to cross the Greater Sea on a venture of trade; so they laid in a store of jewels and set forth from Constantinople, crossing the Sea to Soldaia.



## Chapter V

### How The Two Brothers Arrived At The Court Of The Great Khan

When the two brothers got to the Great Khan, he received them with great honor and hospitality, and showed much pleasure at their visit, asking them a great number of questions. First, he asked about the emperors, how they maintained their dignity, and administered justice in their dominions; and how they went forth to battle, and so forth. And then he asked the like questions about the kings and princes and other potentates.

## Chapter VI

### How The Great Khan Asked All About The Manners Of The Christians, And Particularly About The Pope Of Rome

And then he inquired about the Pope and the Church, and about all that is done at Rome, and all the customs of the Latins. And the two brothers told him the truth in all its particulars, with order and good sense, like sensible men as they were; and this they were able to do as they knew the Tartar language well.

## Chapter VII

### How The Great Khan Sent The Two Brothers As His Envoys To The Pope.

When that prince, whose name was Kublai Khan, lord of the Tartars all over the earth, and of all the kingdoms and provinces and territories of that vast quarter of the world, had heard all that the brothers had to tell him about the ways of the

Latins, he was greatly pleased, and he took it into his head that he would send them on an embassy to the Pope. So he urgently desired them to undertake this mission along with one of his barons; and they replied that they would gladly execute all his commands as those of their sovereign lord. Then the prince sent to summon to his presence one of his barons whose name was Cogatal, and desired him to get ready, for it was proposed to send him to the Pope along with the two brothers. The baron replied that he would execute the lord's commands to the best of his ability.

After this the prince caused letters from himself to the Pope to be indited in the Tartar tongue, and committed them to the two brothers and to that baron of his own, and charged them with what he wished them to say to the Pope. Now the contents of the letters were to this purport: He begged that the Pope would send as many as a hundred persons of our Christian faith; intelligent men, acquainted with the seven arts, well qualified to enter into controversy, and able clearly to prove by force of argument to idolaters and other kinds of folk, that the law of Christ was best, and that all other religions were false and naught; and that if they would prove this, he and all under him would become Christians and the Church's liegemen. Finally he charged his envoys to bring back to him some oil of the lamp which burns on the sepulchre of our Lord at Jerusalem.

### **Chapter VIII**

#### **How The Great Khan Gave Them A Tablet Of Gold Bearing His Orders In Their Behalf**

When the prince had charged them with all his commission, he caused to be given them a tablet of gold, on which was inscribed that the three ambassadors should be supplied with everything needful in all the countries through which they should pass - with horses, with escorts, and, in short, with whatever they should require. And when they had made all needful preparations, the three ambassadors took their leave of the emperor and set out.

When they had traveled I know not how many days, the Tartar baron fell sick, so that he could not ride, and being very ill, and unable to proceed further, he halted at a certain city. So the two brothers judged it best that they should leave him behind and proceed to carry out their commission; and, as he was well content that they should do so, they continued their journey. And I can assure you, that whithersoever they went they were honorably provided with whatever they stood in need of, or chose to command. And this was owing to that tablet of authority from the lord which they carried with them.

So they traveled on and on until they arrived at Ayas in Armenia, a journey which occupied them, I assure you, for three years. It took them so long because they

could not always proceed, being stopped sometimes by snow, or by heavy rains falling, or by great torrents which they found in an impassable state.

### **Chapter IX**

#### **How The Two Brothers Came To The City Of Acre**

They departed from Ayas and came to Acre, arriving there in the month of April, in the year of Christ 1269, and then they learned that the Pope was dead. And when they found that the Pope was dead (his name was Pope Clement IV), they went to a certain wise churchman who was legate for the whole kingdom of Egypt, and a man of great authority, by name Theobald of Piacenza, and told him of the mission on which they were come. When the legate heard their story, he was greatly surprised, and deemed the thing to be of great honor and advantage for the whole of Christendom. So his answer to the two ambassador brothers was this: "Gentlemen, ye see that the Pope is dead; wherefore ye must needs have patience until a new Pope be made, and then shall ye be able to execute your charge." Seeing well enough that what the legate said was just, they observed: "But while the Pope is a-making, we may as well go to Venice and visit our households." So they departed from Acre and went to Negropont, and from Negropont they continued their voyage to Venice. On their arrival there, Messer Nicolas found that his wife was dead, and that she had left behind her a son of fifteen years of age, whose name was Marco; and 'tis of him that this book tells. The two brothers abode at Venice a couple of years, tarrying until a Pope should be made.

### **Chapter X**

#### **How The Two Brothers Again Departed From Venice, On Their Way Back To The Great Khan, And Took With Them Mark, The Son Of Messer Nicolas**

When the two brothers had tarried as long as I have told you, and saw that never a Pope was made, they said that their return to the great Khan must be put off no longer. So they set out from Venice, taking Mark along with them, and went straight back to Acre, where they found the legate of whom we have spoken. They had a good deal of discourse with him concerning the matter, and asked his permission to go to Jerusalem to get some oil from the lamp on the sepulchre, to carry with them to the great Khan, as he had enjoined. The legate giving them leave, they went from Acre to Jerusalem and got some of the oil, and then returned to Acre, and went to the legate and said to him: "As we see no sign of a Pope's being made, we desire to return to the great Khan; for we have already tarried long, and there has been more than enough delay." To which the legate replied: "Since 'tis your wish to go back, I am well content." Wherefore he caused letters to be written for delivery to the great Khan, bearing testimony that the two brothers had come in all good faith to accomplish his charge, but that as there was no Pope they had been unable to do so.

## **Chapter XI**

### **How The Two Brothers Set Out From Acre, And Mark Along With Them**

When the two brothers had received the legate's letters, they set forth from Acre to return to the grand Khan, and got as far as Ayas. But shortly after their arrival there they had news that the legate aforesaid was chosen Pope, taking the name of Pope Gregory of Piacenza; news which the two brothers were very glad indeed to hear. And presently there reached them at Ayas a message from the legate, now the Pope, desiring them, on the part of the Apostolic See, not to proceed further on their journey, but to return to him incontinently. And what shall I tell you? The king of Armenia caused a galley to be got ready for the two ambassador brothers, and despatched them to the Pope at Acre.

## **Chapter XII**

### **How The Two Brothers Presented Themselves Before The New Pope**

And when they had been thus honorably conducted to Acre they proceeded to the presence of the Pope, and paid their respects to him with humble reverence. He received them with great honor and satisfaction, and gave them his blessing. He then appointed two friars of the order of preachers to accompany them to the great Khan, and to do whatever might be required of them. These were unquestionably as learned churchmen as were to be found in the province at that day - one being called Friar Nicolas of Vicenza, and the other Friar William of Tripoli. He delivered to them also proper credentials, and letters in reply to the great Khan's messages and gave them authority to ordain priests and bishops, and to bestow every kind of absolution, as if given by himself in proper person; sending by them also many fine vessels of crystal as presents to the great Khan. So when they had got all that was needful, they took leave of the Pope, receiving his benediction; and the four set out together from Acre, and went to Ayas, accompanied always by Messer Nicolas' son Marco.

Now, about the time that they reached Ayas, Bundakdar, the Sultan of Babylon, invaded Armenia with a great host of Saracens, and ravaged the country, so that our envoys ran a great peril of being taken or slain. And when the preaching friars saw this they were greatly frightened, and said that go they never would. So they made over to Messer Nicolas and Messer Maffeo all their credentials and documents, and took their leave, departing in company with the master of the temple.

## **Chapter XIII**

### **How Messer Nicolo And Messer Maffeo Polo, Accompanied By Mark, Traveled To The Court Of The Great Khan**

So the two brothers, and Mark along with them, proceeded on their way, and journeying on, summer and winter, came at length to the great Khan, who was then at a certain rich and great city, called Kaiminfu. As to what they met with on the road, whether in going or coming, we shall give no particulars at present, because we are going to tell you all those details in regular order in the after part of this book. Their journey back to the Khan occupied a good three years and a half, owing to the bad weather and severe cold that they encountered. And let me tell you in good sooth that when the great Khan heard that Messers Nicolo and Maffeo Polo were on their way back, he sent people a journey of full forty days to meet them; and on this journey, as on their former one, they were honorably entertained upon the road, and supplied with all that they required.

## **Chapter XIV**

### **How Messer Nicolo And Messer Maffeo Polo And Marco Presented Themselves Before The Great Khan**

And what shall I tell you? When the two brothers and Mark had arrived at that great city, they went to the imperial palace, and there they found the sovereign attended by a great company of barons. So they bent the knee before him, and paid their respects to him, with all possible reverence prostrating themselves on the ground. Then the lord bade them stand up, and treated them with great honor, showing great pleasure at their coming, and asked many questions as to their welfare, and how they had sped. They replied that they had in verity sped well, seeing that they found the Khan well and safe. Then they presented the credentials and letters which they had received from the Pope, which pleased him right well; and after that they produced the oil from the sepulchre, and at that also he was very glad, for he set great store thereby. And next, spying Mark, who was then a young gallant, he asked who was that in their company? "Sir," said his father, Messer Nicolo, "'tis my son and your liegeman." "Welcome is he too," said the emperor. And why should I make a long story? There was great rejoicing at the court because of their arrival; and they met with attention and honor from everybody.

...Thereafter Messer Marco abode in the Khan's employment some seventeen years, continually going and coming, hither and thither, on the missions that were entrusted to him by the lord and sometimes, with the permission and authority of the great Khan, on his own private affairs. And, as he knew all the sovereign's ways, like a sensible man he always took much pains to gather knowledge of anything that would be likely to interest him, and then on his return to court he would relate everything in regular order, and thus the emperor came to hold him in great love and favor. And for this reason also he would employ him the oftener on the most weighty and most distant of his missions. These Messer Marco ever carried out

with discretion and success, God be thanked. So the emperor became ever more partial to him, and treated him with the greater distinction, and kept him so close to his person that some of the barons waxed very envious thereof. And thus it came about that Messer Marco Polo had knowledge of, or had actually visited, a greater number of the different countries of the world than any other man; the more that he was always giving his mind to get knowledge, and to spy out and inquire into everything in order to have matter to relate to the lord.

## **Chapter XVII**

### **How Messer Nicolo, Messer Maffeo, And Messer Marco Asked Leave Of The Great Khan To Go Their Way**

When the two brothers and Mark had abode with the lord all that time that you have been told, having meanwhile acquired great wealth in jewels and gold, they began among themselves to have thoughts about returning to their own country; and indeed it was time. For, to say nothing of the length and infinite perils of the way, when they considered the Khan's great age, they doubted whether, in the event of his death before their departure, they would ever be able to get home. They applied to him several times for leave to go, presenting their request with great respect, but he had such a partiality for them, and liked so much to have them about him, that nothing on earth would persuade him to let them go.

...The lord, having that great regard that I have mentioned for those three Latins, was very loath to do so and his countenance showed great dissatisfaction. But at last he did give them permission to depart...

## **Chapter XVIII**

### **How The Two Brothers And Messer Marco Took Leave Of The Great Khan, And Returned To Their Own Country**

And when the prince saw that the two brothers and Messer Marco were ready to set forth, he called them all three to his presence, and gave them two golden tablets of authority, which should secure them liberty of passage through all his dominions, and by means of which, whithersoever they should go, all necessities would be provided for them, and for all their company, and whatever they might choose to order. He charged them also with messages to the king of France, the king of England, the king of Spain, and the other kings of Christendom. He then caused thirteen ships to be equipped, each of which had four masts, and often spread twelve sails. And I could easily give you all particulars about these, but as it would be so long as affair I will not enter upon this now, but hereafter, when time and place are suitable. Among the said ships were at least four or five that carried crews of two hundred and fifty or two hundred and sixty men....

...Another thing too must be mentioned, which does credit to those three ambassadors, and shows for what great personages they were held. The great Khan regarded them with such trust and affection, that he had confided to their charge the queen Kukachin, as well as the daughter of the king of Manzi, to conduct to Arghun the lord of all the Levant. And those two great ladies who were thus entrusted to them they watched over and guarded as if they had been daughters of their own, until they had transferred them to the hands of their lord; while the ladies, young and fair as they were, looked on each of those three as a father, and obeyed them accordingly. Indeed, both Ghazan, who is now the reigning prince, and the queen Kukachin his wife, have such a regard for the envoys that there is nothing they would not do for them. And when the three ambassadors took leave of that lady to return to their own country, she wept for sorrow at the parting.

And now that I have rehearsed all the prologue as you have heard, we shall begin the book of the description of the divers things that Messer Marco met with in his travels.

Now I will tell you of a great miracle that befell at Bagdad, wrought by God on behalf of the Christians.

### **How the Calif of Bagdad Took Counsel to Slay All the Christians in His Land**

I will tell you then this great marvel that occurred between Bagdad and Mausul.

It was in the year of Christ ... that there was a Calif at Bagdad who bore a great hatred to Christians, and was taken up day and night with the thought how he might either bring those that were in his kingdom over to his own faith, or might procure them all to be slain. And he used daily to take counsel about this with the devotees and priests of his faith,<sup>[2]</sup> for they all bore the Christians like malice. And, indeed, it is a fact, that the whole body of Saracens throughout the world are always most malignantly disposed towards the whole body of Christians.

Now it happened that the Calif, with those shrewd priests of his, got hold of that passage in our Gospel which says, that if a Christian had faith as a grain of mustard seed, and should bid a mountain be removed, it would be removed. And such indeed is the truth. But when they had got hold of this text they were delighted, for it seemed to them the very thing whereby either to force all the Christians to change their faith, or to bring destruction upon them all. The Calif therefore called together all the Christians in his territories, who were extremely numerous. And when they had come before him, he showed them the Gospel, and made them read the text which I have mentioned. And when they had read it he asked them if that was the truth? The Christians answered that it assuredly was so. "Well," said

the Calif, "since you say that it is the truth, I will give you a choice. Among such a number of you there must needs surely be this small amount of faith; so you must either move that mountain there,"--and he pointed to a mountain in the neighbourhood--"or you shall die an ill death; unless you choose to eschew death by all becoming Saracens and adopting our Holy Law. To this end I give you a respite of ten days; if the thing be not done by that time, ye shall die or become Saracens." And when he had said this he dismissed them, to consider what was to be done in this strait wherein they were.

### **How the Christians Were In Great Dismay Because of What the Calif Had Said**

The Christians on hearing what the Calif had said were in great dismay, but they lifted all their hopes to God, their Creator, that He would help them in this their strait. All the wisest of the Christians took counsel together, and among them were a number of bishops and priests, but they had no resource except to turn to Him from whom all good things do come, beseeching Him to protect them from the cruel hands of the Calif.

So they were all gathered together in prayer, both men and women, for eight days and eight nights. And whilst they were thus engaged in prayer it was revealed in a vision by a Holy Angel of Heaven to a certain Bishop who was a very good Christian, that he should desire a certain Christian Cobbler,<sup>[1]</sup> who had but one eye, to pray to God; and that God in His goodness would grant such prayer because of the Cobbler's holy life.

Now I must tell you what manner of man this Cobbler was. He was one who led a life of great uprightness and chastity, and who fasted and kept from all sin, and went daily to church to hear Mass, and gave daily a portion of his gains to God. And the way how he came to have but one eye was this. It happened one day that a certain woman came to him to have a pair of shoes made, and she showed him her foot that he might take her measure. Now she had a very beautiful foot and leg; and the Cobbler in taking her measure was conscious of sinful thoughts. And he had often heard it said in the Holy Evangel, that if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee, rather than sin. So, as soon as the woman had departed, he took the awl that he used in stitching, and drove it into his eye and destroyed it. And this is the way he came to lose his eye. So you can judge what a holy, just, and righteous man he was.

### **How the One-Eyed Cobbler Was Desired to Pray for the Christians**

Now when this vision had visited the Bishop several times, he related the whole matter to the Christians, and they agreed with one consent to call the Cobbler before them. And when he had come they told him it was their wish that he should

pray, and that God had promised to accomplish the matter by his means. On hearing their request he made many excuses, declaring that he was not at all so good a man as they represented. But they persisted in their request with so much sweetness, that at last he said he would not tarry, but do what they desired.

### **How the Prayer of the One-Eyed Cobbler Caused the Mountain to Move**

And when the appointed day was come, all the Christians got up early, men and women, small and great, more than 100,000 persons, and went to church, and heard the Holy Mass. And after Mass had been sung, they all went forth together in a great procession to the plain in front of the mountain, carrying the precious cross before them, loudly singing and greatly weeping as they went. And when they arrived at the spot, there they found the Calif with all his Saracen host armed to slay them if they would not change their faith; for the Saracens believed not in the least that God would grant such favour to the Christians. These latter stood indeed in great fear and doubt, but nevertheless they rested their hope on their God Jesus Christ.

So the Cobbler received the Bishop's benison, and then threw himself on his knees before the Holy Cross, and stretched out his hands towards Heaven, and made this prayer: "Blessed LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, I pray Thee by Thy goodness that Thou wilt grant this grace unto Thy people, insomuch that they perish not, nor Thy faith be cast down, nor abused nor flouted. Not that I am in the least worthy to prefer such request unto Thee; but for Thy great power and mercy I beseech Thee to hear this prayer from me Thy servant full of sin."

And when he had ended this his prayer to God the Sovereign Father and Giver of all grace, and whilst the Calif and all the Saracens, and other people there, were looking on, the mountain rose out of its place and moved to the spot which the Calif had pointed out! And when the Calif and all his Saracens beheld, they stood amazed at the wonderful miracle that God had wrought for the Christians, insomuch that a great number of the Saracens became Christians. And even the Calif caused himself to be baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen, and became a Christian, but in secret. Howbeit, when he died they found a little cross hung round his neck; and therefore the Saracens would not bury him with the other Califs, but put him in a place apart. The Christians exulted greatly at this most holy miracle, and returned to their homes full of joy, giving thanks to their Creator for that which He had done.

And now you have heard in what wise took place this great miracle. And marvel not that the Saracens hate the Christians; for the accursed law that Mahommet gave them commands them to do all the mischief in their power to all other descriptions of people, and especially to Christians; to strip such of their goods, and

do them all manner of evil, because they belong not to their law. See then what an evil law and what naughty commandments they have! But in such fashion the Saracens act, throughout the world.

Now I have told you something of Bagdad. I could easily indeed have told you first of the affairs and the customs of the people there. But it would be too long a business, looking to the great and strange things that I have got to tell you, as you will find detailed in this Book....

### Of the Great Country of Persia; With Some Account of the Three Kings

Persia is a great country, which was in old times very illustrious and powerful; but now the Tartars have wasted and destroyed it.

In Persia is the city of SABA, from which the Three Magi set out when they went to worship Jesus Christ; and in this city they are buried, in three very large and beautiful monuments, side by side. And above them there is a square building, carefully kept. The bodies are still entire, with the hair and beard remaining. One of these was called Jaspas, the second Melchior, and the third Balthasar. Messer Marco Polo asked a great many questions of the people of that city as to those Three Magi, but never one could he find that knew aught of the matter, except that these were three kings who were buried there in days of old. However, at a place three days' journey distant he heard of what I am going to tell you. He found a village there which goes by the name of CALA ATAPERISTAN, which is as much as to say, "The Castle of the Fire-worshippers." And the name is rightly applied, for the people there do worship fire, and I will tell you why.

They relate that in old times three kings of that country went away to worship a Prophet that was born, and they carried with them three manner of offerings, Gold, and Frankincense, and Myrrh; in order to ascertain whether that Prophet were God, or an earthly King, or a Physician. For, said they, if he take the Gold, then he is an earthly King; if he take the Incense he is God; if he take the Myrrh he is a Physician.

So it came to pass when they had come to the place where the Child was born, the youngest of the Three Kings went in first, and found the Child apparently just of his own age; so he went forth again marvelling greatly. The middle one entered next, and like the first he found the Child seemingly of his own age; so he also went forth again and marvelled greatly. Lastly, the eldest went in, and as it had befallen the other two, so it befell him. And he went forth very pensive. And when the three had rejoined one another, each told what he had seen; and then they all marvelled the more. So they agreed to go in all three together, and on doing so they beheld the Child with the appearance of its actual age, to wit, some thirteen days. Then they adored, and presented their Gold and Incense and Myrrh. And the Child took

all the three offerings, and then gave them a small closed box; whereupon the Kings departed to return into their own land.

### How the Three Kings Returned to their Own Country

And when they had ridden many days they said they would see what the Child had given them. So they opened the little box, and inside it they found a stone. On seeing this they began to wonder what this might be that the Child had given them, and what was the import thereof. Now the signification was this: when they presented their offerings, the Child had accepted all three, and when they saw that they had said within themselves that He was the True God, and the True King, and the True Physician. And what the gift of the stone implied was that this Faith which had begun in them should abide firm as a rock. For He well knew what was in their thoughts. Howbeit, they had no understanding at all of this signification of the gift of the stone; so they cast it into a well. Then straightway a fire from Heaven descended into that well wherein the stone had been cast.

And when the Three Kings beheld this marvel they were sore amazed, and it greatly repented them that they had cast away the stone; for well they then perceived that it had a great and holy meaning. So they took of that fire, and carried it into their own country, and placed it in a rich and beautiful church. And there the people keep it continually burning, and worship it as a god, and all the sacrifices they offer are kindled with that fire. And if ever the fire becomes extinct they go to other cities round about where the same faith is held, and obtain of that fire from them, and carry it to the church. And this is the reason why the people of this country worship fire. They will often go ten days' journey to get of that fire. Such then was the story told by the people of that Castle to Messer Marco Polo; they declared to him for a truth that such was their history, and that one of the three kings was of the city called SABA, and the second of AVA, and the third of that very Castle where they still worship fire, with the people of all the country round about.

