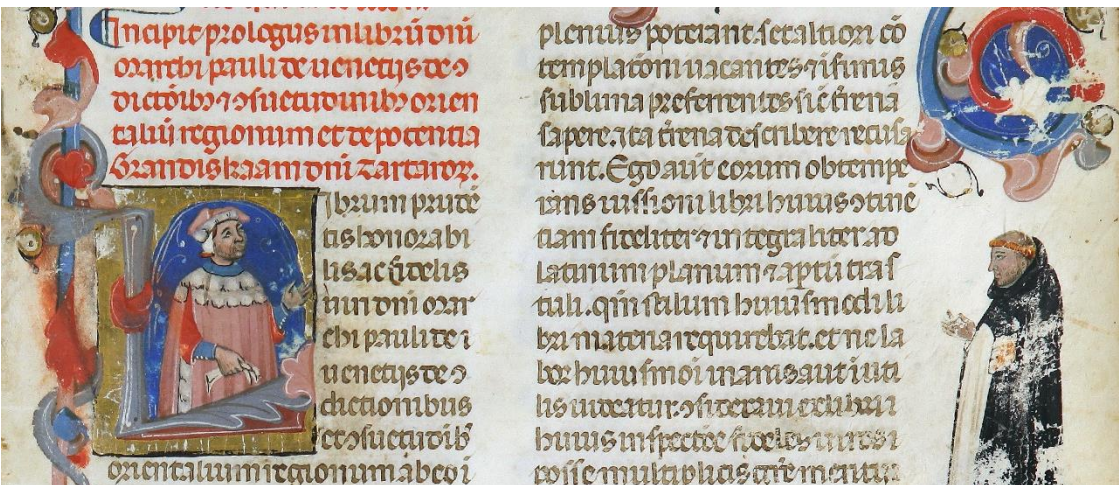


# Conference Program



## Marco Polo and the European Image of Asia

University of Innsbruck, Austria

November 14-16, 2024

## November 14, 2024 (Thursday)

10:00-10:30

**Jürgen Fuchsbauer (University of Innsbruck)**

Welcoming Address

**Mario Klarer (University of Innsbruck)**

Introduction

10:30-11:30

**Samuela Simion (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)**

“A New Witness to the VA Version of Marco Polo’s *Devisement dou monde: The Manuscript A.II.9 in the ‘Ludovico Jacobilli’ Diocesan Library in Foligno*”

The paper introduces a recently rediscovered witness to Marco Polo’s *Devisement dou monde*, belonging to the VA group (Foligno, Diocesan Library “Ludovico Jacobilli”, ms Jacobilli A.II.9). This 15th-century manuscript, of unknown origin, belonged to the priest Ludovico Jacobilli (1598–1664), who bequeathed his collection to the library between 1662 and 1664; although the manuscript was mentioned in catalogues as early as 1930, it was hitherto unknown to Marco Polo studies. The paper is divided into three parts: firstly, a brief codicological description of the manuscript (acephalous and missing some *folios*); secondly, a comparison between the witness and the extant manuscripts of VA version (especially the manuscript CM 211 of the Biblioteca Civica in Padua, on which the critical edition is based); finally, an evaluation of the contribution of the new witness to the reconstruction of the physiognomy of the VA group.

11:30-12:30

**Andrea Palandri (Dublin City University)**

“The Irish Adaptation of Marco Polo’s *Travels*”

This paper examines the Irish adaptation of Marco Polo’s *Travels* from the late fifteenth-century Book of Lismore, commissioned for Fínghean Mac Carthaigh Riabhach and Caitilín Fitzgerald in south-west Cork. Originating from Francesco Pipino’s Latin translation (1310–24), specifically a version that was in circulation in England during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this distinctive adaptation is analyzed to map its textual transmission from Italy to Ireland. The paper distinguishes scribal errors from deliberate authorial interpolations in the Irish Marco Polo, discussing their significance within the context of the broader European transmission of the text and in the context of late fifteenth-century Irish literature. This period in Ireland saw a burgeoning interest in texts about the Far East and Christian-Saracen conflicts, an interest that is also reflected in the manuscripts that were being written in England at the time. Notable changes to the Irish adaptation include the return to a more typical description of salamanders as found in medieval European bestiaries and the integration of Irish divinatory incantations in scenes of Mongolian battles

which illustrate how foreign material was being blended with native understanding to produce a unique adaptation that conformed to the ‘horizon of expectation’ of Irish audiences. By examining manuscripts containing Pipino’s translation that were written in England and comparing them to a number of Irish manuscripts, the paper also discusses the interconnectedness of the medieval European learned circles who were studying, copying, and reshaping Marco Polo’s text during this period.

12:30-14:30

Lunch Break

14:30-15:30

**Hans Ulrich Vogel (University of Tübingen)**

“Vignettes of Marco Polo’s Observations in China: Bamboo Cables – Dragon Columns – Astrological Divination”

As it is made clear in the title, this contribution focuses on three topics mentioned in the Venetian’s account of China. The first deals with the hawsers made of “canes,” i.e., bamboo, which were used near Zhenzhou (modern Yizheng, Jiangsu) for towing boats upstream on the Yangzijiang and were described in the different redactions of *Le Devisement dou monde*. I will also delve into the question, whether horses were harnessed to these hawsers, as it is mentioned in R, Z, and V only. The second theme is related to Polo’s report about the artistic as well architectural element of dragon sculptures coiling around the columns of the Great Khan’s bamboo palace in his summer residence in Shangdu—an information preserved exclusively in R and L. Third, it is R and Z alone that inform us to quite some detail on how divination was carried out by astrologers in Khubilai Khan’s capital Khanbaliq. In all three cases, the relevant passages of the different versions of *Le Devisement* will be compared with data derived from primary sources and historical relics, mainly—though not exclusively—of Chinese origin. From these three vignettes it becomes clear that the Venetian’s descriptions of these phenomena are chiming remarkably well with what we know of relevant contemporary Chinese conditions and developments. Moreover, they also highlight the importance of the Ramusian redaction which in many instances preserved and transmitted information in a reliable and unique way. Eventually, it has, however, also to be pointed out that it was not always easy for the copyists and translators of DM to understand and figure out precisely the object or action that was reported by our traveler from Mongolian-ruled China.

15:30-16:00

Coffee Break

16:00-17:00

**Laura Tomasi (Università di Verona)**

*“Le livre de missire Marc Paul: A Case of Translation of the *Devisement dou monde* in 15th Century France”*

At the same time as the appearance of the first incunabulae printed editions, the *Devisement dou monde* (DM) circulated in 15th century France also through *Le livre de missire Marc Paul* (PFr), a translation into Middle French of the P version. Preserved by two valuable manuscripts (London, British Library, Egerton 2176, and Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, M 305, both belonged to members of the French high society), this vernacular version conveyed the DM to new readers, during a very prolific phase for the French translation activity. More precisely, PFr is placed at the end of a textual process (VA > P > PFr) that involved different languages, in which Latin has covered the function of intermediate language, allowing the transfer of contents into a third language (Middle French); consequently, the P version was made accessible to a new audience, who could read Marco Polo's description of Asia. Furthermore, the prologue of PFr is transcribed at the opening of the code Paris, BnF, n.a. fr. 5000 (16th century), which attributes an account of a trip to Italy to Marco Polo: although modest, this case of independent circulation is interesting for the history of the text. In my proposed presentation, I will discuss the material and textual features of the PFr version, outlining the differences compared to the other DM's versions (for example, the Fr or the P version) and the peculiarities of the prologue. I will also focus on the codicological characteristics of the two manuscripts as well as on the circulation and reception of the Middle-French translation.

17:00-18:00

**Carlo Calloni (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia):**

*“Manuscripts and Printed Editions of Marco Polo's Book between the Medieval and Modern Ages: New Findings on the Latin Translation by Francesco Pipino”*

Among the various multilingual versions of *Devisement dou Monde*, the Latin translation by the Dominican friar Francesco Pipino was the most widely diffused. This translation played a crucial role in spreading Marco Polo's book throughout Europe during the Middle Ages: the existence of 63 Latin manuscripts testifies the great success of this peculiar form of the text, which served as a model for many re-translations into modern languages. However, the sheer number of manuscripts has so far discouraged a complete *recensio* of the tradition. In my PhD thesis, I address this issue by using some *loci selecti* to establish relation between the various witnesses. In this paper, I intend to discuss some findings of my research and in particular, in line with the main theme of the conference, I would like to offer some new insights into how Marco Polo was read «for century to come», highlighting the link between the medieval and modern reception of the book. To do so, I will focus on the transition from manuscripts to printed editions. The first case I will examine is the *editio princeps* of Pipino's translation, the Gouda edition by Leeu (1483–84), which was read by Christopher Columbus: previous scholars have already identified the probable manuscript used by the editor, but my research provides further background on it.

The second case will be the Grynaeus edition (1532), which represents a complete rewriting by Huttich. The manuscript he used has remained unknown until now.

## November 15, 2024 (Friday)

10:00-11:00

**Alvise Andreose (Università degli Studi di Udine)**

“The Editorial History of the *Devisement dou Monde* in the Early Modern Period”

The editorial history of the *Devisement dou Monde* in the first centuries of the modern era has not yet been studied in depth. Awareness of the philological problems raised by Marco Polo’s book was slow to develop. The first editors of the text (F. Creussner, G. Leeu, G. B. Sessa) adopted a passive attitude towards the *textus receptus*. The same applies to the Portuguese and Spanish translations published in 1502 and 1503 by V. Fernandez and R. de Santaella, respectively. The Latin version published by J. Huttich in the *Novus Orbis* in 1532 was merely a linguistic revision of the medieval translation by F. Pipino. The philological approach to the work began with G. B. Ramusio, who compared five manuscripts to construct the text on which he based his Italian translation (1559). His edition not only provided posterity with a text that was much richer and more authoritative than the one in circulation but also, for the first time, directly confronted the problem of the great divergence of readings documented in the textual transmission. Between the publication of Ramusio’s text and the first decades of the nineteenth century, interest in the textual question of Marco Polo’s book was very low. The editions published during this period were limited to reproducing already edited versions. From the second half of the sixteenth century, two vulgates became established and remained so until the beginning of the nineteenth century: the Latin translation by Pipino, revised by Huttich, and the text by Ramusio. Italy was a different case. In the territories of the Serenissima Republic, the Venetian version, originally printed by Sessa in 1496, continued to be published. The picture began to change in the second half of the eighteenth century. The first ‘scientific’ edition of the *Devisement* can be considered to be that published by W. Marsden in 1818.

11:00-12:00

**Eugenio Burgio (Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia)**

“The Perception of Chinese Urban Space in the *Devisement dou monde*”

One of the great acquisitions of knowledge of Asia for Marco Polo was the direct experience of an urban society that in its general characteristics was easily comparable to the forms of Italian urban realities but clearly superior to that of the Italian *comuni* in terms of quality of life and material characteristics. The object of the paper is to discuss the modes of description adopted by Marco Polo, a subject placed ‘in between,’ between Italian communal civilization, Mongolian court, and Chinese reality.

12:00-14:00

**Lunch Break**

14:00-15:00

**Christine Gadrat-Ouerfelli**  
**(LA3M, CNRS-Aix Marseille Université)**

“Marco Polo and the Indian World”

This paper focuses on the part of Marco Polo’s book devoted to the Indian Ocean and the countries bordering it. Until Marco Polo’s voyage, European knowledge of these faraway regions depended largely on ancient geographers and encyclopedists, as well as legends linked to the conquests of Alexander the Great. Marco Polo provides a first-hand account and a wealth of new place names, adding considerably to the geographical knowledge of this little-known area. The *Devisement du monde* also provides encyclopedic knowledge of the fauna, flora, beliefs, and customs of the peoples of this vast Indian world. While the chapters on the empire of the Great Khan made a deep impression on Marco Polo’s readers, those devoted to the Indian Ocean and its shores had a lasting impact on the geographical and cartographic representations of these regions in Europe, and are undoubtedly one of the most significant contributions of the *Devisement du monde*.

15:00-15:30

**Coffee Break**

15:30-16:30

**Sharon Kinoshita**  
**(University of California, Santa Cruz)**

“From the Venice Lagoon to the Straits of Taiwan: Marco Polo’s Spaces of Familiarity and Difference”

Born into a family of Venetian merchants, Marco Polo came from a city that, in his boyhood, underwent extensive modifications to its built environment—intended in part to reaffirm civic identity in the wake of its loss of influence in Constantinople following the Byzantine reconquest of (1261). Fast forward to 1279, to another world-historical turning point, when Qubilai Khan completed his conquest of the Southern Song, reuniting a Chinese empire that had been fragmented for centuries. The jewels in the crown of this conquest were the capital Lin’an (modern Hangzhou), known to Marco Polo as Quinsai, and Zaytun (modern Quanzhou). My talk explores the interplay of familiarity and difference in representations of Yuan dynasty China in Marco Polo’s *Devisement du monde* (*Description of the World*), commonly but misleadingly known as “The Travels.” At least one modern tourist site refers to Hangzhou as “the Venice of the East”; in the thirteenth century, such a comparison would have seemed a ludicrous reversal of size, scale, and importance. With the other Italian maritime republics of Amalfi, Pisa, and Genoa, Venice looms large in medieval Mediterranean history largely for the role it played in commerce in ports such as Constantinople, Acre, and above all, Alexandria. Focusing our perspective through the *The Description of the World* (1298) allows us to expand the frame, re-positioning the

Mediterranean in the far west not only of overland routes today celebrated as the Silk Road, but of maritime networks traversing the Indian Ocean, but also running eastward to the eastern shores of the Mongol empire.

16:30-17:30

**Mark Cruse (Arizona State University)**

“From Khanbaliq to Quebec: French Colonialism and Marco Polo’s *Description of the World*”

This presentation discusses the ways in which Marco Polo’s *Description of the World* influenced French exploration and colonization in the early modern period. French lay and clerical elites were among the first readers of the *Description*, manuscript copies of it were produced for multiple generations of the royal family, and it had an early and broad print dissemination in France in both Latin and French. The *Description* was an important part of a centuries-long discussion about France’s place in the world. On the one hand, it showed that other realms sought world dominion and were a threat to French power and prosperity. On the other, the *Description* described a vast world of human and material wealth that the French could conquer and exploit. This paper traces the reception of the *Description* in France from its assimilation to crusade treatises in the 1330s, to its influence on explorers, cartographers, and cosmographers such as Verrazzano, Alfonse, Desceliers, and Le Testu. Much attention has been paid to Columbus’s relationship to the *Description*, and thus to Polo’s influence on Spanish colonialism. My goal is to reorient this discussion and to show how Polo influenced French colonial ambitions and projects.

**November 16, 2024 (Saturday)**

09:00-10:00

**Hubert Alisade (University of Innsbruck)**

“Cauterized Jews and Circumcised Bishops: Marco Polo’s Ethiopia Reconsidered”

The second-hand narrative on Ethiopia in the *Il Milione* has received far less attention in 20th and 21st century Marco Polo research than the accounts on the Middle East and Asia. Furthermore, considerable parts of Marco Polo’s Ethiopia account appear to be historically dubious to false or legendary, such as the missionary activity of the apostle Thomas in Ethiopia and the branding of Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Even more curious is the detailed story of the forced circumcision of an Ethiopian bishop by the Muslim sultan of a neighboring region after the bishop’s journey to Jerusalem, which according to Marco Polo’s informants took place in 1288. This paper offers a complete rereading of Marco Polo’s account on Ethiopia on the basis of a comparative analysis of the *Il Milione* versions F, L, LA, P, V, VA, VB, and Z as well as selected medieval Ethiopian and Arabic source texts. Special

emphasis is put on some peculiarities of version Z and on the letter of the second Ethiopian emperor from the Solomonic dynasty, Yāgbā ('Agbā'a) Şayon (reigned 1285–94), addressed to the Mamluk Sultan Qalāwūn (r. 1279–90) and written in 1290, which is partially preserved in Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir's *Tashrīf al-ayyām*. Also of importance are later Ethiopian sources such as emperor Zar'a Yā'əqob's (r. 1434–68) *Maşḥafa bərḥān*. In addition, further medieval and late medieval Western sources on Ethiopia, especially Benjamin of Tudela's *Massā'ōt* and the geographically significant *Iter de Venetiis ad Indiam* from the time of the Ethiopian emperor Dāwit I (r. 1382–1411), are also analyzed closely with reference to Marco Polo. In sum, this rereading is based on a very broad spectrum of Marco Polo and non-Marco Polo source texts and critically evaluates former research, especially that by Carlo Conti Rossini and Salvatore Tedeschi. This makes it possible to place some aspects of Marco Polo's account on Ethiopia more precisely in their historical or geographical contexts and, at the same time, offers a compact and as complete as possible summary of Western medieval knowledge—or pseudo-knowledge—about Ethiopia.

10:00-11:00

**Antonio Garcia Espada (UNED Madrid)**

“Marco Polo and the Recovery of the Holy Land”

Important features of Marco Polo's book can be related to the Recovery of the Holy Land genre. From 1290 to 1316 dozens of these treatises circulated among the main courts and sovereigns of the Latin West with a wide array of proposals on how to revive the spirit of crusade among the Christian powers to defeat the Sultan of Cairo and regain dominion over the Holy Land. Through a detailed reconstruction of the evolution of the genre this paper intends to show the relevance of two unconventional ideas: the need to cut Egypt access to an extensive market economy – due to its geographical position and its alliance with the Golden Horde – and the need to replace the Egyptian Sultan with the Persian Ilkhan as “Lord of the Two Seas”. These ideas surpassed the traditional papal ban on the sale of iron, slaves and war materials to the Sultan. The feasibility of the whole business relied on a new comprehension of space, in understanding the various possibilities of connecting the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean extra terram Soldani, and the plausible role of the Mongols in all this. A comprehensive reading of these treatises shows a big leap in geographical imagination. The efforts of the authors, explorers and mapmakers that compose the Recovery genre provide a valuable frame of reference for the creation and first circulation of Marco Polo's book as well as a precise measure of the relevance and correlation of his work to a particular place and time.

11:00-11:30

**Coffee Break**



11:30-12:30

**Raissa de Gruttola (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)**

“Images of Chinese Cities in European Travel Accounts: The Texts by Marco Polo and the Franciscan Missionaries”

Among the many innovative aspects delivered to European audiences through the text by Marco Polo, one of the most interesting is the description of China and its cities. The Venetian traveler was impressed by the high level of urbanization of the cities in Cathay and Mangi, two areas including present day China. Marco Polo felt the change in the landscape observing and describing the contrast between the deserts crossed through central Asia and the urbanized cities in China. The reaction of Polo was something that also some other observers experienced. They were the Franciscan Friars Giovanni da Montecorvino and his suffragan bishops, Odorico da Pordenone and Giovanni de' Marignolli. The Friars reached the capital of the Mongol empire and moved towards South visiting also cities other than Khanbaliq and including, among others, Hangzhou and Quanzhou. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the images of Chinese cities outlined in the travel accounts of Marco Polo and the Franciscan Friars, exploring the impressions of European travelers transmitted to a European audience. These descriptions will be supplemented by the references to the considered cities included in relevant Chinese sources of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. A review of the current literature in Chinese language on the topic will broaden the perspective of analysis and open new research perspectives.

12:30-12:45

**Closing Remarks**