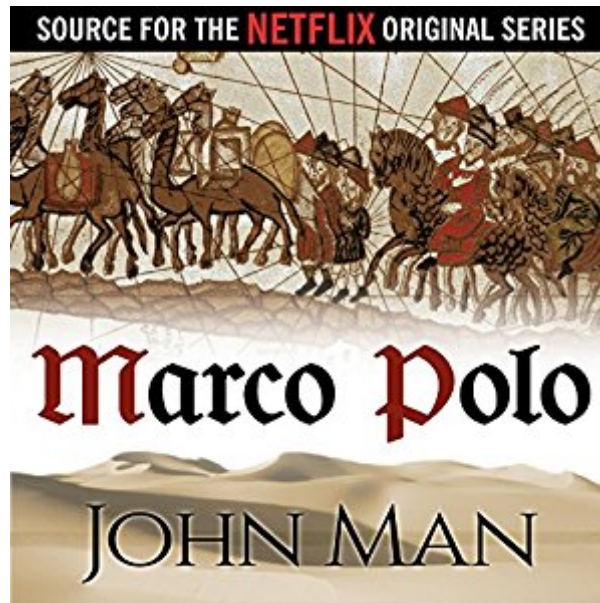




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Marco Polo: The Journey That Changed The World



Synopsis

In 1271 a young Italian merchant named Marco Polo embarked on a groundbreaking expedition from Venice, through the Middle East and Central Asia to China. His extraordinary reports of his experiences introduced medieval Europe to an exotic new world of emperors and concubines, amazing cities, huge armies, unusual spices and cuisine, and imperial riches. Marco Polo also revealed the wonders of Xanadu, the summer capital of Mongol emperor Kublai Khan. Almost 750 years later, acclaimed author John Man traveled in Marco Polo's footsteps to Xanadu and then on to Beijing and through modern China in search of the history behind the legend. In this enthralling chronicle, Man draws on his own journey, new archaeological findings, and deep archival study to paint a vivid picture of Marco Polo and the great court of Kublai Khan.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This was an excellent review of what's currently known about Marco Polo and his journey. The author has a direct writing style with sense of humor that I appreciated. Some nonfiction can be very dry and hard to follow, but not so with this book; I found myself devouring this book, as curious to know what would happen next as if I was reading fiction! The author clearly describes Marco Polo's journey and some of the conflicts in the research with his analysis - all in perfectly understandable language. I didn't know much at all about Marco Polo before I read this (only the game and that he went to China!) but I feel I have a pretty comprehensive knowledge about his journey now. I would highly recommend this book to anybody who has the least curiosity about history. I am not a history buff, by any means, but I found this book extremely interesting and informative.

Amazing discussion of Marco Polo, his life, his book, and how his book opened up the mind of Europe to China, the Far East, and to the adventure into the New World of North and South America. The Marco Polo book itself is essentially unreadable except by academics, and it is easy for a modern, nonscholastic reader to dismiss it as an erroneous account of events that occurred long ago--which is literally an accurate assessment--but John Man manages to explain the intricacies of the book and put the book, and the civilization, people and places it describes into context. I feel culturally enriched by the experience of reading this book.

After watching Netflix's new series "Marco Polo" I was inspired to learn more about this incredible story and man. The book doesn't disappoint. I found it completely engrossing, especially the way the author inserts his own personal travels to Asia into the narrative. It's sort of a historical travelogue, recounting Polo's travels. According to the book cover, this book was the main source for the TV show, and it shows. If you like the show, you'll love the book.

At least five recent & well-regarded translations of that traveller's tale by Messer Marco Polo & ghost writer Rusticello are now available, making accessible what the imprisoned older man remembered of his youthful adventures in the lands of Kublai Khan. Even before these tales were written down, however, their veracity was questioned, their honesty derided, and the sanity of the narrator suspected. On one point only was agreement strong: the rubies, diamonds, pearls, sapphires and emeralds sewn in the shabby cloaks Marco, his father Niccolo, and his uncle wore on their return to Venice in 1296. So, asked John Man, what does current scholarship say about these questions? "Marco Polo: The Journey that Changed the World" gives Man's answers in 15 chapters. The chapters are organized somewhat linearly in that they include Kublai's empire from Polo's arrival to the Khan's death and organized somewhat opportunistically in chapters such as Xanadu and Marco's relationships with women. The overall conclusions are that some of Polo's narrative is consistent with what evidence is available, such as the likelihood Marco actually did spend many years in Kublai's China, the existence of a huge roc-like bird, and that Xanadu probably was shaped like a stately pleasure dome, along the lines of the Mongolian ger. Some is also certainly not true and a lot is indeterminable. What to me makes this book worthy reading is the sorting out of the details and specifics like the number of bridges in Kublai's capitol city and claims Marco made of Kublai's innovations in legal, social, and governmental areas, including that wonder, printed money. Man's modus operandi makes this a traveller's tale about a traveller's tale. He set out to

follow Polo's path, the roads taken, Afghanistan passes threaded, cities and citadels visited, what could still be seen of what Marco said he saw.. These travels, with digressions of Man's wanderings, make up about 40% of the evidence. The rest is extrapolation of what is possible such as the extended discussion of how to construct Xanadu the pleasure dome, pole by pole (about 30%) and what today's best scholars conclude. I particularly liked how Man handled negative evidence: instances of when Polo did NOT write about a major historical event such as Japan's defeat of Kublai's invasion and apparent lack of Polo's name in historical records such as the governorship of Yangzhou. Some scholars argue the silence indicates Polo wasn't there, but Man refutes this energetically. How believable is Man himself? Some readers may find this approach to historical analysis vivid, convincing, and appropriate. Others may wish Man found himself less fascinating & Polo more fascinating. In a few places, such as how literally Ghengis and Kublai Khan took a number such as 10,000, Man plumps for a "large number" interpretation where other recent analysis of the military organization numbers suggests 10,000 meant 10,000, an issue relevant to the size of the armies, herds of white horses, and cities. Not a deal-breaker but a reminder that while Man has worked heroically at achieving the most believable answers, 700 years bring mists of time not easily dispelled even by many miles, many months, and many millions of words. This is a full book whose almost 400 pages include references, a useful index (thank you, thank you, author & publisher), about 20 good color pictures, and a map of the roads between Xanadu and Beijing. More maps would have been welcomed, however. The title? The world is so interconnected that many events (the spice trade, Columbus reaching the Americas, the discovery of De Natura Rerum, and so on and on and on) have been claimed by various authors as the progenitor of today. No need to hold Man's last chapter to an excruciating standard of causality; maybe think of Polo's travels as "among the influences" on our world. "Marco Polo" is a fine read by an experienced writer and traveller..

Interesting but not much information on Marco. Appreciate the historical record on him is sparse but it would have helped the story to describe the contemporary cultural biases and commercial motivations underpinning the trading strategies of the many diverse parties involved. With details, where known, of any particular contemporary transactions that had particular significance to history. Not much background on the Mid East and Asian nations perspective.

I really tried. I just couldn't keep reading. This book took an interesting subject and made it unbearable.

Very enjoyable. It is a pleasure to read a history of Marco Polo's Journey in the language of today instead of ancient times. John Man has made it so enjoyable and corresponds with other histories of the Silk Road with Peter Hopkirk's two books Foreign Devils on the Silk Road and Trespassers on the Roof of the World as well as describing China in that time. Glenis

It was interesting, but the story line seemed very disjointed. At times I wasn't sure who was being talked about or where they were. What a pity Marco Polo didn't record the details of his journey. Overall I liked the book but it was a struggle at times.

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