

Marco Polo in the Spotlight: Perception and Reception

International Consortium for Research in the Humanities (ICRH):

“Fate, Freedom and Prognostication – Strategies for Coping
with the Future in East Asia and Europe”

Hartmannstr. 14, Building D1, Erlangen

18 February 2020

10:00-10:15 Welcome Address and Introduction

Hans Ulrich Vogel

10:15-11:00 A Cuppa Milk or Two - Marco Polo on Food and Feasting at the
Court of Kublai Khan

Phillip Grimberg (*Sinologie, Institut für Sprachen und Kulturen des
Nahen Ostens und Ostasiens, FAU, and IKGf Visiting Fellow*)

11:00-11:45 Marco Polo's Crouching Dragons and Hidden Tigers

Hans Ulrich Vogel (*Abteilung für Sinologie, Asien-Orient-Institut,
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, and IKGf Visiting Fellow*)

11:45-12:15 Discussion

12:15-13:15 Lunch break

13:15-14:00 Marco Polo on the Behaim Globe (1492) - A Critical Stocktaking

Günther Görz (*Department Informatik, Technische Fakultät, FAU,
and IKGf Faculty Affiliate*)

14:00-14:45 Translating Marco Polo's Travel Narrative in the German Middle
Ages: Prognostication, Astrology and Marvellous Tales in the DI
Version

Elisa Cugliana (*Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Culturali
Comparati, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, and Cologne Center for
eHumanities, Universität zu Köln*)

14:45-15:15 Discussion

ABSTRACTS

Phillip Grimberg

A Cuppa Milk or Two - Marco Polo on Food and Feasting at the Court of Kublai Khan

Although the authenticity of his accounts has been under scrutiny and subject to heated debates among scholars, Marco Polo's (1254-1324) travelogue nevertheless offers a fascinating and rich insight into some of the otherwise obscured details of imperial court life during the reign of Kublai Khan (1271-1294) in China. With regard to food and feasting, Marco Polo records in chapter 10 of his account how court rituals involve ritual drinking of mares and camels' milk and devouring mutton dishes as a reverence to the nomadic and pastoral origins of the Mongol tribes. Furthermore, he records what containers and vessels were used for this purpose, how people were seated according to their rank, how the emperor was served his food and how these ritual feastings turned into leisurely gatherings after the ceremonial part was concluded. In this paper, I shall try and show what role ceremonial feasts and the foodstuffs involved played in demonstrating and/or maintaining a Mongolian identity in a Chinese cultural setting and how and to what extent food can function as a cultural and social signifier in this context.



Hans Ulrich Vogel

Marco Polo's Crouching Dragons and Hidden Tigers

Marco Polo was saying few about dragons, but much more about tigers. Hence, this lecture will mainly deal with *panthera tigris*, with a focus on China. By taking into account Western and East Asian primary sources and secondary literature it can be shown that no contradictions at all exist between the indications in *Le divisament dou monde* and the data obtained from Chinese sources and research literature about tigers in China. In addition, I will analyse and evaluate the Venetian's tiger discourse in the light of what was known and thought about these huge felines both in Europe and, much more so, in China. Marco Polo appears to be the first European that reported on

the tigers of East Asia and especially of China which – though hard for many people nowadays to be imagined – is considered to be the cradle and original habitat of the *panthera tigris* specie.



Günther Görz

Marco Polo on the Behaim Globe (1492) - A Critical Stocktaking

Marco Polo's book plays an important role as a source for the Behaim globe. Not only is he the most cited author in many of the long inscriptions in the Asian part of the globe, but also most of the toponyms in Asia can be traced back to him, and, last but not least, we can observe influences on the map image. After a short overview of the globe, its map image and the inscriptions some characteristic examples are presented. The current state of research is still significantly influenced by the monograph of Ravenstein (1908) as well as by works that were created in the context of the Behaim exhibition at the Germanic National Museum in 1992/93 (especially Jandeseck). On this basis, we will provide a short inventory of the inscriptions in number and content that refer to Marco Polo and present some criteria for the selection and processing of the source(s). The globe shows numerous overwritings from several centuries, and due to its poor state of preservation, many inscriptions are no longer legible. We, therefore, propose a research agenda in which a new reading of all the inscriptions is to be carried out based on a multispectral photographic survey of the globe's surface, taking comparatively into account the influence of Marco Polo on other maps, such as the Catalan Atlas and the world maps of Fra Mauro, Henricus Martellus and Waldseemüller.



Elisa Cugliana

**Translating Marco Polo's Travel Narrative in the German Middle Ages:
Prognostication, Astrology and Marvellous Tales in the DI Version**

My presentation examines the medieval German translation DI of Marco Polo's *Devisement dou Monde* and its Digital Scholarly Edition, a project which I am carrying out as a joint PhD thesis between the Universities of Venice and Cologne. Unfortunately, this version of Marco Polo's travel narrative has not received much scholarly attention. Starting from my stemmatic hypothesis, I will therefore show the peculiarities of this textual tradition, consisting of five witnesses, and I will present a prototype of my edition, showing the interplay between content and methodology. Specifically, my talk will touch upon topics like realia studies, variance, mapping and normalisation, while keeping the focus on DI. However, to make this contribution more intriguing, the parts of the text selected for the applicative examples will be the ones dealing with Marco Polo's marvellous stories of astrologers, diviners and other fascinating characters, in their Early New High German translation.

