

**TARIX. MANBASHUNOSLIK  
HISTORY. SOURCE STUDIES**

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## **About Marco Polo Samarkand**

### **Abstract**

Marco Polo's world-wide famous travelogue known with different names such as *Devisement dou Monde* "The description of the World", *Livres des Merveilles du Monde*, "Book of the Marvels of the World", and *Il Milione* "The Million" in Italian, is a goldmine of information regarding the mysteries and marvels of the countries and peoples along the Silk Road, especially concerning the Ta(r)tars, i.e. the Mongols, as they were called at that time in Europe. Already during the XIII and XIV centuries, Marco Polo's travelogue had experienced a huge success. It was copied several times and translated in various languages, spreading all over Europe and becoming a real best-seller. The original manuscript is, however, lost. As is well known, the language in which the lost original manuscript was written – i.e. Franco-Italian, a mixed language (*Mischsprache*) consisting of a French-based language mixed with Italianisms – is recorded only in the manuscript fr. 1116 preserved in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (F). For the overall classification of Marco Polian codices, see *Gadrat-Ouerfelli* (2015, 382-385) and *Simion* (2019, 54-55).

**Key words:** Great Silk Road, travel, travelogue, marvels, manuscript.

## **Marko Polo Samarqand haqida**

### **Abstrakt**

Marko Poloning butun dunyo bo'ylab mashhur sayohatnomasi, masalan *Devisement dou Monde* "Dunyo ta'rifi", *Livres des Merveilles du Monde*, "Dunyo mo'jizalari kitobi" va italyan tilidagi "Million" Ipak yo'li boylab joylashgan mamlakatlar va xalqlarning tarixi va mo'jizalari, xususan, ta(r)tarlar, ya'ni mo'g'ullar haqida, ular Yevropada o'sha davrda shunday

atalgan. XIII va XIV asrlarda allaqachon Marko Poloning sayohatnomasi katta muvaffaqiyatga erishgan edi. U bir necha marta ko'chirilgan va turli tillarga tarjima qilingan, butun Yevropaga tarqalib, eng yaxshi xaridorgir kitobga aylangan edi. Biroq asl qo'lyozma yo'qolgan. Ma'lumki, yo'qolgan asl qo'lyozma shunday tilda yozilgan, ya'ni fransuzcha-italyancha, italyan bilan aralashtirilgan fransuz tildan tashkil topgan aralash til (Mischsprache)-da yozilgan nusxasi 1116-yil Fransiya bibliotekasida saqlanib qolgan. Marko Polo kodekslarining umumiy tasnifi uchun Gadrat-Ouerfelli [2015, 382-385] va Simion [2019, 54-55]ning tadqiqotlariga qarang.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Buyuk Ipak yo'li, sayohat, sayohatnoma, mo'jizalar, qo'lyozma.

### **Giovanni Battista Ramusio's XVI century's Marco Polo version**

Around 1520, the Venetian humanist Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1485-1557), a member of the ruling class of Venice, started to collect geographic narratives for his forthcoming comprehensive anthology on travel accounts entitled *Navigazioni et Viaggi* 'Navigations and Travels' (see Milanese 1978-1988). For this enterprise, he managed to gather approximately 50 explorers' first-hand travel accounts. In this anthology, Marco Polo's travelogue holds a prominent position. Ramusio collated several versions of Marco Polo's travel account, available to him in Venice at his time, and produced what can be called the very first critical edition of Marco Polo's travelogue. The following codices were at his disposal for this task: a Latin text (Z), an incorrect Venetian translation (V), a Latin summary (L), a Venetian rehash (VB), and the Latin version (P), the most widespread Polian version among the intellectual circles.

### **Digital Ramusio**

The digital critical edition of Giovanni Battista Ramusio's (1485-1557) work *Viaggi di messer Marco Polo* 'Travels of Sir Marco Polo' was prepared by a group of romance philologists and orientalist<sup>1</sup> and is available online on Ca' Foscari University's Digital Publishing House since February 2015.

In "Digital Ramusio" readers can access the results of

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<sup>1</sup>The scholars who took part in this project are (alphabetically): Alvise Andreose, Alvaro Barbieri, Giampiero Bellingeri, Eugenio Burgio, Marina Buzzoni, Angelo Cattaneo, Marco Ceresa, Giacomo Corazzol, Simone Cristoforetti, Daniele Cuneo, Paolo De Troia, Mario Eusebi, Antonella Ghersetti, Giuseppe Mascherpa, Laura Minervini, Martina Modena, Maria Piccoli, Elisabetta Ragagnin, Irene Reginato, Anna Rinaldin, Fabio Romanini, Vito Santoliquido, Samuela Simion, and Federico Squarcini. The project was coordinated by Prof. Dr. Eugenio Burgio, Prof. Dr. Marina Buzzoni and Prof. Dr. Antonella Ghersetti.

Ramusio's collation from different angles. Thus, it is possible to check, section after section, Ramusio's text with its main source. Comment pages, chapters and texts are fluctuant and superimposable. Besides, an introduction provides information on the main features of the Polian tradition, Ramusio's language and stylistic choices, as well as the use of the Marco Polian materials for XV c. cartography. Regarding source editions, it should be mentioned that V, L and VB were edited for the first time in "Digital Ramusio" and that P represents a new edition based on the manuscript Ricc. 983 held in the Riccardian library of Florence.

Furthermore, Digital Ramusio offers a comprehensive lexicological section dealing with the Oriental names occurring in the Polian tradition. This section, including not only toponyms and personal names, but also lexemes referring to material and spiritual culture, institutional and administrative offices, etc., aims at updating and integrating existing materials, such as Pelliot (1959-1973) and Cardona (1975). Each entry consists of a) a list of the word's occurrences in R, b) corresponding forms occurring in other versions, c) main bibliographical references, d) philological, linguistic and historical comments, and e) a link to Google maps for identified toponyms. Thus, Digital Ramusio is a unique and extremely user-friendly tool for the scholarly community as well as for interested readers. Moreover, "Digital Ramusio" is part of a broader project that will include both the whole edition of Marco Polo's Travelogue and the English translation of the critical text and related comments<sup>1</sup>.

### **Marco Polo's information on Samarkand**

Samarkand has always been a crucially important centre on the Silk Road, a.o. due to its blessed geographical position and the fertility of the surrounding areas. Samarkand, capital of Sogdiana in Achaemenid times – known as Marákanda in Arrian's work (*Anabasis*) on the expeditions of Alexander the Great – was conquered by the Mongols in 1220; see § 257-263 of the Mongol Chronicle *The Secret History of the Mongols* (de Rachewiltz 2006, 189-195). In this Middle Mongolian emic source, Samarkand is referred to as Semisgen (← Turkic *semiz kent*, fat i.e. rich city'). The same denomination is also employed by the Castilian emissary Ruy Gonzáles de Clavijo, who arrived in Samarkand in 1404<sup>2</sup>. Babur also

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<sup>1</sup>We would also like to mention that Ramusio's Marco Polo version was recently translated and edited with comprehensive comments in Mongolian; see Bat-Uchral, Ragagnin and Simion (2019).

<sup>2</sup>"The richness and abundance of this great capital and its district is such as is indeed a

mentions that Moghuls and Turks call it “Semizkand” (Fat City) (The Baburname, ed. Thackstone 2002, 55). Samarkand, referred to as “Samarcan” (Samarcan) in Ramusio’s Marco Polian version<sup>1</sup>, is the subject of Book One, chapter 30, entitled Della città di Samarcan, et del miracolo della colonna nella chiesa di San Giovambattista, Of the city of Samarcan, and of the miraculous column in the church of St. John the Baptist’. We report below the original passage in XVI c. Italian, followed by Marsden’s English translation.

*Samarcan è una città nobile, dove sono bellissimi giardini et una pianura piena di tutti i frutti che l’uomo può desiderare. Gli habitanti parte sono christiani, parte Saraceni, et sono sottoposti al dominio d’un nepote del Gran Can, del qual non è però amico, anzi è di continuo fra loro inimicitia et guerra. Et è posta la detta città verso il vento maestro. Et in questa città gli fu detto esser accaduto un miracolo, in questo modo: che già anni cento et venticinque uno nominato Zagathai, fratello germano del Gran Can, si fece christiano, con grande allegrezza dei christiani habitanti, quali col favore del signore fecero fabricar una chiesa in nome di San Giovambattista: et fu fatta con tal artificio che tutto il tetto di quella (che era ritonda) si fermava sopra una colonna che era in mezzo, et di sotto di quella vi metterono una pietra quadra, la qual tolsero con il favor del signor di uno edificio de’ Saraceni, li quali non hebbero ardimento di contradirgli per paura. Ma, venuto a morte Zagathai, gli successe un suo figliuolo qual non volse essere christiano, et allhora i Saraceni impetrorno da lui che li christiani li restituissero la sua pietra; la qual anchor che i christiani si offerissero di pagarla, non volsero, percioché pensavano che, levandola via, la chiesa dovessi rovinare: per la qual cosa li christiani dolenti ricorsero a ricomandarsi al glorioso San Giovanni, con grande lachrime et humiltà. Et venuto il giorno nel qual doveano restituire la detta pietra, per intercession del santo, la colonna si levò alta dalla base della detta pietra per palmi tre in aere, che facilmente si poteva levar via la pietra de’ Saraceni senza che li fosse posto sostentamento alcuno, et così fino al presente si vede detta colonna senza alcuna cosa sotto. Si è detto a bastanza di questo, dirassi della provincia de Carchan.*

‘Samarcan is a noble city, adorned with beautiful gardens,

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wonder to behold: and it is for this reason that it bears the name of Samarkand: for this name would be more exactly written Semiz-kent, two words which signify „Rich-Town“, for semiz is fat or rich and Kent means city or township: in time these two words having been corrupted into the name Samarqand (Clavijo, Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403-1406, translation by Guy Le Strange 1928, 287).

<sup>1</sup> Paleographic variants of the toponym Samarkand in other Marco Polian versions are, respectively: Sanmarcan, Sanmarcarm, Sarmarcan F; Sanmarcan L; Samarcan P; Sanmarchan, Sarman V; Sanmarc(h)an VA; Sa(n)marchan VB; Samarcan Z.

and surrounded by a plain in which are produced all the fruits that man can desire. The inhabitants, who are partly Christians and partly Mahometans, are subject to the dominion of a nephew of the Grand khan, with whom, however, he is not upon amicable terms, but on the contrary there is perpetual strife and frequent wars between them<sup>1</sup>. This city lies in the direction of north-west. A miracle is said to have taken place there, under the following circumstances. A hundred and twenty-five years ago, a prince named Zagatai, who was own brother to the (then reigning) Grand khan, became a convert to Christianity; greatly to the delight of the Christian inhabitants of the place, who under the favour and protection of the prince, proceeded to build a church, and dedicated it to St. John the Baptist. It was so constructed that all the weight of the roof (being circular) should rest upon a column in the centre, and beneath this, as a base, they fixed a square stone which, with the permission of the prince, they had taken from a temple belonging to the Mahometans, who dared not to prevent them from so doing. But upon the death of Zagatai<sup>2</sup>, his son<sup>3</sup> who succeeded him showing no disposition to become a Christian, the Musulmans had influence enough to obtain from him an order that their opponents should restore to them the stone they had appropriated; and although the latter offered to pay them a compensation in money, they refused to listen to the proposal, because they hoped that its removal would occasion the church to tumble down. In this difficulty the afflicted Christians had no other resource than with tears and humility to recommend themselves to the protection of the glorious St. John the Baptist. When the day arrived on which they were to make restitution of the stone, it came to pass through that the intercession of the Saint, the pillar raised itself from its base to the height of three palms, in order to facilitate the removal of the stone; and in that situation, without any kind of support, it remains to the present day. Enough being said of this, we shall now proceed to the province of Karkan [Marsden 1818, 147-148].

The miracle described in this section as well as the alleged conversion to Christianity of the Mongol Khan are most probably of Nestorian origin. It should also be remembered in this concern that Samarkand had been one of the Metropolitan Sees of the Nestorian

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<sup>1</sup>The enemy of Qubilay Khan referred to is Kaidu (1230-1303), grandson of Ögödei Qa'an, and not Qubilay's nephew.

<sup>2</sup>"Sigatay" refers to Chagathay, second son of Chinggis Khan and Khan of the Chagatai Khannate in 1226-1242. At the time of Marco Polo, Samarkand was part of the Chagataid Ulus.

<sup>3</sup> The person referred to in this line is not Chagathay's son but his nephew Qara Hülegü.

Church since the VIII century [Yule, Cordier 1929, 186]<sup>1</sup>. Mention of a similarly magically hanging pillar with reference to a Christian community is also found in a Chinese XIV c. source, documented by Archimandrite Palladius. Here, it is stated that Sie-mi-sze-hien (Semiz Kent) is a country where the religion of the Christians dominates and that there is a miraculous temple where one pillar is in a hanging position [Bretschneider 1876, 238-239]. Interestingly enough, the miracle about a column hovering in mid-air is also mentioned in the legend of John the Baptist in the Scottish Legendary (late fourteenth century); see Contzen (2013, 198). Finally, this column could also be related to the special Stone called K ok-Tař ‘Green Stone’ on which Timur’s throne was set [Yule, Cordier 1929, 187].

### **Abbreviations**

F: XIV c. Franco-Italian version, handed down by the manuscript fr. 1116 of the Biblioth que nationale de France (Eusebi (ed.) 2010) and by a fragment, signed f, in a private collection (Concina 2007; M nard (ed.) 2012; Eusebi & Burgio (ed.) 2018);

L: XIII c. Latin summary handed down by 6 manuscripts (Burgio (forthcoming))

LT: XIV c. Latin version resulting from the contamination of TA and P, handed down only by the manuscript lat. 3195 held in the Biblioth que nationale de France in Paris (Santoliquido 2018-19);

P: Francesco Pipino OP’ early XIV c. Latin translation of VA; it is handed down by around 60 versions (Pr řek (ed.) 1902; Simion 2015);

TA: early XIII c. Tuscanian version, handed down by 5 manuscripts (Bertolucci Pizzorusso (ed.) 1975);

V: late XIV c. Venetian version handed down only by the manuscript Hamilton 424 held in the Staatsbibliothek Berlin (Simion 2019);

VA: Medieval northern vernacular Italian version, handed down by five manuscripts (Barbieri & Andreose (ed.) 1999);

VB: XV c. Venetian humanistic rehash handed down by two codices and one fragment (Gennari 2009–2010);

Z: Latin version handed down by the Zelada ms. 49. 20 (second half of XV c.) preserved in the Archivo y Biblioteca Capitulares of Toledo (Barbieri (ed.) 1998).

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<sup>1</sup>In this concern, it should also be mentioned that after the Mongol Khan Eljigidey (1327) converted to Christianity, Samarkand became the seat of a Catholic diocese; cf. Richard (1977, 187).

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