THE MYSTERIES OF THE
”MARCO POLO MAPS”

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If you are interested in learning more about the maps of Marco Polo, check out *They Mysteries of the Marco Polo Maps*. Available for purchase online [here](#).
Think of the author's child going hungry due to low book sales...
Some Background...

1989, graduate student at the University of Toronto...

...2015, a greatly aged "scholar"

The labors of the history of cartography can age a researcher markedly...
A Project about Some "Marco Polo Maps"?

**Introduction**
- How I became interested in this subject...

**What are the "Marco Polo Maps"?**
- Private collection of fourteen unique and largely unknown documents relating to Marco Polo and his travels to Asia
- Documents are part of the "Rossi Collection", after one of their owners, Filomeno Emanuele Marciano Rossi
A brief description of the collection...

1. Apparently passed down to the present owners by way of a branch of the famous Sanseverino clan in Italy

2. Mixture of maps, geographical and descriptive texts, and letters

3. Apparent dates of the material range from the 13th to the 18th century…

4. Includes maps allegedly drawn by members of the family of Marco Polo and others…
A brief description of the collection (continued)...

5. Maps contain a number of very significant historical characteristics, e.g., echoes of the ancient maps of Ptolemy, depictions of parts of the northern Pacific Ocean; inscriptions in Chinese and Arabic, and so on

6. Only published scholarly article on collection is short piece done by historian of cartography Leo Bagrow in the 1940's...

7. In the early 1930's, a few brief notices concerning collection appear in U.S. newspapers...

8. The Library of Congress, which held part of collection for a time (and still possesses one map), put together a somewhat longer study, almost half a century ago — never published, and incomplete...
These documents are privately owned, which means careful communication with the owner...

The material is sensitive, in the sense that it could change an accepted historical narrative and because there is the potential for revealing forgery or fabrication in this case...

As in business, there were a number of "stakeholders" involved in this project: the owner; the Library of Congress; National Geographic; the University of Chicago Press; two documentary film companies...

The material requires knowledge in a wide variety of fields — Latin, Italian, and even Chinese languages; ancient and medieval maps; early exploration; the Marco Polo narrative and the manuscript tradition; European, Central Asian, and East Asian history; early Chinese legends; genealogy; paleography; vellum and inks; carbon dating; history of forgeries (e.g., the Vinland Map)...

The Challenges for an Historian of Science...
A Look at the Documents…

Example: "Moreta Polo Map 1"
Already, one can see the challenges... Text in Chinese and Italian, a strange map, and the apparent signature of Moreta Polo — the daughter of Marco Polo! There is also a strange text at the bottom of the map...
Journey made by Maffeo, Nicholau [sic], and Marco Polo from Venice to Acre in Persia, and from Acre finally to Campalu in Tartary, voyaging through valleys and mountains, and finally, to the completely walled city. Each city is built with a temple inside, within which sits a divine Buddha with crossed legs. When Messer Marco spoke [i.e., learned to speak] the Tartar language, the king, in gratitude, took him under his care. Then he [i.e., Marco Polo] drew a summu nauticu and navigated the sea up to the eastern extremity, and finally a long peninsula completely surrounded by sea wolves [luvi marini] and connected to a huge land, completely unknown that is situated beside the land that by the Moor is called Serica. There [i.e., in that huge land], every woman is [an] archer and each man [is an] archer of the king... There, because of the cold, they live in round chambers. The king of [this] locale invited Messer Marco into his chamber in a courteous manner. Messer Marco brought a mask of gold to the king in Tartary, where the king placed him to govern one of his provinces. It is sufficient to note that according to the Syrian sailor in the service of Master Marco Polo, it is said in truth that the aforementioned peninsula is situated $DCCCC \ [=900?]$ degrees [or] eight hours difference from the islands off Mauritania in the Atlantic Ocean. And [this peninsula is] more than two hours from Tartary, from where at one time this people emigrated. The writing on the stones says that this people emigrated from Tartary... The aforementioned [?] people, in the Mongolian language, named this land Foxaa, [or] more exactly, Focaa.
A map of northeastern Asia with toponyms in Arabic lettering; the map has a short text in Italian below it, apparently written by Bellela Polo, and mentioning a certain Biaxio Sirdomap.

The map has toponyms referred to by the Roman numerals I-V.

In the text, Bellela notes that:

"[M]y father Marco Polo wishes me, Bellela, to show this world map which he obtained from the pilot Biaxio Sirdomap who, for at least thirty years, had sailed the coasts of Asia from Syria to the Far East, trading in seal skins..."
Details of toponyms referred to by the Roman numerals I-V:

I / penisola de li zervi // [i.e., “Peninsula of the Stags”]
II / penisola phoca marina // [i.e., “Peninsula of the Marine Seals”]
III / Valle conzonta e giazata // [i.e., “Connected and frozen valley”]
IV / Isola de le femene // [i.e., “Island of Women”]
V / Eolfo [i.e., Golfo] Mangi // [i.e., “Gulf of the Mangi”]

Arabic toponym, from west to east across the map, as follows:

[1] “the land of China”
[2] “Ghadhil” [?]
[5] “Jalid” [i.e., “frost”]
Example: "Map with Ship"

A map of northeastern regions of Asia…
The Chinese characters here seem to have no particular meaning; one can just read: 丁, 的, 百, 出, 七, 四, 由, and 家.

There is Arabic script again, although the meanings are not entirely clear.

There are also numbered toponyms, with a key in Italian:

I. India e pertinente isole secondo come dixono li saracini. II. Cattigara de tartaria isole de Zipango e isole pertinente. III. Peninsola de li lioni marini. [IV] Isole consonte a la peninsola de li servi situata a IV hore de varietade de le provincie amurade de tartaria.

I. India and adjacent islands, according what the Saracens say. II. Cattigara of Tartary, islands of Japan, and adjacent islands. III. Peninsula of the Sea Lions. IV. Islands connected to the Peninsula of the Stags, situated at four hours difference from the walled provinces of Tartary.
A Look at the Documents…

Example: "Fantina Polo Map 1"
A Look at the Documents…

Example: "Fantina Polo Map 1"

Ptolemaic grid and Ptolemaic representation of British Isles.

...but with a representation of the coasts of East Asia and lands beyond.
Conclusions: Late Copies, Creations, Fabrications, or Forgeries?

Observations...

1. This is *not* a repeat of the "Vinland Map" controversy (see next slide):
   - many more documents
   - complex connection between them
   - no apparent suspects
   - no apparent monetary or political motives...

2. Perhaps copies from the seventeenth/eighteenth century of genuinely much earlier materials...

3. Perhaps creations from the seventeenth/eighteenth century
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Conclusions: The "Vinland Map"
APPENDIX: More Documents
A Look at the Documents...

And now some of the more complicated documents...
A Venetian Italian transliteration of Chinese toponyms from the ancient Chinese legend of Fusang...
The place names referred to by Roman numerals run as follows:

I. Tartaria o Serica [i.e., "Tartary or Serica"] /  
II. Zipangu [i.e., the early Italian name for Japan] /  
III. Uan Scian [i.e., Wén Shēn (文身)] /  
IV. To Qiú [meaning unknown] /  
V. Ta Can [i.e., Dà Hàn (大漢)] /  
VI. Focan [i.e., Fú Sāng (扶桑)] //  
VII. Maro Oriente [i.e., "Eastern Sea"]
Example: "Fantina Polo Map 2" — details

These toponyms match exactly the place names in the Chinese story of Fusang as it appears in the *Book of Liang* (梁書 *Liáng Shū*), dating from the seventh century A.D.:

- **Uan Scian** = **WénShēn** (文身) [literally, "tattooed bodies", perhaps a reference to the Ainu people; this land of the "tattooed people" was said to be some "7,000 里 (li)" to the northeast of Japan]

- **Ta Can** = **DàHàn** (大漢) [i.e., 大漢國 *DàHàn Guó*, literally, "Great Han Country", a land said to be to the east of Wen Shen]

- **Focan** = **Fú Sāng** (扶桑) [a mythical land to distant east of China and/or a mythical mulberry tree (桑) growing there]

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*But this story of Fusang was only known in the West in 1761, and was published in French (by the sinologist Joseph de Guignes)... with the placenames romanized into French... certainly not Venetian Italian.*

*These documents here seem to imply an Italian transcriber of a Chinese speaker.*
A Look at the Documents...

Example: "Pantect Map"
An example of the complexity of this project for the historian of science...

The "Pantect Map":
- Toponyms from Ptolemy and Pliny
- Apparent representation of the Bering Strait...
- Odd placename of *transerica pons*
- Latin translation of "Golden Tablet" text...
Marcus Poli de Venetia *patronus* ratio*um* summarum
ad<|l>|ecto inter praet|orio|s> judicio Kublai K|h>|an legat|us| est
provincia<|e|> Janju <|cui|> Ta<r>|tari ob<|o|>ediunt,
<et ad> alia<ae> ab initio per ami<|c|>itiam Tartaris adjuncta<e|>.
Multas existimatis insulas in longissimo Oriente
non invisa<s> solum sed etiam inaudita<s>. Primus
Tartariae in locum <i>intravit anno priore. Tu
meruisti. Tua voluntate parent peregrina
commercia cum *conscendis gemmatum tribunal,*
sed tot testes pateris quot te agmina
circum<i>re cognosce.

Ego Kub<l>|ai <Kh>an <sum>, super me de<us> est.
[Latin text on the "Pantect Map"]

Marcus Poli de Venetia patron<us> ratio<n>um summarum ad<l>ecto inter praet<orios> judicio Kublai K<h>an legat<us est> provincia<e> Janju <cui> Ta<r>ari ob<o>ediunt, <et ad> alia<ae> ab initio per ami<c>ti Tartari adjuncta<e>. Multas estimatis insulas in longissimo Oriente non invisa<s> solum sed etiam inaudita<s>. Primus Tartariae in locum <i>ntravit anno priore. Tu meruiisti. Tua voluntate parent peregrina commercia cum conscientis gemmatum tribunal, sed tot testes pateris quot te agmina circum<i>re cognosce.

Ego Kub<l>ai <Kh>an <sum>, super me de<us> est.

[Latin phrase from an early inscription, first published in 1895, though "Pantect Map" seems to be earlier than that...]

[Latin phrase from Cassiodorus]

considis geniatiun tribunal: sed tot testes pateris quot te agmina circumdare cognosci

Some kind of Latinate "pastiche" being put together here?

[English translation]

Marco Polo of Venice, a defender of the highest counsels, granted prætorian rank by the will of Kublai Khan, legate of the province of Janju which the Tartars obey <and of> others joined to the Tartars through friendship from the beginning.

You think that there are many islands in the most distant East, not only unseen but unheard of. He first entered the territory of Tartary a year ago. You have served <me well>. With your <good> will let them do business as iterant merchants when you ascend the bejeweled tribunal, but you permit as many witnesses as the number of regiments surrounding you, understand.

I am Kublai Khan, above me is God <alone>.

A Look at the Documents...

Example: "Pantect Map" — details (cont.)
Question Session