

# [Publicizing discoveries: the studies and the story of marco polo](https://assignbuster.com/publicizing-discoveries-the-studies-and-the-story-of-marco-polo/)

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Marco Polo is famous for his heroic venture through the Mongol Empire, for his travel of the Silk Road, and for the detailed account of the East that he brought back to Europe. His publication of The Travels of Marco Polo and his narrative of the adventure brought him to fame when it spread across Europe.

Polo was considerably more famous than his contemporaries because of both his study of Asia and because of his story about it. He influenced politics, banking, and mapmaking, and he made a society that was once only interested in continental trade seek global trade routes. By being one of the first westerners to travel the Silk Road, Marco Polo broke the limits of exploration in Asia and provided the most detailed account of Asian culture that Europe had ever seen; in addition, his writings advanced cartography, and – most importantly – sparked a European interest in further exploration of the world. It was 1253 when Niccolo Polo and his brother, Maffeo, left for an extended trading journey through the East. They owned and operated a successful family trading business in Venice and, according to Laurence Bergreen, were “ known for frequent journeys to the East, especially Constantinople, in search of jewels, silks, and spices.

” Marco Polo was born in 1254, the year after his father and uncle left for the East, and it is possible that his father did not even know of his existence at the time. It was not until 1269 that Niccolo and Maffeo returned to fifteen-year-old Marco (Burgan 8). In 1271, Polo accompanied his father and uncle on their second journey to Asia. They joined a fleet of Venetian ships known as a muda and began moving southeasterly along the Eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea (Bergreen). He traveled a series of trade routes that were opened by the Mongols, who depended on their international traders. Hundreds of years later these trade roots became known as the Silk Road, and Marco Polo was famous for traveling upon them.

Although his expedition started with Niccolo and Maffeo as a quest for trade, it became an exploration of a foreign land that both interested and puzzled Polo. Marco Polo lived during the Late Middle Ages, a time when Venice was different from other parts of Europe. It thrived on commerce, with the Polo family among the majority of families who were traveling for trade. Travel in Venice was, according to author and researcher Laurence Bergreen, “ not an exception, [but] the norm.” This shows that Polo’s travel and trade was not out of the ordinary. He was like many other Venetians, and Venice was unlike any other place in Europe.

It was a city-state that “ lived on trade, [was] highly-structured, fiercely independent and commercial, [and was] tiny in size, yet global in outlook” (Bergreen). Venice was in the midst of developing what became the most advanced banking system that Western Europe had ever seen (Bergreen). Marco Polo was born when Venice was entering the late middle ages, “ a period of economic expansion [and] the lowering of barriers to commercial activity” (Bergreen). Venice was the center of trade in Europe, and merchants would come from all over Europe and even parts of the Middle East with expensive items to trade (Burgan 8). Although it’s international trade was limited, it surpassed most of Europe nonetheless. This economy and way of life gave Polo the ability to trade in the East and was the fuel for what would later become a legendary exploration of Asia.

Marco Polo brought back detailed accounts regarding Asia that were enlightening to Europe and revealed that Asian culture and economy was unlike anything that Europe had ever seen. Polo brought “ noodles into Italy and of spaghetti into China, […] trade in horses across the Arabian Sea, and [he changed] political conditions on the north-west frontier of India in the mid thirteenth century” (Jackson 82). These accomplishments were due to his discovery of a culture so different from his own. Although Europeans had traveled to Asia before him, no one had studied the East as thoroughly. Marco Polo saw many things he had never seen or imagined before, and was amazed by how much more advanced the East was from Europe. For example, Europeans had not experienced paper money until Marco Polo discovered it in the Mongol Empire.

In his book, The Travels of Marco Polo, Marco Polo tried to convince his European audience why paper money, a concept so foreign to them, was efficient. He writes, “ the people and regions of men who are under [Kublai Khan’s] rule gladly take these sheets [of money] in payment, because wherever they go they make all their payments with them both for goods and for pearls and for precious stones and for gold and for silver; [and] they are so light that the sheet worth ten bezants of gold weighs not one” (qtd. in Bergreen). This is an example of information that Marco Polo brought back that Europeans previously never heard of. His account of the East revealed that Asian society was more advanced than European society and thus prompted development in Europe economy, politics, and trade. Perhaps Marco Polo’s greatest achievement was his work under Kublai Khan, the fifth emperor of the Mongols.

Kublai Khan controlled a massive empire that, according to Laurence Bergreen, included “ most of Asia and a significant part of Europe, all the way to the eastern shore of Danube.” At the time of Polo, Kublai Khan was “ a half-real, half-legendary figure to most Europeans” (Bergreen), and was simultaneously considered “ the most important ruler of the time” (Burgan 12). In 1265, the Polo family received an invitation to meet the Great Khan. They spent days conversing with him, earning his “ confidence and respect” (Bergreen). The Polos were amazed by “ his elaborate courteousness, so unlike the savagery for which the Mongols were notorious,” while the Great Khan was pleased that these foreigners couldConversein his own language (Bergreen). Marco Polo writes that that Mongol emperor had never had the “ opportunity of seeing any native of Italy, [and] he was highly gratified at meeting and conversing with these brothers, who had become proficient in the Mongol language” (qtd. in Bergreen). Considering his importance, it was a great achievement that Polo was able to meet, befriend, and work under the Great Khan. He continued to work for the Khan for approximately seventeen years (“ Marco Polo”).

Marco Polo formed a relationship with Kublai Khan where the Khan “ trusted [Polo] so much that he sent him out on many expeditions, including trips to Yunnan and Burma” (Bergreen.) On these journeys, Polo gathered information about the Mongol Empire, an empire that was far more advanced than any part of Europe. Kublai Khan’s most significant accomplishment was not his vast empire but, in fact, it’s trade. Laurence Bergreen writes that “[Kublai Khan’s] most potent weapon was not the sword or spear, fire or poison, but commerce with the world beyond the borders of his empire.” This was feat that Europe had yet to accomplish on a large scale, and it was one of the most important ideas that Polo brought back to Europe with him. Kublai Khan’s empire became a representation of what Europe could become; it was more advanced in trade, economy, and politics, and Polo shared these ideas with Europe when he published his book.

Marco Polo’s discoveries and ideas were significant, but they were made influential because they were spread throughout Europe when he wrote his book, The Travels of Marco Polo. There are about eighty ancient manuscripts of The Travels of Marco Polo, in Latin, Italian, and French, and more than 1500 editions of the work have been published (Nordenskjold 396). Europeans had never heard of the political or economic structures that Polo described, and, according to author and researcher Michael Burgan, “ the book gave many Europeans their first glimpse of lands they knew almost nothing about” (5). Polo was not the first to travel into Asia, but he was the first to examine Asian culture exhaustively and publish his findings. Milton Rugoff reflects that perhaps “ if [Niccolo and Maffeo Polo] had put down their story as Marco did his […] their tale might well have been an even more remarkable one” (xiii).

This reveals that Marco Polo was not the only European to travel in Asia, but he was by far the most significant because he published his findings, and the latter is what brought him to fame and made his discoveries significant. The eminence of the book is credited both to Polo and to a writer named Rustichello, who co-authored the book. Marco Polo met Rustichello while living as a prisoner of war after the Venetian-Genoese Wars. Rustichello was “ a quick-witted scribe with a talent for flattery, constantly on the lookout for a story—an adventure, a romance, a battle—to beguile his aristocratic audience” (Bergreen). After hearing Polo’s stories of the East, “ Rustichello realized he had come across the story of a lifetime, one of the most remarkable true stories ever told,” and thus Rustichello became Marco Polo’s co-author (Bergreen).

Rustichello helped Polo write his book in a fashion that was interesting and, in the words of Rustichello himself, was for the “ enjoyment of the readers” (qtd. in Bergreen). The book they wrote inspired readers, memorialized adventures, and came to by known as his Travels. Marco Polo’s detailed accounts of the East not only inspired the people of Europe, but also had historical value because they were used as a resource for mapmakers, such as Venetian Fra Mauro, who credited his information to Polo among others. Marco Polo’s keen observations revealed the geography of different parts of the East, and therefore mapmakers were able to use his book as a resource. For example, he wrote extensively about the city of Quinsai, so much that it was “ altogether about a twenty-fifth part of the whole book” (Hilton105). He descriptions included the city-walls, canals, the lake, and the Main Street. This was the kind of detail that mapmakers were able to use. Polo had been credited as a source for cartography by researchers, historians, and mapmakers. For example, Baron Nordenskjold writes, “ some […] inscriptions from the ‘ Travels’ had crept into some of the maps of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries” (396). Fra Maura’s use of Polo’s findings is well supported.

Jim Siebold writes that Maura “ weaves Marco Polo’s narrative into Arab theory and makes these fit together with the cartographic notions of Abyssinia which [Polo] had obtained from ‘ first-hand sources,'” and he also confirms that, “ indeed, Fra Mauro’s representation of the Far East is derived from Marco Polo.” Not only was Polo’s account of Asia influential to trade, economy, and politics, but it also was historically valuable to Europe. Marco Polo’s stories shared important information about Asia, and were so gripping that they sparked the imaginations of others, generating a European interest in exploring other parts of the world. “ Marco’s story made people curious about Asia and its riches,” and as the book became popular, so did the idea of trading with other countries, as the Mongols did (Burgan 5). Many Europeans who read The Travels of Marco Polo become “ determined to re-establish routes of their own to the riches of the East” (“ European Voyages.”) Polo’s Travels inspired explorers whose journeys would later have their own impact on Europe, such as Ferdinand Magellan and Christopher Columbus (Bergreen).

His story brought inspiration to civilians, which generated a pursuit for international trade routes. While the information he brought back about Asia gave him importance almost immediately, his book spread his ideas and sparked an interest in trade across the continent, and thus his influence was present long after his death. Marco Polo’s study of the East and the story of it had a substantial influence on Europe during his time and for hundreds of years after. Marco Polo began his journey through Asia from a young age. He achieved amazing feats while exploring Asia and especially while working for the Mongol emperor, Kublai Khan. When he returned to Europe, his achievements were spread throughout Europe when he wrote his book, The Travels of Marco Polo.

His ideas had historical value when they were used in cartography. Most importantly, the stories he shared with Europe provided inspiration for other explorers; less than two hundred years later, when Christopher Columbus sailed west looking for a route to Asia, he took Marco’s book with him (Burgan 6). Marco Polo’s impact was invaluable; his discoveries began influencing Europe during Polo’s lifetime and continued to do so even after his death. Marco Polo advanced European economy, politics, banking, and cartography. Most significantly, however, he inspired readers across a continent to seek international trade routes.

He influenced many aspects of Europeans culture for a long time, and for this he is remembered as one of the world’s most influential explorers. Works Cited Bergreen, Laurence. Marco Polo: From Venice to Xanadu. New York; Random House, 2007. Kindle Edition. Burgan, Michael.

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