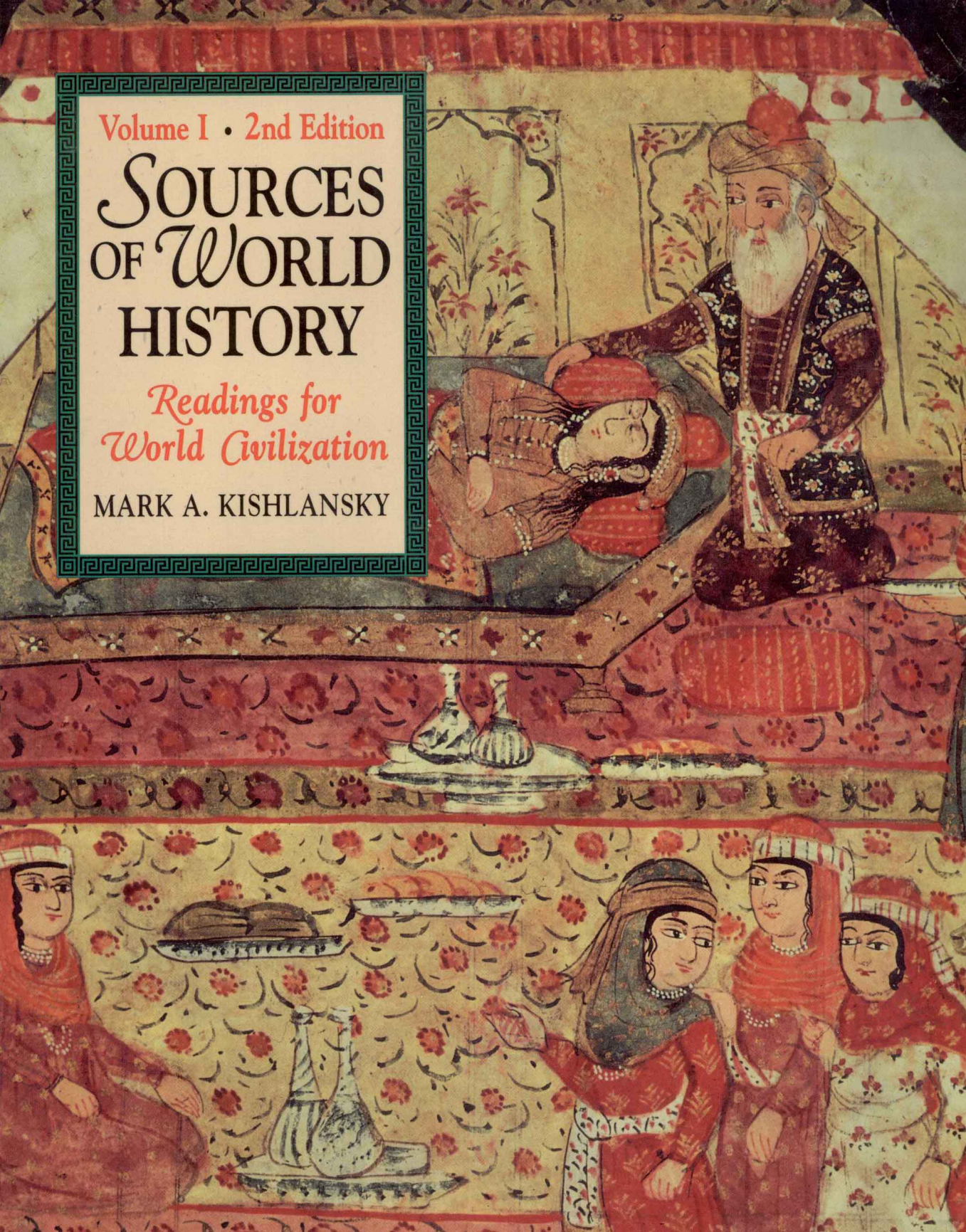


Volume I • 2nd Edition

# SOURCES OF WORLD HISTORY

*Readings for  
World Civilization*

MARK A. KISHLANSKY



# SOURCES OF WORLD HISTORY

## *Readings for World Civilization*

### *Volume I*

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*Second Edition*

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*with the assistance of*  
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## Preface

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*Sources of World History* is a collection of documents designed to supplement textbook and lectures in the teaching of world civilization. The use of primary materials is an essential component of the study of history. By hearing the voices of the past, students come to realize both the similarities and differences between their society and previous ones. In witnessing others ponder the same questions that rouse their own curiosity, students feel a connection between the past and the present. Moreover, by observing the ways in which such questions and experiences are worked out and described, they come to an understanding and respect for the integrity of other cultures. In confronting the materials of the past, students exercise an historical imagination that is at the heart of the teaching and learning of history.

Historical sources are the building blocks from which instructor and textbook writer have ultimately constructed their accounts and their explanations of world historical development. It is essential that even beginning students learn that the past does not come to us prepackaged, but is formed by historians who exercise their own imaginations on primary materials. Historical thinking involves examining the ideas of others, understanding past experiences on others' terms, and recognizing other points of view. This is a process that makes everyone, student and instructor alike, an historian.

I have observed a number of principles in selecting the materials for this collection, which is designed for beginning-level college students. I believe strongly in the value of primary materials and feel that they should be made as accessible to contemporary students as possible. Thus, I have preferred to use up-to-date translations of many texts despite the costliness of acquiring their rights. Many of the late nineteenth-century translations that are commonly used in source books present texts that are syntactically too complex for modern students to comprehend easily. I have also chosen to present longer selections than is usual in books of this type. Unlike works that contain snippets of hundreds of documents, *Sources of the World History* presents a sizable amount of a small number of sources. It therefore allows students to gain a deeper feeling for authors and texts and to concentrate their energies and resources. No selection is so long that it cannot be easily read at a sitting

and none so short as to defy recall. Each selection raises a significant issue around which classroom discussion can take place or to which lectures can refer. Some may even stimulate students to seek out the complete original works.

Two other principles lie behind the selections I have made. The first is that a steady diet of even the world's greatest thinkers is unpalatable without other varieties of social and cultural materials. For this reason, I have tried to leaven the mass of intellectual history with materials that draw on social conditions or common experiences in past eras. These should not only aid students in making connections between past and present, but should also introduce them to the varieties of materials from which history is recreated. Secondly, I have been especially concerned to recover the voices or highlight the experiences of those who are not always adequately represented in surveys of world civilization. The explosion of work in social history, in the history of the family, and in the history of women have made possible the inclusion of materials here that were barely discovered a decade ago. Although this effort can be clearly seen in the materials chosen for the modern sections, it is also apparent in the selections made from more traditional older documents.

By providing longer selections and by expanding the scope of the materials to be incorporated, I have necessarily been compelled to make some hard choices. There exists a superabundance of materials that demand inclusion in a collection such as this. I have tried to find representative examples of the works of each of the major civilization complexes, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Islamic world as well as the central works of Western Civilization. This poses very difficult problems of balance, equity, and accessibility. Since early African and Latin American civilizations were oral cultures, they have necessarily left fewer documentary artifacts, despite the richness of their cultures. Much of what is known comes to us through the eyes of travelers or through the memory of later representatives of these cultures. I have included many such documents along with cautions about how to use them. I have also included Western views of Asia in an effort to raise questions of a comparative and cross-cultural nature. Having so few documents for so many civilizations necessarily raises questions of selection. It is my conviction that it is the experience of using primary materials—rather than the primary materials that are used—that is vital. Thus, I have tried to provide a balance among constitutional documents, political theory, philosophy, imaginative literature, and social description. In all cases, I have made the pedagogical value of the specific texts the prime consideration, selecting for significance, readability, and variety.

The feature, *How to Read a Document*, is designed to introduce students to a disciplined approach of working with primary sources and to encourage them to use their imaginations in their historical studies. No brief introduction pretends to be authoritative, and there are many other strategies and questions that can be adopted in training students to become critical readers. It is hoped that this introduction will remove some of the barriers that usually exist between student and source by walking them through a single exercise with a document in front of them. Any disciplined approach to source materials will sensitize students to the construction of historical documents, their content and meaning, and the ways in which they relate to modern

experience. Individual instructors will easily be able to improve upon the example offered here.

A number of individuals helped to stimulate my thinking about the selection of sources. I would especially like to thank Eric McGeer, R. Bin Wong, Ann Waltner, Leroy Vail, and Mark Wasserman. My greatest debt is to Susan Lindsey Lively for her assistance in compiling these texts. Her discipline helped keep me going as we sifted through hundreds of possible selections and her common sense tempered our final choices.

In this second edition to *Sources of World History*, I have attempted to expand the coverage of non-Western societies as well as to offer more in the way of comparative perspectives by including sections of cultural encounters, particularly in the earlier periods. Two new sections on South Asia attempt to make up for a shortage of materials in the first edition, and I have added an additional set of documents on Japan and the coming of Westernization. In this edition, my thanks are due to the many users of *Sources of World History* who have taken the time to send me suggestions, corrections, and encouragement. At Wadsworth, my thanks go to Clark Baxter, Sharon Adams Poore, and Kathleen Broderick, as well as Howard and Jo Aksen of Aksen Associates, for their editorial and production expertise. My greatest debt is to Tom Cogswell of the University of Kentucky for his guidance and assistance without which this new edition would not have been possible.

Mark A. Kishlansky  
Cambridge, MA, 1998

# How to Read a Document

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Do you remember the first time you ever used a road map? After struggling to unfold it and get the right side up and the right way around you were then confronted by an astonishing amount of information. You could calculate the distance between places, from towns to cities, or cities to cities, even the distance between exits on the toll roads. You could observe relative population density and categorize large and small places. You could even judge the quality of roads. But most likely, you used that map to help you figure out how to get from one place to another, how to find the best route for the trip you were taking.

To make the map tell you that, you had to know how to ask the right questions. It all seems so obvious now—you put one finger on the place where you were and another on the place to which you wanted to go and then you found the best and most direct route between them. In order to do something as simple as this, there are a lot of assumptions that you made about the map. First, you assumed that the map is directionally oriented, north at the top, east to the right, south and west opposite. Second, you assumed that the map is to scale, that the distances between places on the map are proportional to their distances in reality. Third, you assumed that intersections on the map were intersections on the ground, that the two roads that appear to cross on paper actually do cross in reality. These assumptions make possible the answer to your initial question. Of course, if any of them were not true you would have found out soon enough.

Learning to read an historical document is much like learning to read a map. It is important to ask the right questions and to make the right assumptions. But unlike the real voyage that the map makes possible, the voyage made with an historical document is one of the imagination. You will have to learn to test your assumptions and to sharpen your ability to ask questions before you can have any confidence that you are on the right road. Like anything else, this is a matter of concentration and practice. You will have to discipline yourself to ask and answer questions about the document on the first level before you pose questions on higher levels. At the beginning you will be asking questions that you can answer directly; by the end you will be asking questions that will give full play to your imagination and your skills as an historian. Let us consider an example.



Read the following selection slowly and carefully.

1 Ye emperors, kings, dukes, marquises, earls, and knights, and all other people  
2 desirous of knowing the diversities of the races of mankind, as well as the  
3 diversities of kingdoms, provinces, and regions of all parts of the East, read  
4 through this book, and ye will find in it the greatest and most marvellous char-  
5 acteristics of the peoples especially of Armenia, Persia, India, and Tartary, as  
6 they are severally related in the present work by Marco Polo, a wise and  
7 learned citizen of Venice, who states distinctly what things he saw and what  
8 things he heard from others. For this book will be a truthful one.

9 Kublai, who is styled grand khan, or lord of lords, is of the middle stature, that  
10 is, neither tall nor short; his limbs are well formed, and in his whole figure  
11 there is a just proportion. His complexion is fair, and occasionally suffused  
12 with red, like the bright tint of the rose, which adds much grace to his coun-  
13 tenance. His eyes are black and handsome, his nose is well shaped and promi-  
14 nent. He has four wives of the first rank, who are esteemed legitimate, and the  
15 eldest born son of any one of these succeeds to the empire, upon the decease  
16 of the grand khan. They bear equally the title of empress, and have their sep-  
17 arate courts. None of them have fewer than three hundred young female  
18 attendants of great beauty, together with a multitude of youths as pages, and  
19 other eunuchs, as well as ladies of the bedchamber; so that the number of per-  
20 sons belonging to each of their respective courts amounts to ten thousand.  
21 Besides these, he has many concubines provided for his use, from a province  
22 of Tartary named Ungut, having a city of the same name, the inhabitants of  
23 which are distinguished for beauty of features and fairness of complexion.  
24 Thither the grand khan sends his officers every second year, or oftener, as it  
25 may happen to be his pleasure, who collect for him, to the number of four or  
26 five hundred, or more, of the handsomest of the young women, according to  
27 the estimation of beauty communicated to them in their instructions....  
28 Upon their arrival in his presence, he causes a new examination to be made by  
29 a different set of inspectors, and from amongst them a further selection takes  
30 place, when thirty or forty are retained for his own chamber.... These, in the  
31 first instance, are committed separately to the care of the wives of certain of  
32 the nobles, whose duty it is to observe them attentively during the course of  
33 the night, in order to ascertain that they have not any concealed imperfec-  
34 tions, that they sleep tranquilly, do not snore, have sweet breath, and are free  
35 from unpleasant scent in any part of the body. Having undergone this rigor-  
36 ous scrutiny, they are divided into parties of five, one of which parties attends  
37 during three days and three nights, in his majesty's interior apartment, where  
38 they are to perform every service that is required of them, and he does with  
39 them as he likes. The remainder of them, whose value had been estimated at  
40 an inferior rate, are assigned to the different lords of the household.... in this  
41 manner he provides for them all amongst his nobility. It may be asked whether

the people of the province do not feel themselves aggrieved in having their daughters thus forcibly taken from them by the sovereign? Certainly not; but, on the contrary, they regard it as a favour and an honour done to them; and those who are the fathers of handsome children feel highly gratified by his condescending to make choice of their daughters.

The grand khan usually resides during three months of the year, namely, December, January, and February, in the great city of Kanbalu, situated towards the north-eastern extremity of the province of Cathay; and here, on the southern side of the new city, is the site of his vast palace, the form and dimensions of which are as follows. In the first place is a square enclosed with a wall and deep ditch; each side of the square being eight miles in length, and having at an equal distance from each extremity an entrance-gate, for the concourse of people resorting thither from all quarters. Within this enclosure there is, on the four sides, an open space one mile in breadth, where the troops are stationed; and this is bounded by a second wall, enclosing a square of six miles, having three gates on the south side, and three on the north, the middle portal of each being larger than the other two, and always kept shut, excepting on the occasions of the emperor's entrance or departure.... Within these walls, which constitute the boundary of four miles, stands the palace of the grand khan, the most extensive that has ever yet been known. It reaches from the northern to the southern wall, leaving only a vacant space (or court), where persons of rank and the military guards pass and repass. It has no upper floor, but the roof is very lofty. The paved foundation or platform on which it stands is raised ten spans above the level of the ground, and a wall of marble, two paces wide, is built on all sides, to the level of this pavement, within the line of which the palace is erected; so that the wall, extending beyond the ground plan of the building, and encompassing the whole, serves as a terrace, where those who walk on it are visible from without. Along the exterior edge of the wall is a hand-

some balustrade, with pillars, which the people are allowed to approach. The sides of the great halls and the apartments are ornamented with dragons in carved work and gilt, figures of warriors, of birds, and of beasts, with representations of battles. The inside of the roof is contrived in such a manner that nothing besides gilding and painting presents itself to the eye. On each of the four sides of the palace there is a grand flight of marble steps, by which you ascend from the level of the ground to the wall of marble which surrounds the building, and which constitute the approach to the palace itself. The grand hall is extremely long and wide, and admits of dinners being there served to great multitudes of people. The palace contains a number of separate chambers, all highly beautiful, and so admirably disposed that it seems impossible to suggest any improvement to the system of their arrangement. The exterior of the roof is adorned with a variety of colours, red, green, azure, and violet, and the sort of covering is so strong as to last for many years. The glazing of the windows is so well wrought and so delicate as to have the transparency of crystal. In the rear of the body of the palace there are large buildings containing several

86 apartments, where is deposited the private property of the monarch, or his trea-  
87 sure in gold and silver bullion, precious stones, and pearls, and also his vessels  
88 of gold and silver plate. Here are likewise the apartments of his wives and con-  
89 cubines; and in this retired situation he despatches business with convenience,  
90 being free from every kind of interruption.

Now what sense can we make out of all of that? You have just read a historical document, a selection from *The Travels of Marco Polo, The Venetian*. It was written in 1298, while Marco Polo was in prison, and was based on his own observations during 17 years of travel in Asia. Marco Polo was born into a Venetian merchant family. His father and elder brothers had made an earlier trip into Asia where they had met the Grand Khan. Marco accompanied his brothers on their return trip. During his stay he was favored with free passage throughout the khan's dominions and on his return to Venice he was required to tell and retell the stories of his journey. After commanding a ship in an unsuccessful war against Genoa, Marco Polo was captured and imprisoned. It was during this time that he sorted through the many notations that he had made in Asia and composed the tale of his travels.

In order to understand this document we are going to need to ask and answer a series of questions about it. Let us start at the beginning with a number of questions that we might designate Level One questions.

### ***Level One***

The first set of questions that need to be addressed are those for which you should be able to find concrete answers. The answers to these questions will give you the basic information you need to begin the process of interpretation. Although Level One questions are seemingly straightforward, they contain important implications for deeper interpretation. If you do not consciously ask these questions, you will deprive yourself of some of the most important evidence there is for understanding documents. Train yourself to underline or highlight the information that will allow you to answer the following questions.

#### **1. Who wrote this document?**

In the first place, we need to know how this document came to be created. In the case of *The Travels of Marco Polo, The Venetian* we know that the document was written by Marco Polo (**line 6**), who was an Italian merchant. This document is thus the work of a single author written from his own point of view. What is especially important to remember is that Marco Polo was an outsider, describing a society that was not his own. His account of China in the thirteenth century was an account of a European's impressions of China. We will need to learn as much as we can about the "author" of a document to help us answer more complicated questions.

#### **2. Who is the intended audience?**

The audience of a document will tell us much about the document's language, about the amount of knowledge that the writer is assuming, even sometimes about the best

form for the document to take. There can be more than one audience in-tended by the writer. *The Travels of Marco Polo*, *The Venetian* was written in the thirteenth century, and therefore was not written for “publication” in the conventional sense of the word. In fact, *The Travels* was not published for centuries after composition. But Marco Polo obviously intended his work to be read by others, and it was circulated in manuscript and repeated orally. His preface was addressed to “emperors, kings, dukes, marquises, earls, and knights” (line 1), a rather distinguished audience. But his real audience was his own countrymen to whom he was describing a foreign place in terms they would understand. Notice, for example, how he describes the khan’s complexion, “like the bright tint of the rose” (line 12).

### 3. What is the story line?

The final Level One question has to do with the content of the document. We now know enough about it in a general way to pay attention to what it actually says. To answer this question you might want to take some notes while you are reading or underline the important parts in your text. The story here seems to be simple. Marco Polo is impressed with the splendor of the court of the grand khan and especially with the way in which he finds his wives and concubines. Polygamy is interesting to a European viewing a non-Western society and Marco Polo describes it in a way that will titillate his anticipated audience. He also makes it believable, explaining why parents would volunteer their daughters (lines 44–45). He is also impressed with the size of everything that surrounds the Grand Khan. If each of his wives had a retinue of 10,000 (line 20) their courts alone would be more populous than the entire city of Venice.

### *Level Two*

If Level One questions allow you to identify the nature of the document and its author, Level Two questions allow you to probe behind the essential facts. Now that you know who wrote the document, to whom it is addressed, and what it is about, you can begin to try to understand it. Since your goal is to learn what this document means, first in its historical context and then in your current context, you now want to study it from a more detached point of view, to be less accepting of “facts” and more critical in the questions you pose. At the first level, the document controlled you; at the second level, you will begin to control the document.

#### 1. Why was this document written?

Understanding the purpose of an historical document is critical to analyzing the strategies that the author employs within it. A document intended to convince will employ logic; a document intended to entertain will employ fancy; a document attempting to motivate will employ emotional appeals. In order to find these strategies we must first know what purpose the document was intended to serve. Travelers’ tales generally have two interrelated purposes, first, to impress upon one culture the differences to be found in another, and second to show people their own culture in a new light. Marco Polo is genuinely impressed with the opulence and

power of the khan but he is also impressed by the way that the khan provides for his nobles, how he rewards those who have been faithful to him (lines 40–41). As the member of an elite merchant family, Marco Polo was concerned that the Venetian doge reward those faithful to him, especially those who might be temporarily imprisoned.

## 2. What type of document is this?

The form of a document is vital to its purpose. We would expect a telephone book to be alphabetized, a poem to be in meter, and a work of philosophy to be in prose. Here we have a traveler's account and its style and language is employed to create wonder and admiration in its readers. To do this the author needs to provide detailed description that is visually arresting yet sufficiently concrete to be persuasive. This is especially difficult when describing customs as alien to Venetians as those practiced at the court of the grand khan. In order to be believed, the traveler has to overcome the natural skepticism of his audience. During his lifetime, Marco Polo was nicknamed "Marco Millione" (Marco Millions) because people thought he exaggerated the numbers of the Chinese population and the extent of the khan's wealth.

## 3. What are the basic assumptions made in this document?

All documents make assumptions that are bound up with their intended audience, with the form in which they are written, and with their purpose. Some of the assumptions that are at work in this selection from *The Travels of Marco Polo*, *The Venetian* relate to the way in which a state is ruled. Marco Polo describes the khan and his court as if government in China were organized in the same way that government in Italy was. Thus the khan can be understood as a sort of pope or doge. Similarly, Marco Polo assumes that his readers will admire great wealth and large quantities of things. He takes pains to describe things as beautiful, great, wide, and large (lines 52–81).

## *Level Three*

So far, you have been asking questions of your document that the document itself can answer. Sometimes it is more difficult to know who composed a document or who was the intended audience than it has been with *The Travels of Marco Polo*, *The Venetian*. Sometimes you have to guess at the purpose of the document, but essentially Level One and Level Two questions have direct answers. Once you have learned to ask them, you will have a great deal of information about the historical document at your disposal. You will then be able to think historically, that is, to pose your own questions about the past and to use the material the document presents you to find answers. In Level Three you will exercise your critical imagination, probing the material and developing your own assessment of its value. Level Three questions will not always have definite answers; in fact, they are the kind of questions that arouse disagreement and debate and that make for lively classroom discussion.



### 1. Can I believe this document?

If they are successful, documents designed to persuade, to recount events, or to motivate people to act must be believable to their audience. But for the critical historical reader, it is that very believability that must be in question. Every author has a point of view and exposing the assumptions of the document is an essential task for the reader. We must treat all claims skeptically (even while admiring audacity, rhetorical tricks, and clever comparisons). One question we certainly want to ask is, “Is this a likely story?” Do the parents of daughters destined for concubinage at court really believe that it is a sign of good fortune? Do all officers sent by the khan really perform their duties speedily and efficiently? Is there really a wall 8 miles square around the city that contains the khan’s palace (line 52)? Testing the credibility of a document means looking at it from the other side. What would most impress a subject of the khan about his own society? What would most impress him about Venice?

### 2. What can I learn about the society that produced this document?

All documents unintentionally reveal things about their authors and about their age. It is the things that are embedded in the very language, structure, and assumptions of the document that can tell us the most about the historical period or event that we are studying. This is centrally important in studying a travel account. We must ask ourselves both what we can learn about China in the late thirteenth century and what we can learn about Venice. Marco Polo is acting as a double filter, running Chinese customs through his own European expectations and then explaining them to Europeans through his expectation of what they will believe and what they will reject. He is also telling us, indirectly, about the things that Venetians would find unusual and wonderful and therefore by contrast what they would find commonplace. We can learn many things about both Chinese and Venetian society by reading into this document rather than by simply reading it.

### 3. What does this document mean to me?

So what? What does *The Travels of Marco Polo*, *The Venetian*, written almost 700 years ago, have to do with you? Other than the practical problem of passing your exams and getting your degree, why should you be concerned with historical documents and what can you learn from them? Only you can answer that question. But you will not be able to answer it until you have asked it. You should demand the meaning of each document you read. What it meant to the historical actors—authors, audience, and society—and what it means to our own society. In light of *The Travels of Marco Polo*, how would you go about describing an alien society to your generation? How would you go about appreciating an alien culture? Look around your classroom and ask yourself how often you represent yourself to members of other cultures and how often you have to understand the assumptions of other cultures to understand your classmates.

Now that you have seen how to unfold the map of a historical document, you must get used to asking these questions by yourself. The temptation will be great to jump from Level One to Level Three, to start in the middle, or to pose the questions

in no sequence at all. After all, you probably have a ready-made answer to the question, "What does this document mean to me?" If you develop the discipline of asking all your questions in the proper order, however, you will soon find that you are able to gain command of a document on a single reading and that the complicated names and facts that ordinarily would confuse you will easily settle into a pattern around one or another of your questions. After a few weeks, reread these pages and ask yourself how careful you have been to maintain the discipline of posing historical questions. Think also about how much more comfortable you now feel about reading and discussing historical documents.

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