

Marco Polo: A Brief History of Sino-Italian Relations

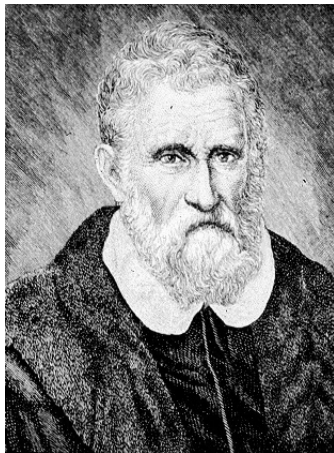
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Andrew Rout

University of Warwick

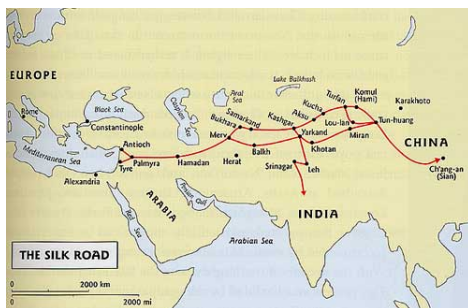
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Marco Polo



- Marco Polo: 1254 – 1324
- Roman to post-Renaissance

Roman – Han dynasty relations



- Western Roman Republic/Empire: 509 - 27 BCE / 27 BCE - 496 CE
- Han Dynasty: 202 BCE - 220 CE (complement 9 - 25 CE)
- Silk road allowed goods to flow in both directions – Roman coins and glassware in China, Chinese silk in Rome
- People didn't "travel" the silk road – no official contact
- They had names for each other: Daqin/Fujin and Serica/Sinae
- Most historical records come from Chinese sources

The Lost Legion: Situation in Rome



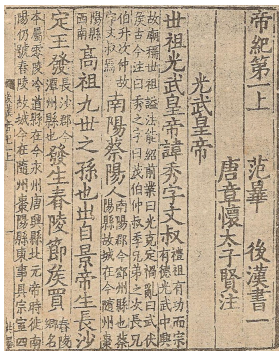
- Rome is republic – power essentially lies with three men
- Crassus' power primarily stems from his great wealth rather than military prowess
- In 53 BCE, Crassus invades Parthian empire (Iran) without consent of the senate
- Fights Parthians at Carrhae – defeated and killed
- 10,000 prisoners of war are deported to Parthia's northeastern border. What happened to the survivors?

The Lost Legion: The Survivors



- At the 36 BCE Battle of Zhizhi (Xiongnu-Han War), Chinese historians record a “fishscale” formation used by some Xiongnu forces.
- Homer Dubs (Oxford) theorises this was the survivors of Carrhae – settled in Liqian county.
- Arguments for: modern inhabitants have blonde hair and green eyes, DNA results.
- Arguments against: 17 years is quite long, DNA results are similar to that of Uighurs.

Official Contact Attempt: Gan Ying



- Ambassador sent by the commander Ban Chao in 97 CE.
- Makes it as far as the “Western Sea”.
- Convinced to turn back by the Parthians – told him of a “long ocean”.
- Wrote a description of Roman governance and its natural products – silk from island of Cos.
- His travels were recorded in the *Book of the Later Han* (above figure).

Later Sino-Roman Relations

- Lots of political instability.
- The remaining points of contact between the Roman empire and China have minimal historical basis, but include:
 - ① 166 CE: 'Ambassadors' sent from "Andun" (Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius). Recorded in *Book of Later Han* – brought elephant tusks, rhino horns, and tortoise shells
 - ② 284: Embassy brings gifts to Jin dynasty, possibly from Emperor Carus – *Book of Jin*
 - ③ 6th Century: Nestorian monks steal Chinese silkworms for Justinian the Great
 - ④ 643, 667, 701, 719: Nestorian monks attempt diplomatic relations with the Tang dynasty *Old Book of Tang* on behalf of Byzantines
 - ⑤ 1091: Final recorded embassy to Song dynasty from the Byzantines – from Alexios I Komnenos

The Chinese Marco Polo: Rabban Bar Sauma



- Born around 1220 in what would become Beijing.
- Travels to Baghdad after an unsuccessful pilgrimage to Jerusalem with a student who would become Chinese *Patriarch of the East*.
- 1287: Travels to Europe – visits Rome, Tuscany, Genoa. Granted a Eucharist by Pope Nicholas IV.
- Visits numerous European nobles – Philip the Fair (France) and Edward I (England) amongst them.
- Dies in 1294 after returning to Baghdad.
- Evidence: Mentioned in letters between Mongols and Philip, his own written accounts.

Marco Polo: Background



- Sack of Constantinople in 1204 helps Venice become one of the predominant Mediterranean Powers
- Niccolo and Maffeo Polo (father and uncle) are merchants – travel to Asia in 1260s and meet Kublai Khan
- 1254: Marco Polo is born in (probably) Venice – there are claims he was born in Dalmatia.
- The elder Polos return in 1269, and take Marco on their next excursion to Asia in 1271.

Marco Polo: Travels



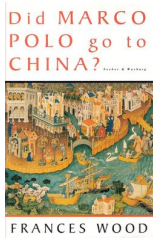
- Travelled as shown in the figure above
- Made steady progress until North-eastern Afghanistan – Marco taken ill for a year – learns Persian and Mongolian here.
- Describes the religious harmony within the city of Samarkand.
- Meet Kublai Khan – becomes a foreign emissary to India and Burma. Travels throughout South East Asia.
- Kublai refuses to let them leave until 1291 – escort Kököchin to Persia.

Marco Polo: Return to Italy



- Returns to Venice in 1295 – converts his treasures into gemstones
- Venice is now at war with Genoa – captured possibly at Curzola or Laiazzo.
- Imprisoned – meets Rustichello da Pisa.
- *Il Milione* is written and published in Old French.

Marco Polo: Did he travel to China?



- Frances Wood – *Did Marco Polo go to China?*, 1995.
- Number of things missing from Polo's description
 - 1 Chopsticks
 - 2 Tea
 - 3 Calligraphy
 - 4 foot-binding
- Others have pointed errors in the invasions of Japan.
- Polo not mentioned by name in any of the Mongol histories.
- Consensus is he did go – probably exaggerated his own role in history.

Matteo Ricci



- Born 1552, Jesuit who studied mathematics and cosmology.
- 1582: Travels to Macao (Portuguese port) with Michele Ruggieri – learns Chinese script and classical Chinese.
- 1588-1610 (death in Beijing) – travels around China
 - ① First European style map in Chinese
 - ② First romanization and dictionary (Portuguese) of Chinese
 - ③ First European to enter the Forbidden City in Beijing
 - ④ Builds oldest Catholic church in China
 - ⑤ Discovers the Kaifeng Jewish community
 - ⑥ First translations in both directions – Confucian classics and Euclid's *Elements* – kickstarts the Chinese Renaissance.

Forbidden City



Others



- This is a brief summary of 2000 years of history
 - 1 Odoric of Pordenone: 1236 – 1331: Franciscan friar who visited India, China, Sunda Islands. Inspired works of John Mandeville.
 - 2 Niccolo de Conti: 1395 – 1469: Visited SEA and southern China – created Fra Mauro map and travelled at the same time as Zheng He.
 - 3 Shen Fuzong (above): 1658 – 1691: Brought to Europe by Philippe Couplet – toured Portugal, France, England, Italy. Becomes a Jesuit – dies in Mozambique.
 - 4 Fan Shouyi (Luigi Fan): 1683-1753: First known Chinese to travel and return to Europe – learned Latin theology in Rome.
 - 5 Giuseppe Castiglione: 1688-1766: Jesuit – served as court painter to Kangxi, Yongzheng, Qianlong.
 - 6 Others I have undoubtedly missed out...