

# TRAVELER POSTCARDS

## TRAVELERS' ACCOUNTS EXCERPTS

### Introduction to source collection

During the middle ages, missionaries and merchants ventured to faraway lands, often writing accounts during or after their journeys or dictating their experiences to others. These sources are fascinating, but they're also tricky. For every truthful account, people encountered fantastical ones—"The Travels of Sir John Mandeville," for example, was incredibly popular—despite the fact that there likely was never a Sir John Mandeville. Even accounts by real historical actors are difficult to analyze, because authorship is unclear, or they borrowed from other sources, or the account includes exaggerations and embellishments. Despite these challenges, travel accounts offer us rich insights and a unique glimpse into the vibrant world of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Many of these excerpts have been edited for clarity, brevity, and focus, and annotations are available as footnotes.

### Source 1 – The Book of Descriptions of Countries

<b>Title</b>	<i>The Book of Descriptions of Countries</i>
<b>Source type</b>	Primary source travel account with some information based on other sources; this particular version was likely copied from the original and annotated by another author, hence the note in the opening.
<b>Date</b>	1335-1343, most likely 1339/1340
<b>Author</b>	Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, Florentine merchant (compiler)
<b>Description</b>	<p>The <i>Practica della Mercatura</i> (Italian for "The Practice of Commerce"), which is also known as the <i>Merchant's Handbook</i>, is a detailed guide to international trade and business in fourteenth-century Eurasia and North Africa. Originally called the <i>Book of Descriptions of Countries</i>, the work is based on Pegolotti's experiences as a merchant, and other local documents, statutes, and price lists he compiled.</p> <p>This excerpt includes an opening note, description of a route from Tana to Cathay (from the Sea of Azov to China), advice for traveling merchants, and a description of paper currency.</p>

### Excerpt

IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, AMEN! This book is called the *Book of Descriptions of Countries* and of measures employed in business, and of other things known by merchants of different parts of the world and by all who have to do with merchandise and exchanges; showing also what relation the merchandise of one country or of one city bears to that of others; and how one kind of goods is better than another kind; and where the various wares come from, and how they may be kept as long as possible. The book was compiled by Francis Balducci Pegolotti of Florence, who was with the Company of the Bardi of Florence,<sup>1</sup> and during the time that he was in the service of the said Company, for the good and honor and prosperity of the said Company, and for his own. . .

<sup>1</sup> An influential banking family during the medieval period.

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CHAPTER I. Information regarding the journey to Cathay,<sup>2</sup> for such as will go by Tana<sup>3</sup> and come back with goods.

In the first place, from Tana to Gittarchan<sup>4</sup> may be twenty-five days with an ox wagon, and from ten to twelve days with a horse wagon. On the road you will find plenty of Moccolds [Mongols], that is to say, of *gens d'armes* [armed people or bandits]. And from Gittarchan to Sarai<sup>5</sup> may be a day by river, and from Sarai to Saracanco<sup>6</sup> also by river, eight days. You can do this either by land or by water; but by water you will be at less charge for your merchandise.

From Saracanco to Organci<sup>7</sup> may be twenty days' journey in camel wagon. It will be well for anyone travelling with merchandise to go to Organci, for in that city there is a ready sale for goods. From Organci to Otrar<sup>8</sup> is thirty-five to forty days in camel wagons. But if when you leave Saracanco you go direct to Otrar, it is a journey of fifty days only, and if you have no merchandise it will be better to go this way than to go by Organci.

From Otrar to Armalec<sup>9</sup> is forty-five days' journey with pack-asses, and every day you find Moccolds. And from Armalec to Camexu<sup>10</sup> is seventy days with asses, and from Camexu until you come to a river called ..... is forty-five days on horseback; and then you can go down the river to Cassai<sup>11</sup> and there you can dispose of the *sommi*<sup>12</sup> of silver that you have with you, for that is a most active place of business. After getting to Cassai you carry on with the money which you get for the *sommi* of silver which you sell there; and this money is made of paper, and is called *balishi*. And four pieces of this money are worth one *sommo*<sup>13</sup> of silver in the province of Cathay. And from Cassai to Cambulac<sup>14</sup>, which is the capital city of the country of Cathay, is thirty days' journey.

...

CHAPTER II. Things needful for merchants who desire to make the journey to Cathay above described.

In the first place, you must let your beard grow long and not shave. And at Tana you should furnish yourself with a dragoman [guide and interpreter]. And you must not try to save money in the matter of dragomen by taking a bad one instead of a good one. For the additional wages of the good one will not cost you so much as you will save by having him. And besides the dragoman it will be well to take at least two good men servants who are acquainted

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2 Another word for China, used by Europeans, particularly before East Asia was well known to outsiders. At one point, some Europeans thought China and Cathay were distinct countries.

3 The medieval name for commercial colony for Genoese and Venetian merchants near the city of Azov, in modern-day Russia, near the Don River and the Sea of Azov. Coastal areas were also controlled by the Golden Horde.

4 Likely the destroyed medieval city Xacitarxan, also called Hajji Tarkhan or Astrakhan, located on the Volga river in modern-day south Russia.

5 Likely describing the Mongol capital in modern-day Southern Russia.

6 Former town on Ural river, likely in modern day Atyrau province of Kazakhstan.

7 Likely the city of Khiva in modern-day Uzbekistan.

8 A former city in modern-day Kazakhstan, once a Silk Road hub. Also called Farab.

9 Also known as Almaliq, a former city in modern-day Yining, Xinjiang, China.

10 Modern-day Hami in Xinjiang, China. Also known as Kamil/Kamul in the Uyghur language.

11 Likely Hangzhou, China.

12 A standardized weight unit used in some parts of Eurasia; travel accounts suggest use in Genoa and Tartar territories.

13 Singular for *sommi*.

14 Also known as Khanbaliq or Dudu, the capital of the Yuan dynasty.

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with the Cumanian tongue.<sup>15</sup> And if the merchant likes to take a woman with him from Tana, he can do so. . . if he do take one, it will be well that she be acquainted with the Cumanian tongue as well as the men.

. . .

Cathay is a province which contained a multitude of cities and towns. Among others there is one in particular, that is to say the capital city, to which is great resort of merchants, and in which there is a vast amount of trade; and this city is called Cambulac. And the said city hath a circuit of one hundred miles, and is all full of people and houses and of dwellers in the said city. You may calculate that a merchant with a dragoman, and with two men servants, and with goods to the value of twenty-five thousand golden florins, should spend on his way to Cathay from sixty to eighty *sommi* of silver, and not more if he manage well; and for all the road back again from Cathay to Tana, including the expenses of living and the pay of servants, and all other charges, the cost will be about five *sommi* per head of pack animals, or something less.

. . .

You may reckon also that from Tana to Sarai the road is less safe than on any other part of the journey; and yet even when this part of the road is at its worst, if you are some sixty men in the company you will go as safely as if you were in your own house.

. . .

Whatever silver the merchants may carry with them as far as Cathay, the lord of Cathay will take from them and put into his treasury. And to merchants who thus bring silver they give that paper money of theirs in exchange. This is of yellow paper, stamped with the seal of the lord aforesaid. And this money is called *balishi* and with this money you can readily buy silk and all other merchandise that you have a desire to buy. And all the people of the country are bound to receive it. And yet you shall not pay a higher price for your goods because your money is of paper. And of the said paper money there are three kinds, one being worth more than another, according to the value which has been established for each by that lord.

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## Citation

Yule, Henry; Cordier, Henri; da Pordenone, Odorico; Ṭabīb, Rashīd al-Dīn; Pegolotti, Francesco Balducci; de Marignolis, Joannes; Batuta, Ibn; and de Góis, Bento. *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, new ed., rev. throughout in the light of recent discoveries by Henri Cordier. London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1913.

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<sup>15</sup> Refers to a Turkic language spoken in the Cuman-Kipchak confederation, which was a Turkic confederation in the western part of the Eurasian Steppe, known as Cumania to some Europeans.

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## Source 2 – The Travels of Friar Odoric

<b>Title</b>	<i>The Travels of Friar Odoric</i>
<b>Source type</b>	Primary source - travel account
<b>Date</b>	1318-1330
<b>Author</b>	Friar Odoric, also known as Odoric of Pordenone
<b>Description</b>	Account by an Italian late-medieval Franciscan friar and missionary explorer who traveled extensively during the fourteenth century. This excerpt includes an opening note, descriptions of cities in Anatolia and Greater Persia, and a brief description of Hangzhou in China.

### Excerpt

Albeit [although] many other stories of sundry [various] kinds concerning the customs and peculiarities of different parts of this world have been related by a variety of persons, yet would I have you to know that I also, Friar Odoric of Friuli, can truly rehearse [talk about] many great marvels which I did hear and see when, according to my wish, I crossed the sea and visited the countries of the unbelievers in order to win some harvest of souls [convert people].

..

Wherefore I relate . . . a multitude of the things which I have seen and heard in the East and the North and the South. Of all I purpose [intend] not to speak, though I shall be the first to tell of many which will seem to a number of people past belief. Nor, indeed, could I myself have believed these things, had I not heard them with my own ears or seen the like myself. Fourteen years and a half, in the habit of Francis, that blessed confessor of Christ, I sojourned [traveled] in those parts of the world. . .

First, then, going with the galleys [ships] from Venice, I crossed over the Greater Sea, and so passed to Trebizond, which was of old called Pontus<sup>16</sup>. . . Departing thence, I came into Armenia the Greater, to a certain city which is called Arziron,<sup>17</sup> which in time long past was a fine and most wealthy city, and it would have been so unto this day but for the Tartars<sup>18</sup> and the Saracens<sup>19</sup>, who have done it much damage. It aboundeth greatly in bread and flesh, and many other kinds of victual [food], but not in wine or fruits. For the city is mighty cold, and folk say that it is the highest city that is at this day inhabited on the whole face of the earth. . . Departing from it, I came to a certain hill. . . and in that country is the mountain whereon is Noah's Ark. . .

From that country I passed to the city of Tauris,<sup>20</sup> a great city. . . In it they say the Arbor Secco [Dry Tree]<sup>21</sup> existeth in a mosque, that is to say, in a church of the Saracens. And this is a nobler city and a better for merchandise than any other which at this day existeth in the world. For there is not on the face of the earth any kind of provision, or any species of goods, but you will find great store thereof at Tauris. It is admirable for situation, and so opulent a city

<sup>16</sup> The Empire of Trebizond was a successor state of the Byzantine Empire which thrived during the 13th through 15th centuries in the northeastern corner of Anatolia (the Pontus) and the southern Crimea.

<sup>17</sup> Erzurum, in eastern Anatolia in modern-day Turkey.

<sup>18</sup> Turkic-speaking peoples of Central Asia, including Mongols and Turks.

<sup>19</sup> A term for Arabs and Muslims used in ancient and medieval times.

<sup>20</sup> Tabriz in modern-day Iran.

<sup>21</sup> This is a folk Christian story that was likely in circulation at the time about a tree that bore no fruit.

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that you would scarcely believe the things to be found there; for the whole world, almost, hath dealings with that city for merchandise. And the Christians will tell you that the emperor there hath more revenue from that one city than the king of France hath from his whole realm. Near that city is a mountain of salt,<sup>22</sup> which furnisheth a great store of salt for the whole place. And of this salt taketh every man as much as he [desires], and payeth nothing to any man. . . .

Departing from this city of Tauris, I travelled for ten days, and reached a certain city called Soldania,<sup>23</sup> in which dwelleth the emperor of the Persians in the summer season. . . This city is a great one, and a cool place, with an excellent supply of water, and many costly wares are brought thither for sale.

Departing from this city with a caravan . . . I proceeded in the direction of Upper India, and after travelling that way for many days I halted at the city of the three Magi,<sup>24</sup> which is called Saba,<sup>25</sup> a royal city and of great repute. But the Tartars have greatly destroyed it. It is a city which aboundeth greatly in bread and wine, and in many other good things. From this city to Jerusalem . . . is a good fifty days' journey. . .

Passing thence I travelled to a certain city called Iest,<sup>26</sup> which is the furthest city of Persia towards India, from which the Sea of Sand is but one day distant. Now that sea is a wondrous thing, and right perilous. . . In this city of Iest there is very great store of victuals and all other good things that you can mention; but especially is found there great plenty of figs; and raisins also, green as grass and very small, are found there in richer profusion [quantity] than in any other part of the world. . .

. . .

. . . I came unto the city of Cansay,<sup>27</sup> a name which signifieth "the City of Heaven." And 'tis the greatest city in the whole world, so great indeed that I should scarcely venture to tell of it. . . It is a good hundred miles in compass, and there is not in it a span of ground which is not well peopled. . . This being so, I greatly marveled how such numbers of human bodies could manage to dwell in one place, and yet there is always there great plenty of bread and pork, and rice and wine. . . and indeed great abundance of all other victuals. . .

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## Citation

Yule, Henry; Cordier, Henri; da Pordenone, Odorico; Ṭabīṭ, Rashīd al-Dīn; Pegolotti, Francesco Balducci; de Marignolis, Joannes; Batuta, Ibn; and de Góis, Bento. *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, new ed., rev. throughout in the light of recent discoveries by Henri Cordier. London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1913.

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22 Salt was a valuable resource in many parts of the world at this time.

23 Soltaniyeh in modern-day Iran, in the Azerbaijani region of Iran.

24 A biblical story.

25 Saveh, in modern-day Iran.

26 Yazd, in modern-day Iran, is an oasis in the Persian desert.

27 Modern-day Hangzhou, China.

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## Source 3 – The Travels of the Nestorian Chinese Monks Rabban Sawma and Rabban Markos

<b>Title</b>	<i>The Travels of the Nestorian Chinese Monks Rabban Sawma and Rabban Markos</i>
<b>Source type</b>	Secondary source reconstruction by anonymous author shortly after the deaths of the monks; this is very likely based on a primary account that didn't survive.
<b>Date</b>	1270s-1285
<b>Author</b>	Anonymous
<b>Description</b>	Account of the journey of two Nestorian Chinese monks, traveling from China to Jerusalem. In this excerpt, we have some brief observations of cities in modern-day Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. They move through networks of Nestorian Christians.

### Excerpt

The monks Sawma and Markos set out from China with the intention of visiting Jerusalem and the holy places, especially the Tomb of our Lord, so that they might obtain forgiveness of their sins and complete absolution.

...

As Sawma and Mark were practically penniless they went to the monastery of Mar Sehyon, which was situated near Tus,<sup>28</sup> the capital of Khorasan, and Mashad,<sup>29</sup> which lies a few miles to the south of Tus. In the tenth century of our era Tus was the second city of the Nishapur quarter of Khorasan. . . A century later the Mongols laid waste [destroyed] Tus, and Tabaran<sup>30</sup> increased in size and flourished. [There was another] very wealthy city,<sup>31</sup> and it had a large export trade in serpentine stone vases, gold, silver, copper, iron, turquoise, [and] malachite. . .

...

They then went on to Arbil, or Irbil,<sup>32</sup> the ancient Arbela, which lay in the plain between the Greater and Lesser Zab rivers. The town was a great trading center, and a large export trade in cotton was done there; many of its merchants were Nestorians, and its churches were, together with those of Mosul,<sup>33</sup> under the direction of a Nestorian Metropolitan.

From Arbil they went to Mosul on the Tigris, where there were large congregations of Nestorians and many churches. There the two monks were entertained at the monasteries, and were probably supplied with funds for their journey. From Mosul they travelled westwards to Sinjar by the old caravan road which passes Tall Afar.<sup>34</sup> Sinjar was a walled town, and when Sawma and Mark visited it there was a fine mosque there and many bath-houses with

28 Former city in modern-day northeastern Iran.

29 Khorasan and Mashad are located in modern-day northeastern Iran.

30 Likely another urban center near Mashad.

31 Unclear from manuscript, but possibly Bukan in the Kurdish-speaking modern-day West Azerbaijan province of Iran or Dokan in Iraqi Kurdistan in the north of Iraq.

32 City in Iraqi Kurdistan in the north of Iraq.

33 City in modern-day northern Iraq.

34 Cities in modern-day northern Iraq.

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mosaic floors. The houses were, and still are, built in step-fashion up the slope of the hill, and the country round about was very fertile. Tradition says that the Ark rested on the top of the mountain above the town, and Christians and Muslims considered the town one of the holy places.

...

From Sinjar the two monks followed the old caravan road to Nisibis,<sup>35</sup> a very old town which is mentioned in the cuneiform inscriptions. It lies. . . north-east of Mosul and is two days' journey from Jazirat ibn-'Umar<sup>36</sup> on the Tigris. It is surrounded by the river Hirmas. According to Yakut<sup>37</sup> it contained 40,000 gardens! Still following the old caravan road the two monks went to the great rock fortress of Mardin,<sup>38</sup> with its castle which was called "Albaz," that is, "the Falcon." The houses were, and still are, built in step-fashion up the mountain side, and the town was famous for its markets, its khans<sup>39</sup> or inns, and its colleges.

From Mardin the two monks paid visits to the monasteries in . . . the country on the right or west bank of the Tigris . . . [The] Tigris flowed half round the city in a semicircle, while a ditch filled with water on the land side made it into an island. It was an important trading center, whither all the products of Armenia were brought for sale; the houses were of stone, and the town was surrounded by a wall. It is about 105 miles downstream of Diyar Bakr,<sup>40</sup> or Amid. . . It will be noted that all the towns visited by Sawma and Mark were trading centers, where well-to-do merchants congregated for business purposes; and we may assume that many of the merchants would be Nestorians, and that our travelers would receive help from them.

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## Citation

Wallis Budge, E. A. , *The History of The Life and Travels of Rabban Sawma, Envoy and Plenipotentiary of the Mongol Khans to the Kings of Europe, and Markos Who as Mar Yahbh-Allaha Iii Became Patriarch of the Nestorian Church in Asia*. Accessed June 27, 2019. <http://www.aina.org/books/mokk/mokk.htm>.

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35 The city of Nusaybin in modern-day southeastern Turkey.

36 Cizre in modern-day southeastern Turkey.

37 Likely referring to the Arab geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi (1179-1229).

38 City in modern-day southeastern Turkey.

39 Possibly referring to khanqahs, or Sufi Muslim monasteries where traveling Sufis may gather and stay.

40 Northern area of Mesopotamia.



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## Source 4 – The Book of Margery Kempe

<b>Title</b>	<i>The Book of Margery Kempe</i>
<b>Source type</b>	Primary source – travel narrative
<b>Date</b>	c. 1440, compiled in England
<b>Author</b>	Margery Kempe (c. 1373—after 1438)
<b>Description</b>	This is an excerpt from the writings of Margery Kempe, an English Christian mystic and traveler. In her autobiography, she chronicled her spiritual experiences and her pilgrimages.

### Excerpt

And so they went on into the Holy Land until they could see Jerusalem. And when this creature<sup>41</sup> saw Jerusalem—she was riding on [a donkey]—she thanked God with all her heart, praying him for his mercy that, just as he had brought her to see this earthly city of Jerusalem, he would grant her grace to see the blissful city of Jerusalem above, the city of heaven. . .

Then they went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and they were let in on the one day at [evening prayer] time, and remained until [evening prayer] time on the next day. Then the friars lifted up a cross and led the pilgrims about from one place to another where our Lord had suffered his pains and his Passion, every man and woman carrying a wax candle in one hand. . .

And when they came up on to the Mount of Calvary, she fell down because she could not stand or kneel, but writhed and wrestled with her body, spreading her arms out wide, and cried with a loud voice as though her heart would have burst apart, for in the city of her soul she saw truly and freshly how our Lord was crucified. . .

Afterwards she rode on a [donkey] to Bethlehem . . . to the church and to the crib where our Lord was born. . . she would have liked to return again to Jerusalem, because of the great grace and spiritual comfort that she felt when she was there, and to gain herself more pardon. And then our Lord commanded her to go to Rome, and so on home to England. . .

And as she traveled to Venice, many of her companions were very ill, and all the time our Lord said to her, “Don’t be afraid, daughter, no one will die in the ship that you are in.” And she found her feelings completely true. And when our Lord had brought them all to Venice again in safety, her fellow countrymen abandoned her and went off, leaving her alone. . .

Afterwards, while this creature was in Rome, our Lord bade her give away all her money and make herself destitute for his love. And she immediately, with a fervent desire to please God, gave away such money as she had, and such also as she had borrowed from the broken-backed man who went with her. When he found out how she had given away his money, he was greatly moved and displeased that she had given it away, and spoke very sharply to her. And then she said to him, “Richard, by the grace of God, we shall come home to England very well. And you shall come to me in Bristol in Whitsun week,<sup>42</sup> and there I shall pay you well and truly, by the grace of God, for I trust faithfully that he who bade me give it away for his love will help me to pay it back.” And so he did. . .

### Citation

Kempe, Margery. *The Book of Margery Kempe*. New York: Penguin; Viking Penguin, 1985.

<sup>41</sup> Kempe writes in the third person, calling herself “this creature” to express her humility before God.

<sup>42</sup> The Christian festival of Pentecost, on the seventh Sunday after Easter. It marks the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Christ’s disciples.



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## Source 5 – The Travels of Ibn Battuta in Asia and Africa

<b>Title</b>	<i>The Travels of Ibn Battuta in Asia and Africa</i>
<b>Source type</b>	Primary source/secondary source. Ibn Battuta dictated his account to Ibn Juzayy after his travels ended. There is speculation that parts of the work were borrowed from earlier travel accounts, like that of Ibn Jubayr.
<b>Date</b>	1325-1354
<b>Author</b>	Ibn Battuta
<b>Description</b>	This excerpt focuses on Ibn Battuta's observations in Egypt and East Africa, in which he describes markets, goods, and networks of trade.

### Excerpt

I went to Samannúd,<sup>43</sup> whence I journeyed upstream to Cairo, between a continuous succession of towns and villages. The traveler on the Nile need take no provision with him, because whenever he desires to descend on the bank he may do so, for ablutions, prayers, provisioning, or any other purpose. There is an uninterrupted chain of bazaars from Alexandria to Cairo, and from Cairo to Assuan [Aswan] in Upper Egypt.

I arrived at length at Cairo, mother of cities and seat of Pharaoh the tyrant, mistress of broad regions and fruitful lands, boundless in multitude of buildings, peerless in beauty and splendor, the meeting-place of comer and goer, the halting-place of feeble and mighty, whose throngs surge as the waves of the sea, and can scarce be contained in her for all her size and capacity. It is said that in Cairo there are twelve thousand water-carriers who transport water on camels, and thirty thousand hirers of mules and donkeys, and that on the Nile there are thirty-six thousand boats belonging to the Sultan and his subjects, which sail upstream to Upper Egypt and downstream to Alexandria and Damietta, laden with goods and profitable merchandise of all kinds. On the bank of the Nile opposite Old Cairo is the place known as The Garden, which is a pleasure park and promenade, containing many beautiful gardens, for the people of Cairo are given to pleasure and amusements. I witnessed a [celebration] once in Cairo for the sultan's recovery from a fractured hand; all the merchants decorated their bazaars and had rich stuffs, ornaments and silken fabrics hanging in their shops for several days. . . [Locals] go out to spend the night there also on the "Night of mid-Sha'bán,"<sup>44</sup> and the market-people take out all kinds of eatables.

...

On leaving Zayla<sup>45</sup> we sailed for fifteen days and came to Maqdashaw [Mogdishu], which is an enormous town. Its inhabitants are merchants and have many camels, of which they slaughter hundreds every day [for food]. When a vessel reaches the port, it is met by sumbuqsy which are small boats, in each of which are a number of young men, each carrying a covered dish containing food. He presents this to one of the merchants on the ship saying, "This is my guest," and all the others do the same. Each merchant on disembarking goes only to the house of the young man who is his host, except those who have made frequent journeys to the town and know its people well; these live where they please. The host then sells his goods for him and buys for him, and if anyone buys anything from him at too low a price or sells to him in the absence of his host, the sale is regarded by them as invalid. This practice is of great advantage to them.

### Citation

Ibn Battuta. *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325–1354*, edited by Sir E. Denison Ross and Eileen Power, translated by H.A.R. Gibb. London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1929.

<sup>43</sup> City in northern Egypt in the Nile Delta.

<sup>44</sup> Sha'bán is the month before Ramadan in the Islamic lunar calendar.

<sup>45</sup> Port in modern-day northwestern Somalia.

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## Source 6 – The Travels of Marco Polo

<b>Title</b>	<i>The Travels of Marco Polo</i>
<b>Source type</b>	Primary source/secondary source (Marco Polo's account is being retold by a contemporary who cowrote the account).
<b>Date</b>	c. 1300
<b>Author</b>	Marco Polo
<b>Description</b>	A thirteenth-century travelogue, cowritten by Marco Polo and Rustichello da Pisa. It narrates Polo's travels through Asia between 1271 and 1295. This excerpt focuses on trade in south India.

### Excerpt

When the traveler leaves the island of Ceylon [Sri Lanka] and sails westward for about sixty miles he comes to the great province of Maabar [Malabar Region], which is called Greater India.<sup>46</sup> It is indeed the best of the Indies and forms part of the mainland. . . this province is the richest and most splendid in the whole world. And I will tell you why. . . Fine pearls of great size and beauty are found in his kingdom; for the fact is that most of the world's pearls and precious stones are found in Maabar and Ceylon.

...

[In Maabar], a group of merchants will enter into partnership and form a company, and they will take a large ship specially fitted out for the purpose on which each will have his own room equipped and furnished for his use with a tub full of water and other necessities. There are many of these ships, for there are many merchants engaged in this type of fishing and they form numerous companies. The merchants who are associated together on one ship will also have several boats to tow the ship through the gulf. And they hire many men, giving them a fixed sum for the month of April and the first half of May, or as long as the fishing season lasts in this gulf.

...

Let me tell you next that this country does not breed horses. Consequently the entire annual revenue, or the greater part of it, is swallowed up by the purchase of horses. . . the merchants of Hormuz, Kish, Dhofar, Shihr and Aden<sup>47</sup> – all provinces where chargers and other horses are plentiful – as I was saying, the merchants of these provinces buy up the best horses, load them onto ships and take them to this king [of Maabar] and his four brothers, who are also kings. They sell each one for no less than 500 saggi of gold, which is worth more than 100 silver marks. And I assure you that this king buys no fewer than 2,000 of them every year and his brothers as many more. And by the end of the year not one of them has 100 left. They all die because these people have no farriers [horse caretakers] and no idea how to care for them, so ill treatment kills them off. And you can take it from me that the merchants who export these horses neither bring farriers with them nor allow any to come here, because they are only too glad for these kings' horses to die off in large numbers.

### Citation

Polo, Marco *The Travels*, translated by Nigel Cliff. New York: Penguin, 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Historic and geographic area of southwest India.

<sup>47</sup> Trading cities on islands and coasts of the Persian Gulf or Indian Ocean, near modern-day Iran, UAE, Oman, and Yemen.