

The question of authenticity concerning *Of the Noble and Magnificent City of Kin-Sai* poses a fascinating issue for the informed reader. Scholars seek to understand and confirm the exact travels that Marco Polo claims. Questions of authenticity conflict as some view Marco Polo as a man who may have enjoyed greater prowess as a teller of tales than as a respected scholarly anthropologist. The search for meaning in Polo's words arrives with further issues as variations in translation by multiple scholars over the centuries come with added material; other phrases are simply lost in translation. In spite of these critiques, the writings of Marco Polo do not fail to stimulate the imagination and describe an exciting new world almost certainly unknown to indigenous Europeans of the time.

In this case, *Of the Noble and Magnificent City of Kin-Sai*, could not possibly represent a reliable primary source as it has been altered far too often to maintain its authenticity. The original draft no longer exists, while the reputed "F text" written in Franco-Italian only remains at the Bibliothèque National de Paris. There exist two sets of translation for a total of 150 versions: an A series infamous for its diversions and elaborations made by subsequent authors beyond the context of the F text. The B series describes a set of translations that augment the original text with elaborations of history, geography, and clarity for confusing areas of the F text, perhaps remnants of a second edition now lost to history. This compendium of information has been gathered and reinterpreted so often that its legitimacy as authentic source material has been seriously damaged in the process. Based on this description, it more likely would represent a secondary source.

However, the work itself is an invaluable scholarly reference. Marco Polo was not the first European to spend years of his life in Mongolia nor was he the first to write of his travels in Asia; he was eclipsed by authors who penned their own accounts of the region, Benjamin of Tudela and the Franciscan missionaries Giovanni da Pian del Carpine and William of Rubruck. Polo benefitted from his

discipline as a copious note taker while abroad and access to a diligent ghostwriter in Rustichello of Pisa who drove Polo to organize himself and share his experiences. The results detailed carnal pleasures of exotic courtesans, economic oddities such as paper money, and an efficient public infrastructure replete with firefighters, policemen, an army, and a hospital. With great attention to detail in the description of buildings, countryside, and living style, the dismissal of *Of the Noble and Magnificent City of Kin-Sai* would appear to many as a foolhardy decision.

In spite of its merits, certain critiques persist. One of the most important concerns the scholarly reputation of Polo's colleague. Apart from his associations with the famous traveler, Rustichello was also known for his legendary accounts of King Arthur. In an age before the printing press when hand copied books were the only option, Rustichello adapted the writing of *Palamedes* upon receipt from Edward I, which is by some accounts a rambling description of Arthur's exploits. Other problems with Polo's work include the lack of description detailing the certain peculiarity of an unfamiliar written language, the failure to discuss the Great Wall of China, and the weak attention to detail in describing how the feet of women were often bound in order to limit growth. Other accounts of inconsistency stem from Polo's affiliation with Kublai Khan and the recounting of military events such as the Battle of Xiangyang, an altercation that took place before Polo could have possibly arrived in the region. Finally, Polo's position in the government of Khan has no record in spite of meticulous record-keeping practices. Even with these issues surrounding the authenticity of *Of the Noble and Magnificent City of Kin-Sai*, Chinese scholars have discovered details within the text that could only come from an informed point of view. Ultimately, each claim must be judged individually in order to determine its merit.