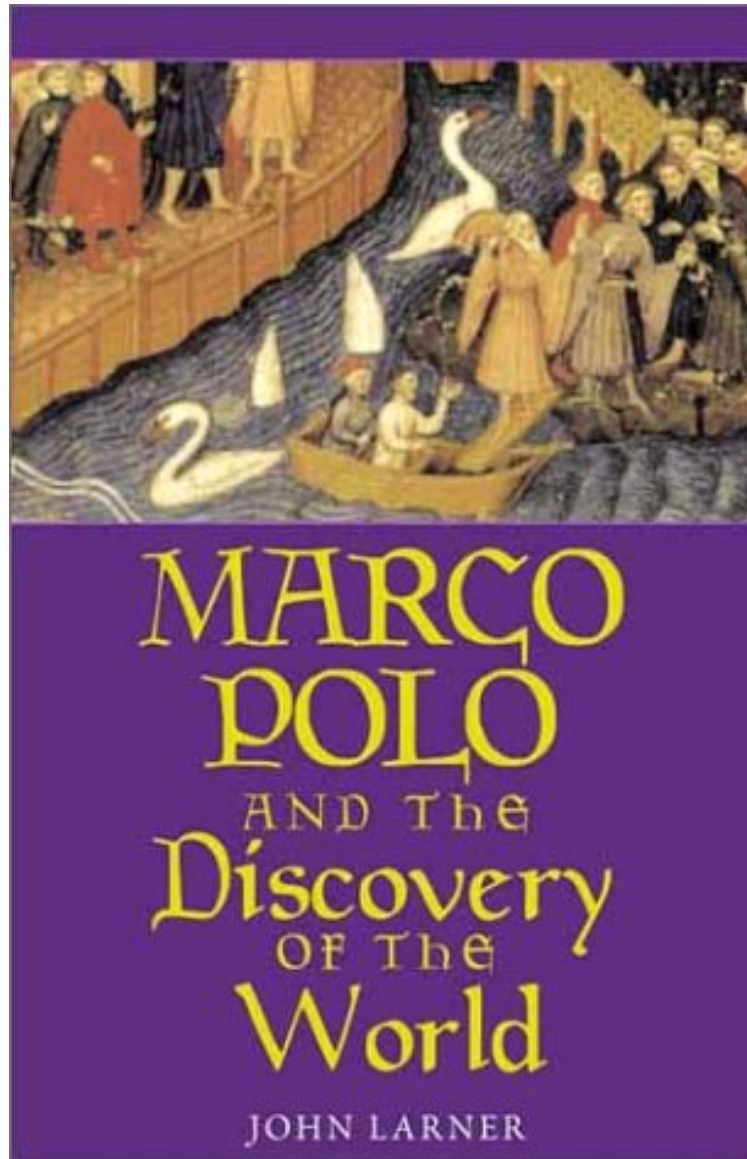


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Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World

John Larner

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John Larner : Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World:

0 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Not for a 100 level college course By Ashleyanna really hard read, if your a professor, this book is too complicated for an intro course, a 200 course maybe... unless your actually a good teacher, and not someone who should be fired but sadly has tenure so you cannot be, and we all have to suffer for it

(but that's another story.)5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. The Legacy of Marco Polo !By buddhamanThis book is by far and without question the best book you can buy about Marco Polo ! Larner is learned and even handed with the facts - of course you'll need to read Polo's " Description of the world first , and Larners book will decode it for you in a way that will open up Marco's world - few other books come close , of course Sir Henry Yule's life's work , which is without equal and lead the way Larners volume, that builds and clarifies in a way Yule's does not.Lastly another work that comes close but from a different angle is " In the footsteps of Marco Polo " by Explorers Francis O'Donnell and Dennis Beelefold , it chronicles their two year 25,000 mile journey as they retraced the entire route of Marco Polo - The first and only team in history to do so - their book is a companion to the Emmy nominated documentary of the same name !58 of 60 people found the following review helpful. Quel Ver cha Faccia di MenzognaBy Richard R"That Truth which has the Face of a Lie", (p.116), this is John Larner's theme as he reviews Polo's famous book, an account of the Venetian's twenty-four year voyage to the Khan's court in China and back again. Larner explains why Polo's book is an extraordinary achievement, not because it is a great diary, nor because Polo was a particularly perceptive observer, but simply because it was written at all when so little hard data was coming from the East, and thus the broad influence it had on the West.In one passage (p.85), that could usefully have come earlier, Larner explains, "...Who is Marco Polo? He is not an adventurer, a merchant, or a Christian missionary; he is rather a minor Mongolian civil servant who during his years in the East has been an observer or student of the topography and human geography of Asia, of its customs and folklore, of, above all, the authority and court of the Great Khan, all seen from a Mongol point of view. Then, having taken early retirement, he has sought an audience for his memories. Marco left Venice in 1271 at the age of seventeen. He returned in 1295, twenty-four years later, aged forty-one. Take these facts, together with a truly remarkable feature of the Book: that in describing the eastern world there is no evidence of culture shock."This is a book for scholars, for those who have read Polo's work. The endnotes and bibliography extend for almost fifty pages, revealing to the novice the existence of an entire academic sub-stratum devoted to the study, debunking, and defense of Marco Polo. Larner analyses Polo's book and its importance, rather than Polo himself or the importance of his voyage. Readers interested in a voyage almost unimaginable in today's small, well-charted world should start with Polo's book itself, whose very simplicity and dryness inspired Larner but may put off newcomers.Several years after returning from the East, Polo dictated the book to a cellmate in a Genoese prison. Thereafter it was translated and copied dozens of times, with each subsequent interpreter adding his own biases atop Polo's simple prose. Illustrators drew fantastic creatures of the East that Polo never mentioned. As a result, many scholars grew convinced that Polo never made it past the Black Sea and the book was a pack of lies. Larner does a credible job debunking these ideas, although he tends to fall so in love with Marco that his own defenses can appear manufactured, as on p.64 when he ascribes an obvious falsehood in Polo's book to his co-writer's attempts to spice up the text. Perhaps Polo lied, or forgot, or the co-writer misheard, but we have no way to know; there is no evidence one way or the other, and this reader wondered whether Larner's attempts to excuse Polo indicated that he had surrendered his objectivity. On another occasion (p.102), he explains away Polo's virulent anti-Muslim prejudices by suggesting these views are not really so extreme and, in any case, were part of the contemporary worldview.The book is a good one, not without flaws, but instructive, interesting, and eye-opening. The maps and color illustrations are gorgeous, and Marco Polo himself is such a compelling figure that it is simply interesting to read more about him than he reveals in his own words

After many years in Asia, Marco Polo wrote one of the most influential books of the past millennium. No mere travel account, Polos Book is a work that played a key role in the development of European overseas expansion. In this engaging and authoritative book, historian John Larner explores for the first time the full range of influence of Polos Book on the history of geography and exploration. Larner assesses the findings of modern scholarship and offers an original account of Polo and his family, of how and why the Book came into being, and of its reception over the centuries.Beginning with a discussion of the extent of European knowledge of Asia early in the thirteenth century, Larner considers what is known about Marco Polos life and the composition of his text. He examines the Books scope and sources (vindicating its author from recent claims that he never visited China), as well as the nature of Polos cooperation with his co-author Rustichello da Pisa. He traces the manuscript forms and translations of Polos Book in the Middle Ages, its influence on Western cartographers, its fortunes in the climate of fifteenth-century humanism, the possible extent of its encouragement to Columbus, and its later evolution into such new guises as the object of historical scholarship and exotic curiosity. Finally, Larner provides a fresh view of the enigmatic Polo, who, despite a deliberate cultivation of impersonality, continues today to engage the attention of readers.

.com Marco Polo is important not because he traveled extensively in Asia--other 13th-century Europeans did that--but because he wrote down his experiences for others to read. In this excellent study, John Larner of Glasgow University assesses the impact of Polo's Travels on the intellectual society of his day. The book's contribution to learning was immense, giving medieval Europeans new information that forever changed their understanding of Europe's place in the world. Larner analyzes different versions of the book, originally written in a Genoa prison and translated into many

languages within Polo's lifetime. He illustrates a number of fascinating early maps and analyzes Polo's influence on later geographical and literary treatises. Though Polo says very little about himself, Lerner finds clues to his personality. Polo left Venice when he was 17 and remained in Asia until he was 41; Europe must have seemed strange to him, even uncouth, after his decades of service to Kublai Khan, Mongol emperor of China, the richest and most sophisticated country in the world at the time. Polo formed a strong affinity with the Mongolians, which may explain his failure to learn the Chinese language or mention Chinese customs such as tea-drinking or foot binding, occasionally suggested as evidence that he never in fact visited China. *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World* demonstrates in straightforward language and with satisfying detective work how the record of a man's travels became one of the most influential books of the millennium. --John Stevenson

From *Library Journal*Lerner (*Culture and Society in Italy 1290-1420*) focuses on the book that Marco Polo produced. After setting the stage, he introduces us to both Marco Polo and the man he believes was his coauthor, Rustichello da Pisa (whom Polo met when both were prisoners of the Genoese). He makes his case by arguing that the type of occupation-specific education that Polo, a member of Venice's mercantile class, had received before his journey to China would not have enabled him to write a literate narrative. Rustichello, on the other hand, was a minor author of literary romance, an ideal partner to sort out Polo's notes and arrange them into the work that captivated a generation. (Its geographical content, descriptions of Chinese cities and Mongol customs, and emphasis on the wealth of the East, Lerner argues, inspired the Age of Discovery.) He also refutes Frances Wood's theory (in *Did Marco Polo Go to China?*, *LJ* 9/1/95) that he never went to China by presenting reasoned proof that he couldn't have been anywhere else for 24 years. Of interest to students and lay readers with an interest in history; for academic and larger public libraries.

ARobert James Andrews, Duluth P.L., MN
Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. In *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World*, John Lerner aims to demonstrate the Venetian's contribution to the age of European discovery by comparing 'what was generally believed about the geography of the world' before Polo wrote his book with what it was afterward. -- William McGurn, *Wall Street Journal*Lerner shows us that the accounts of Polo's experiences opened up for his contemporaries a sensuous world that was wholly new to them. His book gave the West a body of geographical knowledge previously unmatched in scale. The information the book, at first ignored, but later embraced by cartographers, changed forever the European understanding of the world. In this engaging and authoritative study of Polo's great masterpiece, John Lerner teases out a fresh sense of the enigmatic man himself. -- Don DeNevi, *Palo Alto Daily News*Much is alien and strangely wondrous in the history of the book. So John Lerner makes clear in his learned history of the book of travels that Marco Polo, a Venetian merchant who became a minor official of a Mongol khan, co-authored in a 13th century Genoese prison. -- Tom Engelhardt, *Los Angeles Times*[An] erudite and highly personal book. -- Jonathan Spence, *The New York Times Book*