

This monograph is unlike any of the other ones on this website. The maps shown here are not attractive, artistic or well designed at all. But, if authentic, are significant in their provenance and the alleged source, Marco Polo. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century (around 1271), Italian merchant and explorer Marco Polo traveled from Venice to the far reaches of Asia, a journey he chronicled in a narrative titled *Il Milione*, later known as *The Travels of Marco Polo*. This narrative describes the Polos' 24-year journeys throughout Asia, giving Europeans their first comprehensive look into the inner workings of the Far East, including China, India, and Japan. An authoritative original version of Marco Polo's book does not and cannot exist, for the early manuscripts differ significantly. The published editions of his book either rely on single manuscripts, blend multiple versions together, or add notes to clarify, for example in the English translation by Henry Yule. The 1938 English translation by A.C. Moule and Paul Pelliot is based on a Latin manuscript found in the library of the Cathedral of Toledo in 1932, and is 50% longer than other versions. Approximately 150 manuscript copies in various languages are known to exist, and before availability of the printing press discrepancies were inevitably introduced during copying and translation. The popular translation published by Penguin Books in 1958 by R.E. Latham works several texts together to make a readable whole.

Polo related his memoirs orally to Rustichello da Pisa while both were prisoners of the Genova Republic. The idea probably was to create a handbook for merchants, essentially a text on weights, measures and distances. While Polo's writings would go on to inspire the European explorers such as Christopher Columbus throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, scholars have long debated their veracity. Some have argued that Polo never even reached China, while others believe that he came as far as the Americas. Also, the narratives of Marco Polo influenced the maps made during this same period. Now, there's new evidence for this historical puzzle: a very curious collection of fourteen little-known maps and related documents said to have belonged to the family of Marco Polo himself.

In the 2014 book *The Mysteries of the Marco Polo Maps*, an associate professor of history and philosophy Benjamin B. Olshin offers the first credible book-length analysis of these artifacts, charting their course from obscure origins in the private collection of Italian-American immigrant Marcian Rossi in the 1930s; to investigations of their authenticity by the Library of Congress, J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI; to the work of the late cartographic scholar Leo Bagrow; to Olshin's own efforts to track down and study the *Rossi Collection*, all but one of which are in the possession of Rossi's great-grandson Jeffrey Pendergraft. Olshin explores whether the maps are contemporary originals, forgeries, facsimiles, or modernized copies. Marco Polo's daughters—whose names appear on several of the artifacts—preserved in them geographic information about Asia first recorded by their father. The question of whether the daughters inherited the maps created by their father is explored.

Regardless of the maps' provenance, Olshin's exploration—stretching from the remote reaches of the northern Pacific to early Chinese legends—attempts to find some answers about these strangely ignored maps. You would think that, like the infamous *Vinland* map of 1440 (#243), the purported provenance of these maps would have resulted in much more scholarly attention than it has until Olshin.

This monograph will merely review and summarize the extensive research and analysis diligently performed by Mr. Olshin by using excerpts from his book to describe each map.



*The estimated travel routes of the Polo expeditions 1272-1295*

The maps discussed herein are part of the *Rossi Collection*. This collection of text and maps allegedly originated in Venice, Italy and was taken to the United States by Marcian F. Rossi in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Rossi's claims, the maps had come down to his family by way of Admiral Ruggero Sanseverino, a contemporary of Marco Polo, and then, several centuries later, from the Sanseverino family to the Rossi family. Currently they are in the possession of Jeffery R. Pendergraft, a relation, by marriage to the Rossi family. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century attempts were made by Rossi to find out more about these artifacts. From the 1930s through the 1950s Rossi corresponded with the Library of Congress about the documents. The maps and documents demanded investigation into all kinds of disciplines, including genealogy, cartography, Italian history, Chinese history and Chinese, Arabic and Italian languages.

According to Olshin, as far as we know, Marco Polo left no maps related to his travels. Indeed, some have expressed doubt as to whether Marco Polo ever traveled at all, since the narrative about his trip through Asia is secondhand, apparently penned by his prison cellmate, Rustichello da Pisa, to whom Polo dictated his oral account. Moreover, the narrative seems to leave out key elements of Chinese culture, such as the drinking of tea, and makes no mention of the Great Wall. But the narrative itself, often called *Il Milione* (and known by the English title *The Travels of Marco Polo*), persists, and we have the fact that this text played a key role for several centuries in both mapmaking and exploration. Toponyms from Marco Polo appear on maps even as late as the 16<sup>th</sup> century; Columbus himself owned and annotated a copy of the narrative and was

influenced by the work, especially Polo's description of Japan. Yet Marco Polo himself traveled in a period that had yet to see the development of sophisticated empirical cartography, and most of the maps that survive from this time, the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, are medieval world maps. There is, of course, also a tradition of early sea charts (*portolans*), but the Rossi documents appear to be unrelated to those types of works.

Olshin's book examines many aspects of the materials not investigated by others such as the late cartographic historian Leo Bagrow and the Library of Congress' William J. Wilson; aspects that may lend further clues to understanding the materials. The examination includes full translations and analysis of the peculiar passages in Latin, a study of the Ptolemaic depictions in some of the maps, a look at the strange mention of *Antilla*, and further insights into a Chinese connection.

The pieces that make up the 14-piece Rossi collection of maps include a variety of intriguing images and texts. Not only do they include representations of lands and seas, along with what appear to be historical narratives, but they are also connected to one another through various cross-references and persons mentioned in more than one document. The maps contained in this collection include the following:

- *Sirdomap*, a map of northeastern Asia with toponyms
- *Map with Ship*, a map of eastern Asia, along with a picture of a sailing vessel.
- *Pantect Map*, a map of eastern Asia, with an attached accompanying text.
- *Fantina Polo Map 1*, a map covering Europe, North Africa, and Asia, with a "longitude-latitude" grid and a series of place-names.
- *Fantina Polo Map 2*, a map depicting East Asia, a strait, and a peninsula with a chain of islands.
- *Moreta Polo Map 1*, a map covering Europe, North Africa, and Asia, with a "longitude-latitude" grid.
- *Map of the New World*, on the recto, a map of Europe, North Africa, and North and South America; on the verso, there is a text mentioning *Antilla* and the explorer Hernando Cortez.
- *Columbus Map*, a map of the New World, with a brief text.
- Keynote to *Pantect Map*, A text describing a voyage by Marco Polo to a chain of islands and a large peninsula in the Far East; this document is reproduced and discussed by Bagrow in his article of 1948, but the original is missing from the collection.
- *Moreta Polo Map 2*, original is missing

The documents are all on parchment, with the maps and text done in ink. Most of the texts are in Italian; there are also shorter passages in Latin, Chinese, and Arabic. Most of the writing is very clear. However, there appears to have been erasing of text in some cases, with some underwriting slightly visible (primarily so with the *Map with Ship* and the *Columbus Map*. In at least one case, there has been slight erasing and modification of text, as we will see in the discussion of the *Fantina Polo Map I*, below. As noted in this list, two of the documents are missing, and the current owner, Jeffrey R. Pendergraft, believes that there may have been others in the collection at one time that are also now missing.

The names of Marco Polo's daughters - Fantina, Bellela, and Moretta - appear on these maps and in these texts, which relate and refer to one another in various ways. Olshin cautions that the depictions of the "Polo" maps must be examined with care, since they represent a very unusual series of claims: (a) that Marco Polo traveled in the

seas beyond China; (b) that he received information from a Syrian navigator there; (c) that he also incorporated Chinese knowledge of these regions, as evidenced by the Chinese text on the maps; and (d) that well before the voyages of Vitus Bering, these areas were explored and mapped by Marco Polo, and that this information was passed on to his daughters.

Historical records tell us very little about Marco Polo's daughters, so it is rather surprising that a whole series of documents in the *Rossi Collection* contain their names and what seem to be comments about their father's travels. The names of the three daughters appear in a number of these maps and texts, often with the implication that some of these works were, in fact, penned by them.

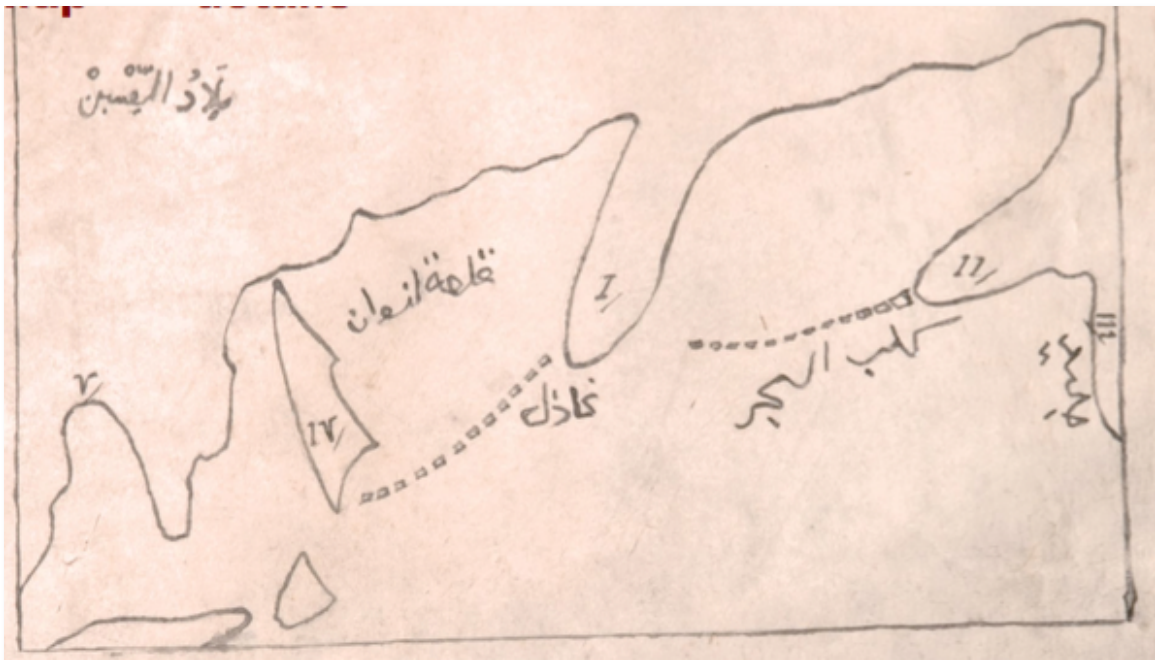
What is most remarkable about the maps discussed by Olshin is that they portray land beyond the farthest northeastern regions of Asia. These depictions would suggest knowledge of the western shores of North America in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, for which there seems little other evidence. It is interesting to note, however, that there exists a series of later maps that hint at early Chinese knowledge of the northern Pacific Ocean and its boundaries.



The *Sirdomap* map is a map of northeastern Asia with toponyms referred to by the Roman numerals I through V, and with the toponyms written in some kind of Arabic text. The second is a short text in this same script, followed by an Italian text on the same page.



Sirdomap Map



The *Sirdomap* map takes its name from an unknown Syrian mariner, a certain Biaxio Sirdomap. The map shows northeastern Asia, with toponyms in Arabic lettering; below it is a short text, apparently written by Bellela Polo; it mentions this Syrian and includes the claim that he knew her father, Marco Polo. The map has toponyms referred to by the Roman numerals I - V, a characteristic we see in two of the other maps in the collection as well. The key given in Italian at the end of the text reads as follows:

- I. *penisola de li zervi* [Peninsula of the Stags]
- II. *penisola phoca marina* [Peninsula of the Marine Seals]
- III. *Valle conzonta e giazata* [Connected and frozen valley]
- IV. *Isola de le femene* [Island of Women]
- V. *Eolfo* [i.e., *Golfo*] *Mangi* [Gulf of the Mangi]

Arabic toponym, from west to east across the map, as follows:

- [1] "the land of China"
- [2] "Ghadhil" [?]
- [3] "Linwan [?] Castle"
- [4] "Kalb al-Bahr" [i.e., "Dog of the Sea"]
- [5] "Jalid" [i.e., "frost"]

On the reverse side, this document has an attached, oval-shaped tab on which is written *Marta Veniero da Padova*. Another document in the *Rossi Collection* contains a text, apparently written by Marco Polo's daughter, Bellela Polo, about her father and his encounter with Briaxio Sirdomap in the Far East. This document is known as the *Bellela Polo Chronicle* and is one of several pieces in the collection directly citing Marco Polo's daughters.

The *Sirdomap* map is related to another document in the *Rossi Collection*, a short text in Arabic script followed by an Italian text, with the year "1267." Allegedly, this text is written by Sirdomap himself. The document's short passage in Italian claims to describe the Arabic text above it. As for the Arabic portion of this *Sirdomap Text*, an attempted translation is as follows: "Happened 300 years ago [?], departed from Syria to

the land of frost the skin [?] of the sea lion there, living [?] they speak a local tongue, fit for him/it [?] --Tartar [?]." Below that text is the year "1267" written in Arabic.

In the text, Bellela notes that:

"[M]y father Marco Polo wishes me, Bellela, to show this world map which he obtained from the pilot Biagio Sirdomap who, for at least thirty years, had sailed the coasts of Asia from Syria to the Far East, trading in seal skins..."





*Map with Ship*

The *Map with Ship*, currently in possession of the Library of Congress, has a rendering of the eastern regions of Asia, along with a picture of a sailing vessel. The *Map with Ship* itself is a strange amalgam indeed: there is the cartographic image itself, a series of peninsulas and islands in a kind of stylized frame. To the left, there is a rather crude rendering of a sailing ship. The map covers the northeastern part of Asia, a strait, and land beyond. The parchment appears as if it has been written on at different times, and there are bits of writing that have been scratched away. In terms of content, the *Map with Ship* is closely related to several other works in the collection. There is a string of crudely written Chinese characters, apparently copied from a Chinese source by someone not familiar with that writing system.

On the map itself there are toponyms in Arabic script, but some areas of the map have a numbered key, with the Roman numbers I through IV. These numerals correspond to a list in Italian that is found to the left of the map, below the drawing of the ship:

- I. India and adjacent islands, according to what the Saracens say.
- II. Cattigara of Tartary, islands of Japan, and adjacent islands.
- III. Peninsula of the Sea Lions.
- IV. Islands connected to the *Peninsula of the Stags*, situated at four hours difference from the walled provinces of *Tartary*.



The Pantect Map

The *Pantect Map* derives its name from a note in its right-hand margin that reads *Pantect De Praefectoria Potestate Interpret / in lat / Domus de Sanseverinus Uroinum*. It, too, is a map of Asia, with the place-names taken from the ancient geography of Ptolemy. An inscription in Italian alongside the map claims that an accompanying Latin text above it is a translation from the original Tartar of the famed “Golden Tablet” given to Marco Polo by the great Kublai Khan (1215-1294). The map was folded and stored in a parchment envelope.

This map provides a broader picture of Asia and approaches the region in some ways that are different from the *Map with Ship*. The term *Pantect* is unclear, but it may simply be an alternate spelling for *pandect*, which is a term for a body of laws or a legal code. The Italian text on the *Pantect Map* says:

Interpretation from the Tartar into Latin of the tablet of gold, for authority and possession of the province and adjacent peninsula, islands, Southern and Eastern Oceans, and with bordering subjects and foreign peoples, that Kublai, Emperor of Tartary, [had] made for Marco Polo of Venice, and from there [?] the explorer was rewarded with much treasure. Done [i.e., written] by Rugerius Sanseverinus.

Also in the *Pantect Map*, below the cartographic rendering, we find another brief inscription in Latin, this time discussing Tartary: *According to Polo, Tartary is one hundred and fifteen degrees seven hours distant from the Fortunate Islands, toward the East. Venice, 5 July 1297. The Fortunate Islands are quite common in early geographic texts and maps and are often interpreted as representing the Canary Islands. In Ptolemy, they are the*



point farthest west, the point from where measurement of longitude begins. Thus, it is not surprising to find them here used as a starting point for the calculation of longitude. However, according to Olshin the rest of the inscription on the *Pantect Map* is rather ambiguous. It speaks of a distance of "one hundred and fifteen degrees seven hours". Is this meant to be read as "one hundred and fifteen degrees [or] seven hours" or as "one hundred and fifteen degrees [and] seven hours"? In the first case, one should note that seven hours would be equivalent to 105 degrees (each hour being equivalent to fifteen degrees), clearly differing from the figure of 115 degrees. In the second reading, one would have 115 degrees plus 105 degrees, for a total of 220 degrees as the distance from the *Fortunate Islands* to *Tartary*.

The *Pantect Map* shows Asia from the Persian Gulf to the seas around Japan, and there are a number of place-names. Moving from west to east, we see Persia, Arabia, *Aethiopia*, and India. Then we encounter *Serica*, that is, China. There we find the city of *Cattigara*, from Ptolemy, and *Campalu*, the city of *Kanbalu*, that is, Beijing, discussed in the traditional Marco Polo narrative.

To the south is the toponym *Cangem*; this refers to the Ganges River, or more exactly what was called by the early cartographers *India extra Gangem*, meaning the part of Asia beyond the Ganges. Beyond that area, further to the south, is the *Oceanus Indicus*. To the east is the *Magnus sinus*, the "Great Gulf," a toponym also taken from the ancient geography of Ptolemy. Moving northward, we see *Cipangu*, the term for Japan found in the Polo narrative. All of these place-names are familiar from both Ptolemy and the traditional Polo narrative. But in the far north of the map, we see a string of islands connecting Asia with a land to the east. A similar configuration is in the *Map with Ship*, as well as other maps in the *Rossi Collection*. In this region of the *Pantect Map*, we find the label *Transerica pons*, literally, "trans-China bridge," a very curious toponym indeed.

To the right of the map, we have another brief inscription, with a key to numbered islands appearing on the map:

There are many islands, the primary ones being

- I. *Aualitis* or *menuthius*
- II. *Salice*
- III. *Agathadaemonis*
- IV. *Jaba diu*
- V. *Satirorurn*

These place-names are all found in Ptolemy; indeed, a number of the maps in this collection utilize the famous geographic work of Ptolemy, and they seem to represent a very early use of his text. Claudius Ptolemy, in his *Geography*, provides instructions on how to create a map of the inhabited world, termed the *oikoumene* in Greek. His text actually includes a list of longitude and latitude coordinates from which one can construct a map. When his work was rediscovered in the Middle Ages, many maps were assembled from these coordinates (see monograph #119).

The problem is that the maps in the *Rossi Collection* are allegedly from a very early period - the late 13<sup>th</sup> century - a period before Ptolemy's work had been rediscovered in Italy. In fact, the Byzantine monk Maximos Planudes (1260-1310) found a manuscript copy of the *Geography* around 1295, a time just before the purported date of this map. The work was not translated into Latin until the 15<sup>th</sup> century.



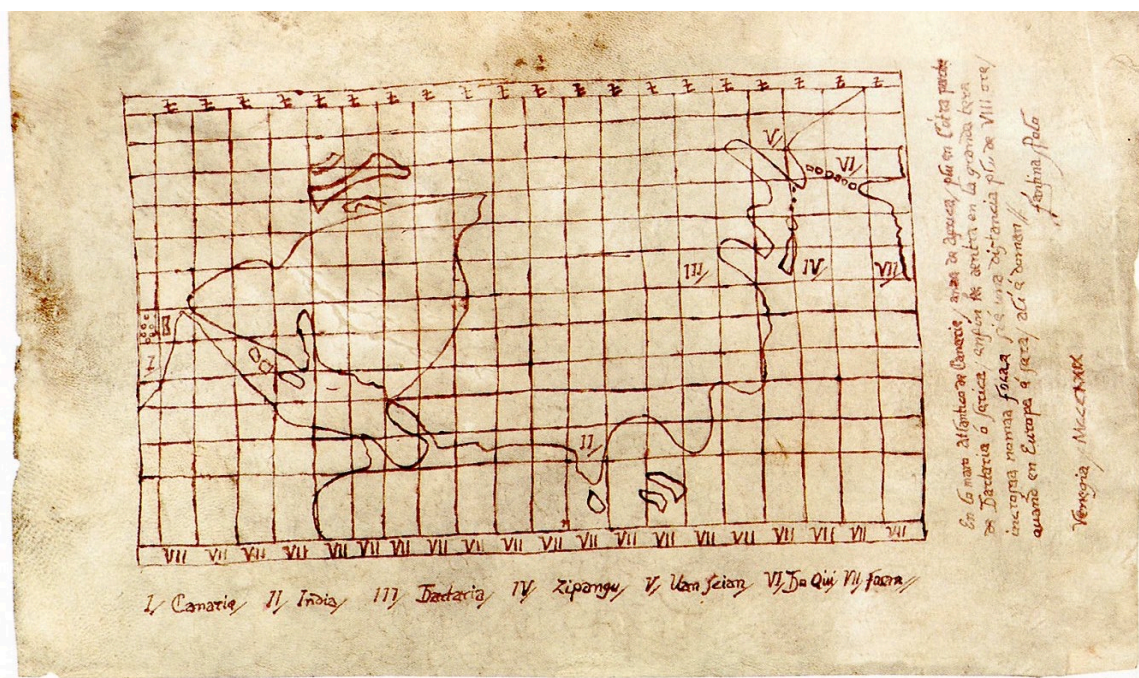
The Rossi maps reflect some knowledge of the *Geography*, but through what connection remains unclear. It is interesting to note that there is actually a quite early false connection made between Marco Polo and the geography of Ptolemy.

In 1934, Marcian Rossi sent another document to the Library of Congress for examination, a manuscript he described as a "keynote found fastened to the Pandect [sic]." The original *Keynote to Pantect Map* itself is now missing, surviving only in a photographic reproduction in Leo Bagrow's article. The recto text of this "keynote" reads:

Depiction of India and Tartary by Marco Polo, and of the many islands explored by him, so that the Great Khan honored him by giving him authority over a province of his realm. No one had ever navigated toward the east, a desert of sand three thousand miles from the Tartar realm. But Marco Polo, with ten ships, set sail and went by sea so far that he reached a chain of islands and [finally] a great peninsula. There they found caves here and there. They [i.e., the inhabitants] wear trousers and shirts of the skin of seals and deer.

According to Olshin what is especially peculiar here is the description of the voyage itself, a trip that is found nowhere in the traditional Polo narrative. On the verso side of the "keynote" document is a text that seems to be describing the content of the *Pantect Map: Universal depiction of Asia, rendered by Marco Polo. According to a hypothesis, there are seven hours or 115 meridian degrees from the islands of Viteperia or Purpura ria of the Fortunate Islands to Cattigara in Tartary. In his manuscript in our language, one reads that on these islands, every man shoots arrows at strangers [the text is not clear at this point] ... and it [i.e., this region] seems to him to be a place wild and without any use.* The discussion in this text is connected closely with that found in other Rossi documents. First of all, we have again, as we did on the *Pantect Map*, the mention of "seven hours" and "115 meridian degrees." Here they are described as being the same, even though seven hours actually would be equivalent to 105 degrees.

Here in the *Keynote to Pantect Map*, we have *Viteperia* and *Purpuraria*; the name *Purpuraria* is probably a reference to Pliny's *Purpurarii*, the "Purple Islands," so called because of the purple dye obtained from there in ancient times. Pliny, however, describes these "Purple Islands" as distinct from the *Fortunate Isles*. *Viteperia*, meanwhile, does not match any island in Pliny's discussion.



Fantina Polo Map I

The *Fantina Polo Map I* is a map covering Europe, northern Africa, and Asia, set in a kind of "longitude-latitude" grid, with place-names referred to by a series of Roman numerals. The map is signed "Fantina Polo" with the year "1329." Very similar gridded configurations are found in two other maps in this series. Another map, the *Fantina Polo Map 2*, is also signed by Fantina Polo. It bears the same date and takes the form of an oval cartouche.

The place-names here are referred to by a series of Roman numerals. Similar gridded configurations can be seen in the *Moreta Polo Map I* and the *Moreta Polo Map 2* and run as follows:

- I. Canaria [i.e., Gran Canaria, one of the Canary Islands]
- II. India
- III. Tartaria [i.e., "Tartary"]
- IV. Zipangu [i.e., the early Italian name for Japan]
- V. Uan Scian [meaning unknown]
- VI. To Qiu [meaning unknown]
- VII. Fusan [meaning unknown]

A rough rendering of the text in English is:

From the Canaries in the Atlantic Ocean off Africa, [to] beyond the other part of Tartary or Serica, [and] finally [to the] interior of that great land that has been crossed, named Focaa, is a distance of more than eight hours; when in Europe it is evening, there it is tomorrow.

Fantina Polo, Venice

1329

In this text and in the numbered key, it appears that at some point in the document's history *Fusan* was written over to render it as *Focaa*.





Fantina Polo Map 2

The *Fantina Polo Map 2* is a map depicting East Asia, a strait, and a peninsula with a chain of islands; the drawing is set in an oval frame. A series of Roman numerals again refer to a set of toponyms. The work is signed "Fantina Polo" with the year "1329." The toponyms below the map are very similar to those found on the *Fantina Polo Map 1*, just described:

- I. *Tartaria* 6 *Serica* [Tartary or Serica]
- II. *Zipangu* [Japan]
- III. *Uan Scian* [meaning unknown]
- IV. *To Qiu* [meaning unknown]
- V. *Ta Can* [meaning unknown; note that this toponym does not appear on the *Fantina Polo 1* map]
- VI. *Fusan* [meaning unknown]
- VII. *Maro Oriente* [Eastern Sea].

Just below the map, there is a text in Italian. A rough translation is as follows:

As many as there are cities surrounded by walls of stone in Tartary, so is the Eastern Ocean filled with islands, with two long peninsulas between which flow rough waters, up to the great peninsula that the Tartar sailors call Ta Can; the first is named Uan Scian ... the chain of islands To Qiu, the next peninsula Ta Can that is joined to ... a bare land; there, the men have swords of ivory and every woman ... is as beautiful as a Venus.

Fantina Polo  
Venice / 1329

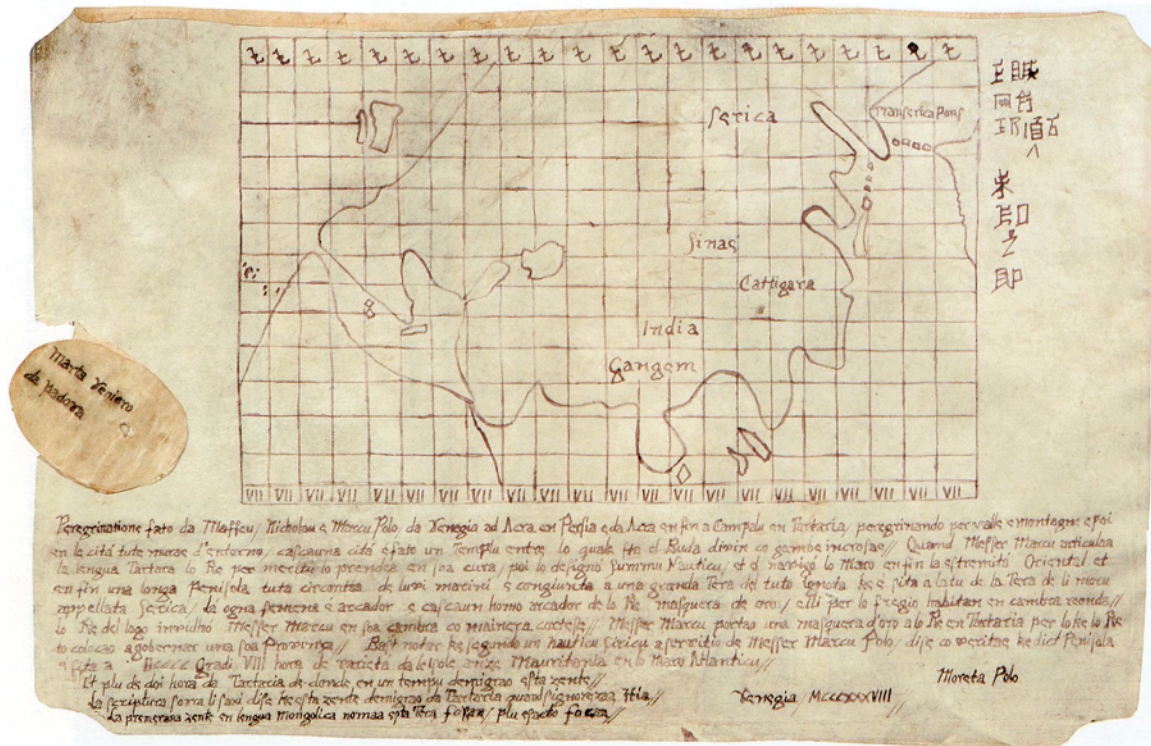
The peculiar place-names of *Uan Scian*, *To Qiu*, *Ta Can*, and *Fusan* may provide a key piece of evidence in deciphering these maps. At first glance, they seem to be nonsense—but in fact they are Italianate renderings of Chinese terms. There is an old Chinese legend of a place called *Fusang*, a land far across the seas. In that legend, these other Chinese places names also appear. This means that whoever made these maps knew of this Chinese story and was able to render the toponyms in Italian.

These toponyms match exactly the place names in the Chinese story of Fusang as it appears in the *Book of Liang* (*Liáng Shū*), dating from the seventh century A.D.:

- Uan Scian = *Wén Shen* [literally, "tattooed bodies", perhaps a reference to the Ainu people; this land of the "tattooed people" was said to be some "7,000 li" to the northeast of Japan]
- Ta Can = *DàHàn* [i.e., *DàHàn Guó*, literally, "Great Han Country", a land said to be to the east of Wen Shen]
- Focan = *FúSāng* [a mythical land to distant east of China and/or a mythical mulberry tree growing there]

But this story of *Fusang* was only known in the West in 1761, and was published in French (by the sinologist Joseph de Guignes) with the placenames romanized into French, certainly not Venetian Italian. These documents here seem to imply an Italian transcriber of a Chinese speaker.





Moreta Polo Map I

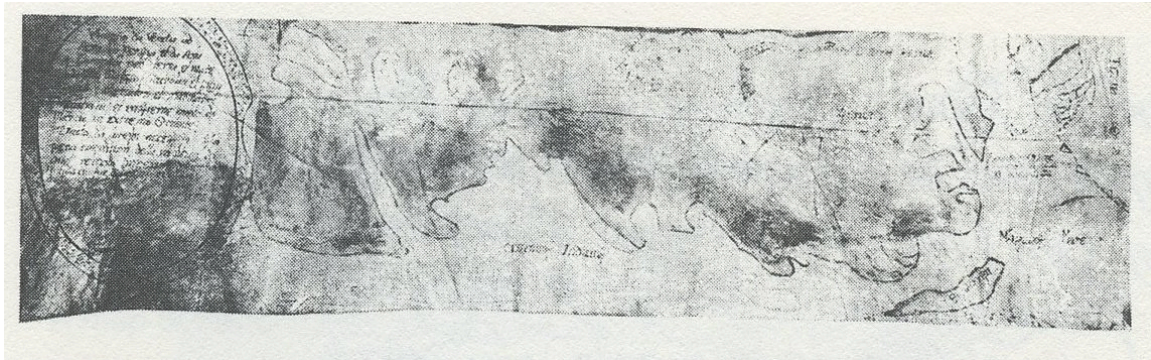
The name of Moreta Polo, Marco Polo's youngest daughter, appears on several maps in this series. The first map, *Moreta Polo Map I*, displays the same kind of gridded configuration found in the *Fantina Polo Map 1*. Another piece, the *Moreta Polo Map 2*, actually has maps on two sides. On one side, we find a map covering parts of South and East Asia and an oval cartouche, and on the reverse we see a map covering Europe, northern Africa, and Asia, again with a "longitude-latitude" grid. Both of these maps contain another surprise: Chinese characters written in the margins.

The *Moreta Polo Map 1* is a map covering Europe, North Africa, and Asia; it is signed "Moreta Polo" with the year "1338." Although this map has what appears to be a "longitude-latitude" grid, it is not clear whether this grid was critical in the map's construction. The grid comprises 22 longitudinal sections. In addition to what looks like a Ptolemaic *oikoumene*, we have the addition of the eastern coasts of Asia, and to the far northeast, the label *Transerica Pons* along the coast. Each "column" of the map is labeled with a Roman numeral VII at the bottom, and with what appears to be a Chinese "seven" at the top. If these "units of seven" are degrees, then the entire map covers 7 degrees times 22, or 154 degrees total, which is less than Ptolemy's extension for the *oikoumene*. There are also some crudely written Chinese characters along the right side of the map; these appear to be almost identical to the characters that are found on the *Moreta Polo Map 2*.

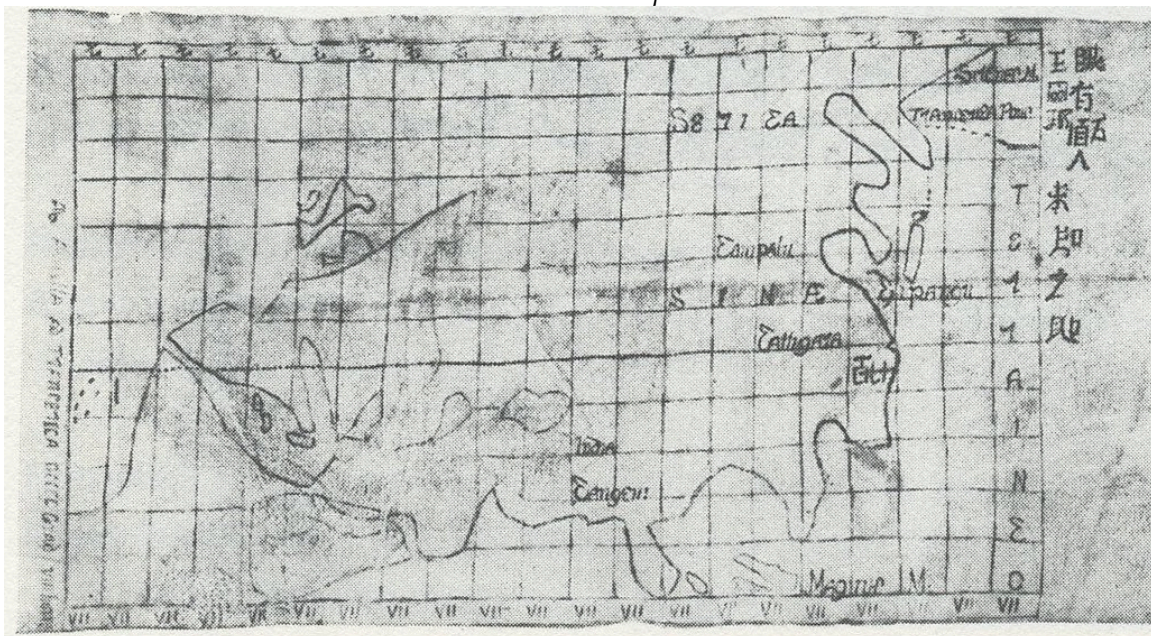
At the bottom of the *Moreta Polo Map 1*, there is a text that begins: *Journey made by Maffeo, Nicholau [sic], and Marco Polo from Venice to Acre in Persia, and from Acre finally to Campalu in Tartary, voyaging through valleys and mountains, and finally, to the completely walled city. Each city is built with a temple inside, within which sits a divine Buddha with crossed legs. When Messer Marco spoke [i.e., learned to speak] the Tartar language, the king, in gratitude, took him under his care. Then he [i.e., Marco Polo] drew a summu nauticu and*



navigated the sea up to the eastern extremity, and finally a long peninsula completely surrounded by sea wolves [luvi marini] and connected to a huge land, completely unknown that is situated beside the land that by the Moor is called Serica. There [i.e., in that huge land], every woman is [an] archer and each man [is an] archer of the king... There, because of the cold, they live in round chambers. The king of [this] locale invited Messer Marco into his chamber in a courteous manner. Messer Marco brought a mask of gold to the king in Tartary, where the king placed him to govern one of his provinces. It is sufficient to note that according to the Syrian sailor in the service of Master Marco Polo, it is said in truth that the aforementioned peninsula is situated DCCCC [= 900?] degrees [or] eight hours difference from the islands off Mauritania in the Atlantic Ocean. And [this peninsula is] more than two hours from Tartary, from where at one time this people emigrated. The writing on the stones says that this people emigrated from Tartary... The aforementioned [?] people, in the Mongolian language, named this land Foxaa, [or] more exactly, Focaa. However, the map does not seem to illustrate the voyage of the Polo clan. The text goes on to state that Marco Polo



Moreta Polo Map 2



Moreta Polo Map 2

The Moreta Polo Map 2 has two cartographic renderings: on the recto side is a map of South and East Asia, with an oval cartouche containing an inscription in Italian



(above, top); on the verso is a map covering Europe, North Africa, and Asia, all in a "longitude-latitude" grid (above, bottom)), as we observed in the *Moreta Polo Map 1*. This verso map has general Ptolemaic features, but there is also the unusual addition of the eastern coasts of Asia, as well as *Cipangu* [Japan] again, neither of which appears in Ptolemy. We find again in the northwest corner of the map *Transerica Pons*, along with a *Sirenus M[are]*. Below that region we see a series of islands curving toward a *terra inco[gnita]* that runs along the right hand edge of the map.

As in the *Moreta Polo Map 1*, the rendering on the verso side of the *Moreta Polo Map 2* has a grid, where each "column" is labeled with a Roman numeral VII at the bottom, and a Chinese "seven" at the top. There seems to be no explanation for this "seven"; such a unit of geographic measurement does not seem to appear in any other early maps or texts.

On the right hand side of this *Moreta Polo Map 2* is a brief Chinese inscription, looking almost identical to that found on *Moreta Polo Map 1*. These Chinese characters in the *Moreta Polo Map 2* appear to have been copied by someone unfamiliar with Chinese writing; their meaning is very unclear. Bagrow's article offers a partial translation from the sinologist Bernhard Karlgren: *have 1,000,000 men ... to be King over the states of the four quarters*. However, very few of the characters in the inscription can be read clearly; one can make out with reasonable assurance only a few.

Along the left-hand border of the figure on the verso of the *Moreta Polo Map* we can make out the words *Ab Antilla ad TRANSERICA DCCCC Grad / VIII ho [= horae?]*. The reference to degrees is unclear, but the *VIII ho* would seem to indicate eight hours. In the text on the recto one can make out the following words: *da Antillia cinque Milla llc octo ... Milia [?] da Junonia al ... P*. The reference to *Junonia* is reminiscent of Pliny's discussion of Atlantic islands; he has both a *Junonia* and a *Junonia Minor*. Despite the reference to *Antilla*, that locale is not depicted here; however, we do find six dots in the western sea, apparently the six *Fortunate Isles* of Ptolemy.

Olshin points out two particularly interesting points about the *Moreta Polo Map 2*. The gridded map on the verso seems to be Ptolemaic in nature, although, as noted earlier, Ptolemaic maps were apparently not known in Europe in the period in which this work was supposedly created, that is, the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. The map seems Ptolemaic in the sense that it is drawn with a grid system and it bears a number of Ptolemaic toponyms, such as *Serica*, *Cattigara*, and *Campalu*. It also displays a number of unique traits, such as the fact that where Ptolemy's map ends in the east, this depiction continues, showing an eastern shoreline for Asia, and includes the unique toponyms *Sirenus M[are]* and *Transerica Pons*.

The figures on the recto and the verso of the *Moreta Polo Map 2* display a number of other oddities, mentioned by Bagrow; however, one that he did not explore is the very interesting fact that this map mentions *Antilla*. As far as is known, the island spelled *Antilia*, first appears on a map in 1424, the *Pizzigano Chart of 1424*. While most cartographic historians assert that the Pizzigano chart is the earliest cartographic depiction of *Antilia*, it may not necessarily be the first mention of the island. On the recto of the *Moreta Polo Map 2*, the map is signed *Morett[a] Polo*; this daughter of Marco Polo died about 1375. So it would seem that this appearance of the toponym *Antilla* predates that of the Pizzigano chart by several decades (see the monograph on *Antillia on this website*).

In both of the *Moreta Polo Maps*, we find the *Fortunate Islands* again, notably *Junonia*, an island discussed in the famous *Natural History* of the Roman writer Pliny the Elder.

**Conclusion:** Olshin looked at the content of the documents in the *Rossi Collection* and found an intriguing series of clues: (a) how the maps do-and do not-look like other early maps of the late medieval and early Renaissance period; (b) the fact that some of the documents contain Ptolemaic toponyms and other characteristics, such as a grid; (c) the several mentions of the famed if mysterious locale of Antilla; and (d) perhaps most curious of all, the presence of Romanized Chinese toponyms on several of the documents.

If genuine, the maps would show that Polo recorded the shape of the Alaskan coast—and the strait separating it from Asia—four centuries before Vitus Bering, the Danish explorer long considered the first European to do so. Perhaps more important, they suggest Polo was aware of the New World two centuries before Columbus. It would mean that an Italian got knowledge of the west coast of North America or he heard about it from Arabs or Chinese. There's nothing else that matches that, if that's true. But as Olshin is first to admit, the authenticity of the ten maps and four texts is hardly settled. The ink remains untested, and a radiocarbon study of the parchment of one key map—the only one subjected to such analysis—dates the sheepskin vellum to the 15th or 16th century, a sign the map is at best a copy. Another quandary is that Polo himself wrote nothing of personal maps or of lands beyond Asia, though he did once boast: "I did not tell half of what I saw."

One reason the parchments have languished since then is their idiosyncrasy. They tell of people and places absent not just from Polo's narrative but from known history. And they're an awkward fit for the era's known map styles—*portolan* sailing charts, the grids and projections of Ptolemy, and the medieval schematics known as *mappae mundi*.

The parchments bear inscriptions, some cryptic, in Italian, Latin, Arabic and Chinese. Olshin, a professor at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, who spent more than 13 years researching and writing his new book, is the first scholar to fully decode and translate the maps and to trace Rossi's ancestry, with some success, back to Polo's Venice. One of Olshin's most tantalizing finds are allusions to *Fusang*, an obscure fifth-century Chinese name for a "land across the ocean" that some scholars now contend was America.

In an article entitled "Did Marco Polo 'Discover' America", by Ariel Sabar in the *Smithsonian Magazine*, October 2014, Sabar says that *Travels* made Polo an instant celebrity after his return to Venice, both for his descriptions of faraway lands and for what his countrymen suspected was wild fabrication. His daughters may have plunged back into their father's notes in hopes of securing his reputation, surmises Stanley Chojnacki, a University of North Carolina expert on gender relations in 14th century Venice, and "to claim by reason of defending him a certain measure of respectability and status and importance themselves."

The following two maps, the *Map of the World* and the *Columbus Map*, are also part of the *Rossi Collection* and appear to be dated beyond the late medieval period.



Map of the World, showing the mythical island Antillia

This map presents further questions but also reveals connections to other documents in the Rossi Collection. On the recto, we find a map that includes Europe and North Africa, as well as North and South America. One oddity pointed out by Olshin, however, is that here the North American and South American continents are labeled *Columbia Septentrionalis* and *Columbia Meridionalis* respectively.

There is a short text below the map, a text that takes the form of a letter addressed to a "Elisabetta Felto della Rovere Sanseverino" and signed "Guido Spinola"; at the end of the text we read "Cagliari, 20 October 1524." On the verso of this *Map of the New World*, we find a text mentioning the mythical island *Antilla* and the famed explorer Hernando Cortez.



*The Columbus Map, oriented with East and North at the top?*

The *Columbus Map* is another map showing the Americas, but quite different from the piece described above, the *Map of the New World*. Here in the *Columbus Map*, we have a large rendering of part of the Americas, but delineated in a rather awkward and distorted manner. There is a brief legend in the lower right corner of the recto side, and nothing on the verso. The legend reads:

Geographic chart [tabula geographical of the navigations and voyages of the sea and land made by Christopher Columbus, the excellent Genoese captain and valiant man, and others. The chart treats the islands and terra firma [i.e., mainland] explored up to the year 1535. With nautical signs, and complete knowledge of points of egress as well as places reached [the meaning is not entirely clear here].

Casatia, 9 January 1620

... Roberto Sanseverino

Olshin believes that the map has two different orientations: the Caribbean region oriented North and the mainland of the Americas oriented with East at the top.

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