

THREADS OF TIME

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AUTHOR'S CHOICE REVIEWS

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Author Carolyn R. Scheidies guest lectures at UNK and has done workshops on historical research. Many of her novels are historical, requiring much research, which she loves. She writes for both children and adults.

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Summary: Shows that history is more than dates. It is about people who influence those who come after them. The book interconnects eleven historical figures from Marco Polo, Columbus and Pocahantas to George Washington, Florence Nightingale and more. Includes index, teacher helps, historical documents.

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DEDICATION

My father, Rev. William Fredrickson, had what seemed to my young eyes a very large library of books. He instilled in me an appreciation for reading, for studying, and for books themselves. From him I learned the value not just of research, but of searching for the truth.

My father is gone now, but I think he would have been proud of this product of my research.

For you Dad, THE THREADS OF TIME.

PREFACE

Did you know Christian missionaries went to China long before Marco Polo arrived? How did this influence the Polos' return trip to China?

What connection did Columbus have with Marco Polo, or Squanto with Pocahontas?

How did Pocahontas influence a President of the United States?

What connects Paul Revere with Abraham Lincoln?

History is more than dry facts and figures. History is also more than single unconnected happenings or persons. History is individuals making a difference in their world. Each of us is connected to our past and our future by the lives of those with whom we come into contact. How we act and our choices do make a difference not just for today, but also for a distant future. Let's see how the following individuals made a difference.

NOTE:

When both my son and my friend's daughter, who went to different schools, came home with some astonishing news that Columbus might have done more harm than good in coming to the New World, I was taken back.

Further questioning of what they had heard made me furious at what had been implied in the classroom. Still, I know these teachers are earnestly passing on what they themselves take as truth.

How can our young people know the truth unless they can read or hear the facts for themselves, and how can they know when so much literature parades the same "politically correct," but historically inaccurate (or drastically edited) viewpoint?

History and how one views history is important for it shapes our present as well as our future attitudes and actions. If the founders of our nation, our heroes, were but greedy and self-serving hypocrites, why should we do better? If we must carry the load of Columbus' supposed misdeeds without dealing with context of time and good as well as bad, how does that influence not only how our children feel about

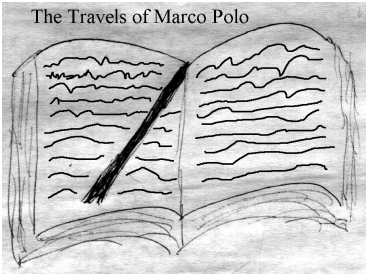
themselves, but also how the different races feel toward each other? Does it not create disharmony and suspicion?

But what did I myself know? Determinedly, I researched the lives of the eleven individuals of this book. They come from many different times, countries and races. What I found surprised me for I learned just how little I knew about each of them.

The more I searched, the more I realized how often these individuals' motives, even characters have been revised to fit current theories.

These men and women were human, imperfect individuals that need to be seen, not through the haze of our own day, but in the setting of their own time, their own society. Using, when possible, their own words, I sat down to write their stories. Stories not of saints or sinners, but of fallen human beings who succeeded because they reached outside themselves to make a difference in their world.

MARCO POLO-MAN OF WORD AND DEED



Marco Polo became known for his book of travels to Cathay, now known as China, in the 13th Century. His journey fired the imaginations of

explorers, adventurers and missionaries for hundreds of years. It was through reading Marco Polo's book that Christopher Columbus became concerned for the spiritual welfare of the people of China and began dreaming of a way to reach the east--by going west.



Marco Polo was born many centuries ago in 1254. Born into a merchant family, Marco lived in the beautiful city of Venice with its majestic buildings and flowing waterways to the sea.

The small seaport, capitol of the Veneto region and Venezia province, consisted of 118 Islands in the Venice lagoon by the Adriatic Sea. At the time Marco Polo lived, Venice controlled trade between Europe and the East, but had not yet reached the height of its influence and power.

Those fitting themselves for the Crusades to the Holy Land had to stop at Venice for ships and supplies as did other merchants, traders, and adventurers. Venice merchants were quick to take advantage of their position, and the merchants became rich.

Other merchants like Nicolo Polo (Marco's father) and Nicolo's brother Maffeo Polo became traders, traveling far and wide in search of goods to increase their wealth. During their travels, the two men made their first arduous journey to Cathay. They left behind Marco, who after the death of his mother, lived with an aunt and uncle.

Growing up, Marco learned the basics of reading, writing, and math. Because Venice was the crossroads for trading and supplies from east and west, north and south, people from all over the world could be found in the seaport town. This background gave Marco an appreciation for peoples of different cultures and backgrounds, unusual for an individual of his day. He learned not to fear that which was different from him and his own culture.

Trained as a merchant like his father, Marco also learned how to deal with not only the heavier coins of Venice, but also the coinage of other nations. He learned to carefully consider and inspect merchandise. He learned to handle cargo ships, their cargo and crews.

When Marco's father and uncle returned in 1269

from the Far East, they brought with them fabulous stories of dignified ruler, Kublai Khan that excited the younger polo.

They returned not just with riches, but also with an invitation to return. The great Khan sent them back with a mission to request of the pope. He asked that 100 men, knowledgeable about the doctrines of Christianity, be sent to his land.

He wanted them to prove to his wise men "that the faith professed by Christians is superior to," he said, "(and) founded upon more evident truth than, any other..."

He requested oil from the lamp kept at the grave of the Lord whom he considered to be the true God. The emperor, far from the center of Europe, might easily have learned about the Christian faith from the remnant of Nestorian Christians still residing in territories under his authority. Missionaries from this group had, in fact, reached China in the 7th Century.

Two years after returning to Venice, the two men, taking Marco with them, sailed from Venice to the port of Acre (now called Akko) in Palestine. From there they continued on by camel. It was a long, hard, dangerous trip, and it was three long years before the Polos reached the court of Kublai Khan.

The Polos had not been able to return immediately to China because the ruling pope had died, and they awaited the election of another in order

to put before him the Khan's request. Two friars were ordered to go with the Polos to the distant court, but they turned back, leaving Marco and the others to go on without them.

Even before they returned to China, John of Monte Corvino, an Italian Franciscan monk, left for China where he established a church around 1300 that flourished for some time.

Kublai Khan, grandson of the great conqueror and political leader Ghenghis Khan, as well as founder of China's YUAN dynasty, welcomed them heartily. They found the man a tolerant, skillful ruler. Under his leadership, the country flourished both economically and culturally. It was Kublai who changed the capitol to Cambuluc, now known as Peking (Beijing), that Marco described in some detail.

Before him, they spread the letters and gifts from Pope Gregory. Reverently, he received the holy oil that he carefully preserved.

Later, after seeing how he revered Christians, the Scriptures and Christianity itself, he was asked why he himself was not a Christian.

He told them he had seen the power of those who worshiped idols. While he believed the truth of Christianity, many Christians seemed weak and ignorant. If he saw the same wisdom and knowledge in men who claimed Christianity, he and his court with him would be baptized.

Marco wrote, "...if the pope had sent out persons duly qualified to preach the gospel, the grand Khan would have embraced Christianity."

What the Khan did do was accept Marco Polo to whom he took an immediate liking. Marco, who spoke and read at least four languages, applied himself to learning the language spoken by the Khan. This greatly pleased the Emperor who began sending the young Polo on many official tours of the kingdom.

His work was so satisfactory, the ruler made him governor of Yangchow, where he stayed for three years. During that time, he took part in the capture of the city of Sainfu.

Wherever Marco went he made careful notes. He wrote about one of Khan's palaces: The roof is very lofty and the walls are all covered with gold and silver. They are also adorned with representations of dragons, beasts and birds, knights and idols, and sundry other subjects. And on the ceiling, too, you see nothing but gold and silver painting.

Of a city he visited, he wrote: The number and wealth of the merchants and the amount of goods that passed through their hands was...enormous.... There are ten principle markets; though besides these there are a vast number of others in the different parts of the town... These markets make a daily display of every kind of vegetable and fruits...All the ten markets are encompassed by lofty houses, and below these are

shops where all sorts of crafts are carried on, and all sorts of wares are on sale, including spices, and jewels and pearls...All along the main street...both sides are lined with houses and great palaces and gardens.

He wrote of the opulence of trade goods: ...I tell you no day in the year passes that there do not enter the city, one thousand cart loads of silk alone, from which are made quantities of cloth of silk and gold and of other goods.

For all the splendor of the lands under the Khan's iron hand that Marco wrote about, China had its dark side. Parents sold their own children into slavery and prostitution. Women were treated as objects and with as little regard. On his travels, Marco encountered many barbarous customs including cannibalism and ritual suicide.

As years passed, Marco, his father and his uncle became worried that the emperor had no intention of EVER letting them return home. They believed if anything happened to their friend, his enemies would (at the very least) capture, if not kill them. And, Kublai Khan was very old.

Their chance to escape came when the emperor, because of their sailing experience, allowed them to be part of the delegation that was to send a bride, picked by the Khan, to his great-nephew, the Mongol ruler of Persia. The Polos traveled with the delegation until they reached Hormuz (a Persian port in what is now

Iran).

Then, traveling on alone, they took ship at Trebizond (now Trabzon) on the Black Sea and sailed to Constantinople (now Istanbul of Turkey) and on to Venice in 1295. Marco was now 41: they had been gone 24 years.

Though they had traveled some 15,000 miles over rugged mountains, deep wide rivers, and through dangerous countryside, they managed to bring back untold riches: ivory, jade, jewels, porcelain and silk, among other treasures.

Unfortunately, they returned home when Venice was at war with its long-time rival, Genoa (a seaport in North-West Italy), which was, at that time, an independent republic. Marco Polo went to war to defend his home, commanding a galley. Later, during the battle of Curzola, Marco Polo was captured and imprisoned by the Genoese. While in prison, using his detailed notes, he dictated his story to a popular writer, Rustichello of Pisa.

Rustichello translated the book "Description of the World" into the Old French, the literary language of the time. In the book, Marco told about Kublai Khan's prosperous country, his postal system, his use of "black stones" we know as coal, use of paper money rather than the heavy coins used by Europeans and his charity toward the needy.

Truce between Genoa and Venice came in

1299, and Marco was released to return home where he was a merchant trader until his death sometime around 1324.

Marco Polo's book, though copied by hand, since printing was still unknown in Europe, became the most widely read book in Europe. Many thought it mere fantasy, but others believed Marco polo's story and began to dream of their own adventures. One of these was a weaver's son from Genoa named Christopher Columbus.