

Until one or two of you have been punished for [these] deeds as a warning to the rest, no good will come of you.”

The Successors of Genghis Khan, translated by John Boyle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 62–65, 77, 79–83.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the significance of postal stations for the Mongols?
2. Why did Ögödei have several capitals?
3. Why did Ögödei accept poor quality goods from merchants?
4. What policies was Ögödei supporting with this description from Rashid al-Din? How did these accounts assist in ruling?

Marco Polo, The Description of the World

Marco Polo was a remarkably astute observer. An inquisitive young man, he learned about and reported on a wide variety of Chinese practices, innovations, and sites. In this selection, he provides Europeans with the first descriptions of paper money and of Khubilai Khan's summer palace at Shangdu (which he refers to as Ciandu and which Europeans knew as Xanadu). The city of Hangzhou (his "Quinsai") made a deep impression on him, and he writes more about it than other sites he visited.

See the headnote on p. 101 for additional information on this text.

Here he tells of the city of Ciandu and of the wonderful palace of the great kaan. And when one is set out from the city of Ciagannor which I have named to you above and one goes riding three days journeys then one finds a city which is called Ciandu, which the great Kaan, who now is and reigns and who has the name Cublai Kaan, who is spoken of in this book, made them make there. And in this city Cublai Kaan made them make there a vast palace of marble cunningly worked and of other fair stone, which with one end has its boundary in the middle of the city, and with the other with the wall of it. The halls and rooms and passages are all gilded & wonderfully painted within with pictures and images of beasts and birds and

trees and flowers and many kinds of things, so well and so cunningly that it is a delight and a wonder to see. It is very wonderfully beautiful and well worked. And from this palace is built a second wall which in the direction opposite to the palace, closing one end in the wall of the city on one side of the palace and the other on the other side, encloses and surrounds quite sixteen miles of plain land in circuit, in such a way that unless one starts from the palace he cannot enter into that close; & it is fortified like a castle; in which wall are fountains and rivers of running water and very beautiful lawns and groves enough. And the great Kaan keeps all sorts of not fierce wild beasts which can be named there, & in very great numbers, that is harts and bucks and roe-deer, to give to the gerfalcons to eat and to the falcons, which he keeps in mew in that place, which are more than two hundred gerfalcons without the falcons. And he always goes himself to see them in mew at least once every week. And the great Kaan often goes riding through this park which is surrounded with a wall and takes with him one tame leopard or more on the crupper of his horse, and when he wishes he lets it go and takes one of the aforesaid animals, a hart or buck or roe-deer and has them given to the falcons and gerfalcons which he keeps in mew. And he does that often for his pleasure and for amusement. And certainly this place is so well kept & adorned that it is a most noble thing of great delight. And again you may know that in the middle place of that park thus surrounded with a wall, where there is a most beautiful grove, the great Kaan has made for his dwelling a great palace or loggia which is all of canes, upon beautiful pillars gilded and varnished, and on the top of each pillar is a great dragon all gilded which winds the tail round the pillar and holds up the ceiling with the head, and stretches out the arms, that is one to the right hand for the support of the ceiling and the other in the same way to the left; but it is all gilded inside and out and worked & painted with beasts and with birds very cunningly worked. The roof of this palace is also all of canes gilded and varnished so well and so thickly that no water can hurt it, and the paintings can never be washed out; & it is the most wonderful thing in the world to be understood by one who has not seen it; and I will tell you how it is made of canes. You may know truly that those canes of which these houses are made are more than three or four palms thick and round and are from ten paces to fifteen

long. One cuts them across in half at the knot, from one knot to the other, and splits them through the middle lengthwise, and then a tile is made; and from each splitting two tiles are made. And of these canes which are thick and so large are made pillars, beams, and partitions, and they are put to many other uses, for they do many other works with them, [so] that one can roof a whole house with them and do all from the beginning,—and this palace of the great Kaan, which is in the middle of that park, of which I have told you above was all made of canes. But each tile of cane is fixed with nails for protection from the winds, and they make those canes so well set together and joined that they protect the house from rain and send the water off downwards. Moreover the great Kaan had made it so arranged that he might have it easily taken away and easily set up, put together and taken to pieces, without any harm whenever he wished, for when it is raised and put together more than two hundred very strong ropes of silk held it up in the manner of tents all round about, because owing to the lightness of the canes it would be thrown to the ground by the wind. And I tell you that the great Kaan stays there in that park three months of the year.

How the great Kaan causes sheets to be spent for money. It is true that the mint of the great lord is in this said town of Cambaluc, and it is appointed in such a way that one can well say that the great lord has the alchemy perfectly, and I shall show it you now, the reason how. Now you may know that he has such a money as I shall tell you made in this way. He makes men take the middle bark of the three barks of the trees which are called gelsus, that is of the mulberries of which the worms that make silk eat their leaves—for there are so many of them that all the country-sides are loaded and full of these said trees, and they take the thin skin which is between the thick outer bark and the wood of the tree and is white, and they grind it and pound it and of that thin skin he makes them make then with glue sheets like those of cotton paper, and they are all black. And when these sheets are made he has them cut up in this fashion—in large portions and small, and they are forms of money, square and more long than broad. For he makes a little one which is worth in their manner about a half of a small tornesel, and the next, a little

larger, is of one tornesel, also small, and the next, a little larger, is of a half Venetian groat of silver, and the next of a groat of silver which is worth a silver groat of Venese, and the next is of two Venetian groats, & the next of five Venetian groats, and the next of ten groats, and the next of one bezant of gold, and the next two bezants of gold, and the next of three bezants of gold, and the next four bezants of gold, and the next five bezants of gold, and so it goes up to ten bezants of gold. And all these sheets [or] moneys are sealed with the mark and with the seal of the great lord, for otherwise they could by no means be spent. And they are made with as much authority and formality as if they were of pure gold or silver, for many officials who are deputed for this write their names on every coin, placing there each one his mark, and when it is all done as it ought to be, the head of them deputed by the lord stains the seal entrusted to him with cinnabar and impresses it upon the coin so that the pattern of the seal dipped in the cinnabar remains printed there, and then that money is authorised. And if anyone were to counterfeit it he would be punished with the last penalty to the third generation. And different marks are printed on them according to their future value. And this money is made in the city of Cambaluc by those who are deputed for this by the king, & not by others. And each year he has so great quantity and supply of them made in the city of Cambaluc that he would pay with it for all the treasure of the world, though it costs him nothing. And in almost all the kingdoms subject to his rule none is allowed to make or spend any other money. And when these sheets are made in the way that I have told you, he has all the payments made with them, and has them distributed to each one through all the provinces and kingdoms & through all his cities and lands where he has rule, & even lands which do not obey him which do not spend this money; and none dare refuse them on pain of losing his life immediately; and no one from other kingdoms can spend other money within the lands of the great Kaan. Moreover I tell you that all the people and regions of men who are under his rule very gladly take these sheets in payment, because wherever they go under the rule of the great Kaan they take them and make all their payments with them both for goods and for pearls and for precious stones and for gold and for silver and for all other things which they carry and

sell or buy, of however great value; they can buy everything with them, and they make payment with the sheets of which I have told you as if they were altogether of real gold or silver. Moreover I tell you that they are so light that the sheet which is put for ten bezants of gold weighs not one. Moreover I tell you that many times a year the merchants come many together from Indie or from other parts with pearls and with precious stones and with gold and with silver and with other things, these are cloth of gold and of silk; and these merchants give all of these things to none in this city but to the great lord. And the great lord calls twelve wise men who are chosen [to be] over those things and who are very clever in doing this; and he commands them to look very carefully at those things which the merchants have brought and to have them paid with what it seems to them that they are worth. And those twelve wise men look at those things and when they have valued them according to their knowledge they have them paid immediately with interest that which it seems to them that they are worth, with those sheets of which I have told you. And the merchants take them very gladly because they know well that they would not have so much from any other, and secondly because they are paid for them at once, and also because they change them afterwards, as has been said, for all the things which they buy both there and through all the lands of the great lord; and also it is lighter than anything else to carry by road. And if they are from some place where these note are not used, they invest them in other merchandise good for their countries. Moreover I tell you without any mistake that many times a year the merchants bring so many things that they are well worth 400000 bezants of gold and the great lord buys of them each year so much that it is without end, and he has them all paid with those sheets, a thing which costs him little or nothing, as you have heard. And again I tell you that many times a year an order goes through the town of Cambaluc that all those who have precious stones and pearls and gold and silver or any other dear things must bring them to the mint of the great lord, & he will have them well and liberally paid with that money according to the proper value. And they do it and bring them there very willingly, because they would not receive so much for them from any other, in so great abundance that it is without number, and all are paid with sheets without delay or loss to them. And he who should not wish to

bring them, stays at home. And in this way the great lord has all the gold and the silver and the pearls and the precious stones of all his lands. And again I tell you another thing which does well to say. For when one has kept these sheets so long that they are torn and are spoilt through too great age, though they are very durable, then he takes them to the mint of the great lord and they are changed for new and clean ones, so, indeed, that he leaves three in a hundred of them for the stamp. And again I shall tell you a pretty fact which does well to tell in our book. For if a baron or other man whoever he might be wishes to buy gold or silver or precious stones or pearls to make his vessels or his girdles or his other work, he goes off to the mint of the great lord and carries some of those sheets and gives them in payment for the gold and for the silver which he buys from the master of the mint. And never is gold or silver spent, but all his armies and officials come to be paid with this sort of money of paper (of which he has as much made as he pleases), of which the value is the same to them as if it were of gold or of silver; and everything necessary for the court is bought. Now I have told you the way and the reason why the great lord must have and has more treasure than any man of this world, and you have well heard how and in what manner; & it costs him nothing, so that he can well spend marvellous sums. And everyone is obliged to buy those moneys from him. Moreover I will tell you a greater thing, that all the lords of the earth have not so great riches, treasures, and expenses as the great lord has alone. Now I have told you and described all the facts how the great lord makes money of sheets.

* * *

Here he tells of the wine which the people of the Kaan drink. And again you may know that the greater part of the people of the province of Catai drink good wine, and it is such a wine as I shall describe to you. For instead of wine they make a drink of rice, and they make the rice boil with very many other good spices mixed together, and they make it—the drink or wine—in such a way and so well and with such a flavour that it is better worth drinking than any other wine of grapes, and men could not wish better. And it is very clear and sparkling & very fragrant and beautiful. And it makes a man become drunken sooner than any other wine because it is very hot stuff, and it is sweet.

[For] Master Marc Pol was in this city many times and determined with great diligence to notice and understand all the conditions of the place, describing them in his notes, as will be briefly here said below. It was contained in that writing first of all that the city of Quinsai is so large that in circuit it is in the common belief a hundred miles round or thereabout, because the streets and canals in it are very wide and large. Then there are squares where they hold market, which on account of the vast multitudes which meet in them are necessarily very large and spacious. And it is placed in this way, that it has on one side a lake of fresh water which is very clear, and on the other there is an enormous river which, entering by many great and small canals which run in every part of the city, both takes away all impurities and then enters the said lake, and from that runs to the Ocean. And this makes the air very wholesome; and one can go all about the city by land and by these streams. And the streets and canals are wide and great so that boats are able to travel there conveniently and carts to carry the things necessary for the inhabitants. And there is a story that it has 12000 bridges, between great and small, for the greater part of stone—for some are built of wood. And for each of these bridges, or for the greater part, a great & large ship could easily pass under the arch of it; and for the others smaller ships could pass. But those which are made over the principal canals and the chief streets are arched so high and with such skill that a boat can pass under them without a mast, and yet there pass over them carriages and horses, so well are the streets inclined to fit the height. And let no one be surprised if there are so many bridges, because I tell you that this town is all situated in water of lagoons as Venese is, and is also all surrounded by water, and so it is needful that there may be so many bridges for this, that people may be able to go through all the town both inside and out by land; and if they were not in such numbers you could not go from one place to the other by land, but only by boats. On the other side of the city there is a ditch perhaps forty miles long which shuts it in on that side, and is very wide and full of water which comes from the said river. And this was made by order of those ancient kings of that province so as to be able to draw off the river into it every time that it rose above the banks; and it serves also as a defence for the city, and the earth which

was dug out was put on the inner side, which makes the likeness of a little hill which surrounds it. There are ten principal open spaces, beside infinite others for the districts, which are square, that is half a mile for a side. And along the front of those there is a main street forty paces wide, which runs straight from one end of the city to the other with many bridges which cross it level and conveniently; and every four miles is found one of these squares such as have two miles (as has been said) of circuit. There is in the same way a very broad canal which runs parallel to the said street at the back of the said squares, and on the near bank of this there are built great houses of stone where all the merchants who come from Indie and from other parts deposit their goods & merchandise that they may be near and handy to the squares. And on each of the said squares three days a week there is a concourse of from forty to fifty thousand persons who come to market and bring everything you can desire for food, because there is always a great supply of victuals; of game, that is to say of roebuck, red-deer, fallow-deer, hares, rabbits, and of birds, partridges, pheasants, francolins, quails, fowls, capons, and so many ducks and geese that more could not be told; for they rear so many of them in that lake that for one Venetian silver groat may be had a pair of geese and two pair of ducks. There are too the shambles where they slaughter the large animals like calves, oxen, kids, and lambs, the which flesh the rich men and great lords eat. But the rest who are of low position do not abstain from all the other kinds of unclean flesh, without any respect. There are always on the said squares all sorts of vegetables and fruits, and above all the rest immense pears, which weigh ten pounds a piece, which are white inside like a paste, and very fragrant; peaches in their seasons, yellow and white, very delicate. Grapes nor wine do not grow there, but very good dried ones are brought from elsewhere, and likewise wine, of which the inhabitants do not make too much count, being used to that of rice and spices. Then there comes every day, brought from the Ocean sea up the river for the space of twenty-five miles, great quantity of fish; and there is also a supply of that from the lake (for there are always fishermen who do nothing else), which is of different sorts according to the seasons of the year, and because of the impurities which come from the city it is fat and savoury. Whoever saw the quantity of the said fish would never think that it could be sold, and yet in a few

hours it has all been taken away, so great is the multitude of the inhabitants who are used to live delicately; for they eat both fish and flesh at the same meal. All the said ten squares are surrounded by high houses, and underneath are shops where they work at all sorts of trades, and sell all sorts of merchandise, and spicery, jewels, pearls; and in some shops nothing else is sold but wine made of rice with spices, for they continually go making it fresh and fresh, and it is cheap. In other streets are stationed the courtesans, who are in so great number that I dare not say it; and not only near the squares, where places are usually assigned to them, but all over the city. And they stay very sumptuously with great perfumes and with many maid-servants, & the houses all decorated. These women are very clever and practised in knowing how to flatter and coax with ready words and suited to each kind of person, so that the foreigners who have once indulged themselves with them stay as it were in an ecstasy, and are so much taken with their sweetness and charms that they can never forget them. And from this it comes to pass that when they return home they say that they have been in Quinsai, that is in the city of Heaven, and never see the hour that they may be able to go back there again. In other streets are stationed all the physicians, astrologers, who also teach to read and to write. And infinite other trades have their places round about the said squares; on each of which there are two great palaces, one at one end and the other at the other, where are stationed the lords deputed by the king, who make inquiry immediately if any difference occurs between the merchants, and in the same way between any of the inhabitants of those quarters. The said lords are charged to watch every day whether the guards who are set on the neighbouring bridges (as will be said below) are actually there or have failed, and punish them as they think right.

Along the principal street of which we have spoken, which runs from one end of the city to the other, there are on one side and on the other houses, very large palaces with their gardens, and near by them houses of artisans who work in their shops; and at all hours are met people who are going up and down on their business, so that to see so great a crowd anyone would believe that it would not be possible that victuals are found enough to be able to feed it; and yet on every market day all the said squares are covered and filled with

people and merchants who bring them both on carts and on boats, and all is disposed of. And again it was contained there in the said writing that this city had twelve different manner of trades, one of each craft, which are reckoned the more important and have greater dealings than the others, for there are very many others. And each trade of these twelve has 12000 stations, that is to say 12000 houses for each trade of the aforesaid. And in each house or station there were at least ten men to exercise those arts, and some fifteen, and some twenty, and thirty, and some forty. And do not understand that they are all masters, but men who do what the masters and patrons order them. And all this is necessary because many other cities of the province are supplied with necessaries from this city.

* * *

And again there were many abbeys in that place round the lake and many monasteries of idols, which are in the very greatest numbers, where stay a large number of monks who serve them. And again I tell you that in the middle of the lake are two little islands on which there are, on each one, very wonderful palaces very great and noble and rich, so well made and so ornamented that they are really like some emperors palaces, with so many rooms and galleries that it could not be believed. And so when some notable one wishes to make a great wedding or any great banquet in a smart place they go to one of these palaces and there with dignity can make their wedding and their feast. And they find there all the furniture that is needed for the banquet, that is of plate and of linen and of dishes and everything else which they need according to their usages, which are all kept in the said palaces for the people of the said city for this purpose, because they were built by them. And sometimes there would be a hundred, and some would wish to make feasts and others weddings, and yet all would be accommodated in different rooms and verandahs with such order that one does not inconvenience the others. Besides this, boats or barges are found on the said lake in great numbers, large and small, to go for enjoyment and to give oneself pleasure; and in these there can stay, ten, fifteen, and twenty, and more persons, because they are fifteen to twenty paces long with broad and flat bottoms, so that they sail without rocking on either side. And every one who likes to enjoy himself with women or with his companions takes one of the boats like these, which are

always kept adorned with beautiful seats and tables and with all the other furniture necessary for making a feast. Above they are covered and flat, where men stand with poles which they stick into the ground (for the said lake is not more than two paces deep) and guide the said barges where they are ordered. The covering on the inside part is painted with different colours and patterns, and likewise all the barge; and there are windows round about which they can shut and open, so that those who stay seated at the meal at the sides may be able to look this way and that and delight the eyes with the variety and beauty of the places to which they are taken. Here come the best wines, hence are brought perfect confections; and in this way those men go about this lake rejoicing together, for their mind and care is set on nothing else but bodily pleasure and enjoyment in feasting together. And you shall know that this lake gives them greater refreshment and comfort than anything else which may be had on land, because on one side it lies along the city so that all the grandeur and beauty of that is seen from afar while one stays on the said barges, so many are the palaces, temples, monasteries, gardens with very lofty trees, set upon the waterside. And barges like these are found on the said lake at all times with people who go for enjoyment; for the inhabitants of this city never think of anything else but after that they have done their work or business to spend part of the day with their ladies.

* * *

And first you may know quite truly that all the ways and streets in all this town of Quinsai are well paved with good hewn stones and with baked bricks, so that the whole city is very clean; and so are all the chief ways and streets and the causeways of all the province of Mangi paved so that one can ride at any time conveniently there wherever one wishes quite cleanly both on horseback and on foot through all the lands of it without soiling the feet. For the land is very low and flat and there is very deep [mud] when it rains, so that if it were not that the ways are all paved (i.e. where it is needed) one sometimes could not ride there nor go, on foot or on horse. But because the couriers of the great Kaan could not travel quickly with horses over paved streets, therefore a part of the street at the side is left without pavement for the sake of the said couriers. In truth the main street of which we have spoken above, which runs from one

end of the city to the other, is paved like this with stones and with bricks ten paces along either side, but in the middle it is all filled with a small and fine gravel, with its vaulted conduits which lead the rain waters into the canals near by, so that it always stays dry. Now on this street are always seen going up and down certain long carriages covered and furnished with hangings and cushions of silk, in which six persons can stay. And they are taken every day by men and women who wish to go for pleasure. And an endless number of these carriages are seen at all times going along the said street, down the middle of it; and they go to gardens where they are received by the gardeners under certain shades made for this purpose, and there they stay to give themselves a good time all day with their ladies, and then in the evening they go home again in the said carriages. And in this city are quite 10000 very fine and great streets. And again I tell you that in this town of Quinsai are quite three thousand artificial baths, which spring from the ground, these are stoves, where the men and the women bathe and take them great delight and go there several times a month; for they live very cleanly in their bodies. Moreover I tell you that they are the most beautiful baths and the best and the largest that are in the world. For I tell you that they are so large that more than a hundred men or a hundred women can well bathe themselves there at one time.

Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, translated by A. C. Moule and Paul Pelliot. (London: George Routledge & Sons, 2 vols., 1938), 185–87, 249–50, 327–28.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Khubilai Khan build such a splendid palace at Shangdu simply for hunting? Why is hunting so significant for the Mongols?
2. Judging from Marco's description and your own additional reading about European cities during this time, how would his native city of Venice compare with Hangzhou (known to him as Quinsai)?
3. Judging from his own background, why would Marco be fascinated by paper money?
4. Why would Europeans originally not believe Marco's descriptions?