The 32nd George Ernest Morrison lecture in ethnology 1971

PRESTER JOHN AND EUROPE'S DISCOVERY OF EAST ASIA

I. DE RACHEWILTZ

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY PRESS CANBERRA 1972

PRESTER JOHN AND EUROPE'S DISCOVERY OF EAST ASIA

RECOMMENDED RETAIL PRICE $1-50
PUBLICATION DATE 22/12/72

PRESTER JOHN AND EUROPE'S DISCOVERY OF EAST ASIA

I. DE RACHEWILTZ

The thirty-second George Ernest Morrison lecture in ethnology 1971

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY PRESS CANBERRA 1972

I have chosen the story of Prester John not without misgivings because it has already been told many times, and no doubt most of you are familiar with it, or with some versions of it. Better known, however, is the later development of the legend, the one popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which placed the kingdom of Prester John in Ethiopia. I think most people who have heard about Prester John regard him in fact as a semi-legendary African ruler rather than an Oriental potentate. I shall not go into this later development of the story, but I shall discuss only the original Asiatic Prester John in relation to those events that led to the great geographical discoveries of the thirteenth century, highlighting, in particular, those points which in my opinion have not received sufficient attention in the past.[1]

First, a few words about the background of the legend.

In classical antiquity and right into the Middle Ages the lands of Further Asia were known to the West through a small number of geographical works based on frequently unreliable information, mainly obtained from traders, as well as through a sizable body of imaginative literature, such as the *Alexander Romance*, with its precursors and derivatives, of far greater popular appeal. Most of the ancient legends about the people and the flora and fauna of Asia seem to be of Asiatic origin, many of them probably originating in Central Asia and in India. Long before Alexander's expedition they had spread with trade among the Greek colonists of Asia Minor, and thence had reached the other peoples of the Mediterranean world.[2]

Now, the image conveyed by these stories was not only that of remote countries inhabited by wondrous creatures and magic trees and mountains, but also, and pre-eminently, that of very rich, indeed fabulously rich lands. Of course, since antiquity India and China had been supplying the West, through various intermediaries, with gems, amber, silk, precious woods, spices and other rare products, their value being further enhanced by the shrewd merchant's tales, and this accounts to a large extent for the universal belief that Asia was a country of immense riches. Herodotus (Bk. III, 106), after having described the Indians' ingenious way of getting gold by stealing it from gold-digging ants, says: 'It is as though the remotest parts of the inhabited world had been given the best of everything, just as Greece was given by far the pleasantest climate.'[3] We must not forget, however, that for the ancient Greek, as also for the medieval man, the continent of Asia was separated from Libya or Africa by the Nile, and that Ethiopia was joined by land with India and was, therefore, part of the latter.[4] Hence the frequent

confusions between these two countries. This means that precious articles coming from Ethiopia, such as ivory and ebony, were regarded as 'Indian' goods, particularly since these same goods were also imported from India. In other words, the traditional view that India was the wealthiest country in the world was no doubt reinforced by the trade carried out with Africa.[5]

Besides its reputation for wealth, Asia was also famous from early times for its proud and magnificent monarchs, the Oriental despots of a long and honoured tradition still alive today. The image of the powerful, extravagant and splendid Oriental ruler, inspired by the great monarchies of the Near East and Western Asia, played an important role in the myths and legends of the Middle Ages.[6]

With the spread of Christianity in the first centuries of our era, new legends were grafted on to the old. Among those that became very popular in the West are the stories of the conversion of the Magi and the apostolate of St Thomas in India. Biblical peoples like Gog and Magog were relegated to the no-man's land behind Alexander's 'Iron Gate' in the Caucasus, and in general the Bible coloured considerably medieval man's vision of the East.[7]

Leaving biblical lore aside, the association of Asia with Christianity was a real fact. After the fifth century, the Nestorian clergy were cut off from the Church of Constantinople and from Western Christianity following the condemnation of Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus, for Nestorius, the Greek Patriarch of Constantinople, had been deposed by the Council and his doctrine of the two distinct natures in Christ, the human and the divine, had been condemned as heretical. He was sent into exile and his followers, who were quite numerous, were expelled from Edessa in 489. The Nestorians moved to Persia and, penetrating along the commercial routes of Asia, sent missionaries further into the East, converting people to their faith, building churches and monasteries, and establishing religious as well as commercial links with the different parts of the continent, from Persia to India, to China and as far as Mongolia and Manchuria. Some tribes of Mongolia were actually converted to Nestorianism in the eleventh century.[8]

Echoes of this extraordinary success of the Nestorian Church, which forms in itself a unique, fascinating, and very little known chapter in the cultural history of Asia, from time to time reached Europe from Byzantium and from Syria. The apocryphal account of St Thomas preaching in India, for instance, is almost certainly related to the work of the Nestorian missionaries in southern India, which eventually led to the establishment of the Syro-Malabar Church still active today.[9] However, owing to the much reduced communica-

tions between Western Europe and the Levant after the seventh and eighth centuries because of the growing power of Islam, reports reaching the West from Asia became even more scanty and unreliable.

There remains one further element to complete our background picture: China. At the beginning of the Christian era China was an extremely nebulous country known to lie beyond the eastern wilderness and the savage Scythians. It was inhabited by the Seres, a mild and affable people famous for producing silk (the ancients believed that this was a delicate operation consisting in combing off the silk floss from certain trees). In the following centuries and, apparently, through contamination with the traditional account of the happy Hyperboreans — a mythical people living 'at the back of the north wind', apparently in the north-east of Asia — there developed an idealised image of the Chinese. Their country came to be regarded in the West as a sort of Earthly Paradise, enjoying peace and good government, and its people became the epitome of all virtues.[10]

We have here the essential ingredients for the creation of a new legend: powerful Oriental monarchs, the wealth and splendour of Asia, and the fact that there were people in this continent praised since antiquity for their virtues, and others who had reputedly been converted to the Christian faith.

Now, in 1122 the existence of Eastern Christianity was confirmed by the arrival in Rome of a high priest who claimed to come from India and who lectured to the Roman Curia on the miracles performed every year in his native country by St Thomas, whose uncorrupted body rested in a great local shrine dedicated to him. He related how, on the feast of St Thomas, the Apostle's body would become animate and with his arm administer communion to the faithful. Any unbeliever who would not repent on that occasion would drop dead on the spot. The tradition of this posthumous miracle is not attested anywhere else and modern critics agree on the whole that the Indian priest was an imposter, but he certainly created much commotion in official circles with his report, and no one questioned its truth at the time.[11]

For the genesis of a myth a catalyst is necessary and history teaches us that there is no better catalyst than the man-in-need's wish to believe. The actual process of wishful thinking that led to the birth of Prester John began some twenty years after the visit of the pseudo-Indian cleric. It was set in motion by two momentous events — the defeat in 1141 of the Seljuk sultan Sanjar by a Chinese-born warrior and empire-builder called Yeh-lü Ta-shih, and the Crusaders' loss of Edessa, taken by the Turkish atabeg Zengi in 1144.

The memorable defeat of Sanjar and the Persian army in 1141 no doubt

filled with jubilation the Nestorian communities of Central Asia oppressed under Moslem rule, and Yeh-lü Ta-shih was probably hailed by them as a saviour. The Nestorians must have also hoped that Yeh-lü Ta-shih would carry on his war on the Moslem sultanates further west and liberate their brethren in Syria and Mesopotamia. Indeed commotion among all the Oriental Christians at the news that Islam was being successfully attacked by a completely unexpected ally from the East must have been considerable.

This Yeh-lü Ta-shih who defeated Sanjar was born in China, but he was not a Chinese. He was a prince of Khitan blood (the Khitans were a people akin to the Mongols) whose dynasty had ruled over North China for almost two centuries. His family had lost the throne in 1125 and Yeh-lü Ta-shih escaped first to Mongolia and then to Central Asia, where in an amazingly short time he built the immense Qara-Khitay empire which lasted until the beginning of the thirteenth century.[12]

Yeh-lü Ta-shih was not a Nestorian, but in all likelihood a Buddhist; however, he certainly protected the Nestorian communities in his newly founded empire, and may have shown open sympathy for their religion. At any rate, when his reputation as the scourge of Islam spread to Western Asia after 1141, he was inappropriately, but understandably, clothed in Nestorian garb. It was, I believe, implicitly assumed by Christians in Asia, as it was in Europe at the time, that whoever fought the Moslems must be a Christian.

When the tragic news of the massacre of the French Crusaders and the capture of Edessa by the Turks was brought to Pope Eugenius III in 1145, an unusual report was also conveyed to the Pope by the visiting Bishop of Gabala in Frankish Syria. The Bishop told the Pope how some years previously a certain Iohannes, a Christian Nestorian king and priest living in the Far East, had defeated the Persians. This Presbyter Iohannes, 'for (the Bishop said) this is how people usually call him', intended to proceed further West and help the church of Jerusalem, but had been prevented from doing so by the impossibility of crossing the frozen river Tigris and had therefore turned his army back. The Bishop concluded his report with these words:

> He is said to be of the ancient lineage of those Magi who are mentioned in the Gospel, and to rule over the same people as they did, enjoying such glory and prosperity that he is said to use only a sceptre of emerald. Inspired by the example of his ancestors who came to worship at Christ's cradle, he had intended to go to

Jerusalem, but they maintain that the reason that has been adduced had prevented him.[13]

This report is a peculiar amalgam of historical truth and mythological fiction. The hero of the story, Iohannes, or John, is undoubtedly Yeh-lü Ta-shih. His title of Priest-king, or Presbyter, probably derives from his supposed relation with the Magi Kings. The idea of the frozen river is borrowed from the *Alexander Romance,* and his great wealth and the emerald sceptre are inspired by the common literary tradition of the East.

But why call him Iohannes? Many hypotheses have been put forth, none of them really satisfactory. The Nestorian Christians of Central Asia may have given him this name partly because of phonetic association with a name or title borne by Yeh-lü Ta-shih, but also because of the fact that 'Yuhunan', the Syriac for John, was one of the most common Nestorian names, and one which had probably some special connnotations in the Nestorian religious and literary tradition which would fit a defender of the faith.[14] Unfortunately we know still too little about medieval Nestorianism to solve this riddle.

The Bishop of Gabala had picked up his curious story in Syria, where it was circulating at the time among the local Nestorians. That Yeh-lü Ta-shih's victory over Sanjar had been so heavily embroidered upon can be explained by the desire of the Nestorian communities to warn the Moslem princes of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt that the Nestorians now had a powerful ally. And so was born Prester John. Europe, but especially the Franks who were in need of moral support after their military reverse, began nurturing the infant legend. This legend was all the more acceptable because it presented itself as a crystallisation of those traditional folkloristic, religious, and literary themes that we have just mentioned.

A decisive phase in the development of the story took place in 1165, when a letter purporting to come from Prester John himself began circulating in Europe. In this letter, addressed to the Emperor of Byzantium, the Holy Roman Emperor, the Pope and the Kings of Europe, Prester John claims to rule over the Three Indies, declares his intention to defeat the enemies of Christ and visit the Holy Sepulchre, and gives an impressive description of all the marvels of his kingdom.[15]

The letter is evidently a clever fabrication, although its real author is unknown. The tone is arrogant: Prester John criticises the Byzantines and the West for their professed Christianity — an argument clearly designed to impress Europe, then bitterly divided by the struggle between Church and Empire, with the contrasting image of a perfect Christian kingdom in the

East. The main literary source of the forger was the *Alexander Romance*, and much of the *Letter* is actually a list of all the Marvels of the East found in the *Romance.*

What was, we may ask, the aim of the forger? Again various opinions have been put forth by scholars since the middle of last century, one of the latest being that the *Letter* was a political pamphlet designed to reconcile the opposing factions in Europe, written by a man, possibly a Western cleric, who had lived in the Near East and who was definitely hostile to the Byzantines.[16]

I have read this strange document many times and I cannot help feeling that it was written with tongue in cheek from beginning to end. If so, the writer's sense of humour was definitely ahead of his times, for the *Letter* was taken so seriously that Pope Alexander III actually sent an embassy to Prester John to convey his reply and establish diplomatic relations with his country. This happened in 1177. Unfortunately the papal embassy disappeared in mysterious circumstances in Africa or in the East and was never heard of again.[17] However, Prester John's reputation as a Christian ruler of Asia and a friend (even though somewhat haughty and patronising) of the Western nations was by now as well established in Europe as in the Levant.

The king of the Three Indies reappears again forty years later, at the time of the Fifth Crusade. In 1217 the news spread among the Franks in Palestine that Prester John was about to join the Crusade against the Saracens. This news was followed two years later by a strange report reaching the Crusaders at Damietta in Egypt, according to which King David, the Christian King of India, had advanced into Persia and was coming to smite the Moslems. There are several versions of this report: in one King David is identified with Prester John, in others with his son or grandson.

At the same time further rumours spread in the Christian camp to the effect that the King of Ethiopia was also joining the Crusaders and that he was about to capture Mecca.[18]

These garbled reports and rumours were received with great elation by the leaders of the Crusade who, on the strength of such illusory hopes of assistance, decided to march on Cairo. Unfortunately for the Crusaders the prophesies did not come true, their army was defeated, Damietta was lost and the Crusade collapsed (July-September 1221).[19]

Now, the rumour about the impending arrival of the negus of Ethiopia was, of course, unfounded, but it was a known fact in the West that the

ruling dynasty in Ethiopia was Christian (Monophysite) and that the Ethiopian kings had often been at odds with the Moslems.

As for the fresh reports about Prester John and his son, or alias, King David, they echoed once more important political and military events that were changing at the time the face of Asia through the Mongol conquests. The Qara-Khitay throne had been seized in 1211 by Küchlüg, a prince of a Mongolian tribe, called Naiman, that had been converted to Nestorianism several generations before. After having established himself as the emperor of Qara-Khitay, Küchlüg, like Yeh-lü Ta-shih eighty years earlier, came into conflict with the Moslem rulers of Persia and Afghanistan. He was, in turn, defeated and killed by Chingis Khan, whose westward push in the years 1219-23 brought the Mongol armies deep into Western Asia and as far as Georgia, Armenia, and Southern Russia. The major outcome of the Mongol invasion was the collapse of the great Khwaresmian empire of Sultan Muhammad-shāh which comprised most of modern Iran, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan.[20]

The repercussions of Küchlüg's activity in Central Asia and of Chingis Khan's campaigns in Central and Western Asia reached, through Nestorian channels, the Crusaders in Palestine and Egypt. Prince Küchlüg, who had fought the Moslems in Central Asia, was this time the figure behind the stories about the imminent coming of Prester John and King David to join the Fifth Crusade and annihilate Islam.

In the eyes of the Central Asian Nestorians who, as before, were responsible for these rumours, Küchlüg really qualified for this task. He was himself a Nestorian by birth and a sworn enemy of Islam, something that he immediately proved by brutally persecuting his Moslem subjects and forcing them to abjure their faith. The Nestorians, naturally enough, hoped that he would complete the task begun by Yeh-lü Ta-shih (the original Prester John) and wipe out Islam from Asia with the help of the Crusaders in the West. Incidentally, the name of David, which we find associated with him, may well have been his Nestorian Christian name.

Here again we have wishful thinking on the part of both Eastern and Western Christians for, as we have seen, the hopes of the Nestorians happened to coincide for the second time with those of the Crusaders who were also badly in need of an ally.

The Prester John legend must, therefore, be regarded as being fathered by the Nestorians and mothered by the Christian nations of the West. Its

raison d'être, at least in the unfulfilled expectations of both parents, was the destruction of Islamic power.

I say unfulfilled because Küchlüg, who may not himself have been fully aware of the role in which the Nestorians had cast him, was in a short time removed from the scene by Chingis Khan. Soon afterwards the Mongol conqueror attacked Sultan Muhammad of Khwaresm. These events followed each other in such quick succession that Chingis Khan's image merged with that of Küchlüg, and the fragmentary reports about his successful wars on the Moslems in Central Asia reaching the Near East and Europe caused the West to believe that *he*, Chingis Khan, was Prester John or King David, i.e. the powerful Christian King of the Indies.[21]

In the following years, however, the frightful work of destruction carried out by Chingis Khan and by his successor Ögödei in Western Asia, Russia and Eastern Europe cast serious doubts on this indentification. By 1242 the Mongols were at the gates of Vienna after having brought to an end, in the previous two years, the flourishing Kievan civilisation and ravaged Poland and Hungary, two staunch Catholic nations, almost beyond repair. Then suddenly the Mongol hordes withdrew from Central Europe as swiftly as they had come, and for no apparent reason. (The Mongol generals were actually recalled to Mongolia to elect the new khan to succeed Ögödei, who had died at the end of 1241, but this fact was not known in the West.)[22] One thing, however, was clear: these bloodthirsty horsemen, who looked like devils and behaved more savagely than Attila's Huns, could not possibly be the Christian soldiers of Prester John.

What, then, people asked, had happened to Prester John and his Christian dynasty?

It was precisely to find an answer to this question and to ascertain the true identity of the Mongols (or Tartars, as they were called in Europe at the time), that Pope Innocent IV sent several embassies to Asia in the year 1245.[23]

This year 1245 marks the true beginning of political and culture contacts between Europe and the Far East. The papal envoys were Franciscan and Dominican friars. The most famous of them, the Italian Franciscan John of Pian di Carpine, reached the Mongolian camp in Central Mongolia in 1246, witnessed the election of the new khan, Güyüg, and returned to France the following year, bringing back a wide assortment of information collected during his adventurous 9,000-mile ride across Europe and Central Asia.

Whereas the Dominican envoys took the Near East route across Palestine

and Syria to reach the Mongol forces in Armenia, John took the route across Central and Eastern Europe to Kiev, which had been under Mongol control since 1240. From Kiev onwards John and his companion, Friar Benedict the Pole, were under Mongol escort. After a brief halt at Batu's camp on the Volga (Batu, the grandson of Chingis Khan, was in charge of the whole region), the papal envoys proceeded eastwards, through the country north of the Aral Sea and West Turkestan, which had been reduced to a wasteland by the Mongols only a few years before. They rode across the old Qara-Khitay territory south of Lake Balkash, and across the Altai mountains into Western Mongolia. Then, travelling due east, they arrived at the imperial camp near the Mongol capital Karakorum on 22 July 1246. They had left Kiev on 3 February.

The immense territory crossed by the two friars was of course all *terra incognita* for them: what they knew about Asia came almost entirely from the geographical lore of the medieval encyclopedists. It is, therefore, not surprising that the information we find in their reports is accurate when based on personal observation, but less so when it concerns other regions of Asia about which they learned only indirectly. John's report to the Pope, the first full-length eye-witness account of Central Asia and Mongolia in a Western language, gives a very detailed picture of Mongolian society, customs and military organisation.[24] In it are mentioned also many other well-known peoples of Asia, such as the Comans, the Alans, the Khazars, the Kangli, the Black Kitayans (i.e. the Qara-Khitay), and the Naimans. But then we read in his report that 'after the Samoyedes are those men who are said to have faces like dogs and live in the wilderness along the shores of the ocean.'[25] In Benedict's shorter account these remote inhabitants of the Arctic region are actually called 'the dog-headed Cynocephali.'[26] The Parossites who are mentioned immediately after the Samoyedes, are described as people having such narrow mouths that they cannot eat solid food, and inhale instead the steam of cooking meat and fruit.[27] We have a few instances like these in which the description of peoples and places is enriched with information drawn from Western geographical lore. The Cynocephali, or men with dog's heads, are one of the most popular fabulous peoples of classical lore. Ktesias of Knidos (fourth century B.C.) was the first author to give an elaborate account of this mythical race, whom he placed in India. As for the people living on steam, the legend is found in Pliny's description of an Indian race.[28] However, the association of Asian peoples with mythical creatures is not entirely a product of the friars' imagination. For instance,

the idea of relating certain tribes of northern Asia with the Cynocephali was almost certainly inspired by the fur-caps and hoods, covering the entire head, worn then, and still worn today, by many inhabitants of Siberia.[29]

Friar John met some Chinese at the Mongol camp and was impressed by their affability and kindness, and by their skill. 'Better artificers' — he writes — 'are not to be found in the whole world in all the trades in which men are wont to be engaged.'[30] He refers also to their own peculiar writing, without however elaborating. He is also the first author to mention the Japanese, whom he calls 'the people of the sun' — a fact which was discovered only a few years ago, when a hitherto unknown version of John's report was published in the United States.[31]

During his long journey Friar John enquired about Prester John. His informers told him a curious story, namely that Prester John, the Christian king of Greater or Northern India, had been attacked by Chingis Khan, but had defeated him with a trick similar to that used by Alexander the Great to defeat the Indian king Porus, i.e. by filling metal statues with burning embers so as to frighten and rout the enemy's elephants.[32] Here we have an obvious contamination with the *Alexander Romance*, where this story is told, but the friar's report reflects also certain true facts about the Mongols, such as the use of manikins and incendiaries in their warfare, and the actual defeat of one of their leading generals in 1221.[33] This shows that in Central and Western Asia, especially in Persia, where the Alexander Saga had always been a favourite subject for story-tellers, elements from the saga were being used to enrich the current stories about Chingis Khan's exploits.

Whatever the imaginary elements in this report, Friar John's account strengthened the West's belief in the continuing existence of Prester John. Moreover, the reports coming from the Dominican emissaries sent by Pope Innocent to make contact with the Mongols in Armenia confirmed too the existence of Prester John, although in these reports he was identified with the chief of another tribe of Mongolia, the Kereit tribe, also of Nestorian faith, who had been defeated by Chingis Khan in 1203.[34] The Dominicans' account was based on information collected directly from Nestorian sources in Armenia, which was then firmly controlled by the Mongols. By this time (1247), Nestorian influence in the areas conquered by the Mongols had grown considerably as a result of the protection accorded to the Nestorian clergy by the Mongol court. At the Mongol court itself this influence was strong because many nobles, including some royal princesses, came from

tribes like the Kereit and the Naiman which had been converted to Nestorianism as we have seen.[35]

Now, in Nestorian circles it was known that the kings and popes of Europe were eager to find Prester John, the great Nestorian ruler of the East. But the last historical figure that could fit this role, Prince Küchlüg, had died thirty years before, and so when questioned by the papal envoys some of the Nestorian clerics, in good or bad faith, indentified Prester John with one or other of the chiefs of those Nestorian tribes that had been conquered by Chingis Khan, and whose daughters and nieces had been taken as wives or concubines by the Mongol emperors.

I said in bad faith because we have also an interesting example of how the Mongols tried to sell, as it were, a non-existent Prester John to the West through the intermediary of the Nestorians.

This amusing episode also occurred in 1247. The Mongol commander in Persia was then planning to attack the Caliph of Baghdad and he conceived the idea of securing the support of the Franks for a simultaneous attack on Egypt, so as to prevent the Sultan of Egypt from coming to the assistance of the Caliph. He sent, therefore, two envoys, both of them Nestorian Christians, to King Louis IX (St Louis) of France, who was then in Cyprus preparing his Crusade.

The emissaries of the Mongols put forth the proposal for a joint Mongol-Christian alliance against the Moslems and, in order to make this plan sound more attractive (the Mongols had, on the whole, a rather bad press), they claimed that the mother of the Mongol emperor was the daughter of Prester John and that the emperor himself had been converted to Christianity.

King Louis was delighted with this news and promptly sent an impressive embassy, led by the Dominican friar Andrew of Longjumeau, to the Mongol court, with his reply and magnificent gifts.[36]

The embassy was not successful because in the meantime the Mongol emperor had died and the empress regent, concerned with the problem of succession, did not want to engage in negotiations with Europe. The report that the deceased emperor was the grandson of Prester John and that he himself had become a Christian turned out, of course, to be unfounded. However, it was as a result of this very embassy that William of Rubruck undertook his historic journey.

John of Pian di Carpine opened the way to Europe's discovery of East Asia, and Marco Polo won the greatest fame as a traveller to the East, but it is to William of Rubruck, a precursor of Marco Polo, that we are in debt

for so much new information and, certainly, for one of the most beautiful pieces of travel literature of all time.[37]

Friar William was a Flemish Franciscan who happened to be in Palestine when King Louis' envoys returned from their unsuccessful mission. From them he learned of the Nestorians at the Mongol court, and how the German slaves of the Mongols lacked the spiritual comfort of what Friar William of course regarded as the true Christianity. It was this realisation that prompted him to go to the Mongols and try to convert them to the Catholic faith.

He left Palestine early in 1253, and travelling via Constantinople, the Crimea, and across modern Kazakhstan and Sinkiang (along the same route followed earlier by John of Pian di Carpine), he reached Mongolia at the end of the year. He spent six months at the capital, Karakorum, and then returned by a somewhat different route to Palestine in 1255. He did not convert the Mongols; nevertheless among the positive achievements of his journey was the rediscovery of the true nature of the Caspian sea (which had been forgotten in the Middle Ages); he was also the first traveller to point out the correct course of the Don and the Volga. He positively identified Cathay, i.e. China, with the country of the Seres of classical times, and it is from him that we learn, for the first time, of the Tanguts and the Tibetans, the latter of whom, according to Friar William, 'make fine goblets out of their parents' skulls so that when drinking from these they may be mindful of them in the midst of their enjoyment.'[38]

Friar William was an extremely acute observer, endowed with a truly photographic memory and with the gift of expression. The report of his journey, prepared for King Louis of France, is probably the most important contribution to the geography and ethnography of Central Asia until the eighteenth century. He was the first European to describe Karakorum, and his observations have helped Soviet and Mongolian archaeologists in their recent work on the site of the old capital.[39]

Being a cleric filled with Christian fervour, Friar William's foremost interest naturally was the spread of Christianity in Asia, and his report is a unique mine of information on the Nestorians. In it there are too, as we would expect, several references to Prester John, whom William calls King John. For William King John was Küchlüg, the last ruler of Qara-Khitay, who — he tells us — had a brother and successor called Unc. Always according to William, this Unc had been defeated by Chingis Khan and had fled to China, but his daughter had been captured and been given as wife to one of Chingis Khan's sons.[40]

Although Friar William no doubt took great pains in collecting all the facts about Prester John and his family, his informants gave him a version of the story which is based on a number of misunderstandings. Unc is clearly the chief of the Kereit tribe, who was commonly known as the Ong-khan (which is a double royal title). Chingis Khan had actually married a niece of the Ong-khan and had sought his daughter for his eldest son, and it was the Ong-khan's refusal that had led to a war between the two chiefs. But the Ong-khan, or Unc, after having been defeated by Chingis, never went to China. This error, however, can be easily explained. In North China, and precisely in the Ordos region north of the Great Wall, there lived at the time a Turkish tribe called Öngüt, whose royal family had also been converted to Nestorian Christianity. The king of the Öngüt had allied himself with Chingis Khan and the Mongol conqueror had later rewarded him by giving him his daughter in marriage. Subsequently, it had become a regular practice for Mongol princesses to marry into the Öngüt royal family.[41]

Now, Friar Williams's account originates from a phonetic similarity between Unc and Öngüt, and from a garbled version of Chingis Khan's relationship by marriage with the Ong-khan and with the Öngüt ruler.

I have mentioned this confusion because Marco Polo, who made his famous journey to China twenty years later (in 1275), was led into a similar web of errors.

But before we pass to Marco, I wish to stress one further point about William of Rubruck's travels. William was a highly educated man for his time, well read in classical and medieval literature. He was greatly interested in locating the dwelling-place in Asia of those monsters and fabulous beings described by authors such as Isidore of Seville and Solinus. He enquired about them but, as he says in his report, he found no evidence of their existence.[42] William, therefore, is also one of the initiators of that important demythologising process that preannounces the critical spirit of the Renaissance. Incidentally, much of the geographical material found in William's report was incorporated by Roger Bacon in his encyclopaedic *Opus majus*.[43]

With Marco Polo we are already on well trodden ground. Marco was in China from 1275 to 1291,[44] and during his stay he travelled widely in the capacity of special inspector of the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan.

In his *Description of the World*, better known as *Il Milione*, Marco deals extensively with Prester John in three separate sections of the book.[45] This shows how conscious he, too, was of the current stories about 'that king most famous in the world.'[46] It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that in the thir-

teenth century the minds of Western travellers were, borrowing Henry Yule's expression, 'full of Prester John.'[47]

For Marco, Prester John is no longer to be identified with the Naiman prince Küchlüg, but with the Unc Khan, i.e. with the Ong-khan of the Kereit tribe, who had been defeated by Chingis Khan following his refusal to give his daughter in marriage to the Mongol emperor — an episode on which Marco dwells at length. Then, again confusing Unc with Öngüt like William of Rubruck, Marco says that the Nestorian ruler of the Öngüt, called Prince George, was the grandson of Prester John. And, pushing phonetic assimilation to extremes, he ends up by identifying the Öngüt kingdom with the country of Gog and Magog, two names which, according to him, correspond to Unc and Mongol.[48]

Now the interesting point about Marco's distorted account, based clearly on stories picked up in Asia, is that the descendant of Prester John of whom he speaks was a well-known figure and a contemporary of Marco Polo. Prince George, for this was indeed his name, is known to us from both Chinese and Persian sources. In Marco's time he was the ruler of the small Öngüt tribal kingdom in North China and the leading representative of Nestorian Christianity in East Asia.[49] By combining religious and temporal authority he qualified for the traditional role of Prester John, and this is probably one of the reasons why the Öngüt ruler was regarded by Western travellers in the latter part of the thirteenth, and at the beginning of the fourteenth century, as a descendant of Prester John.

Marco's return voyage to Italy coincided with the journey to China of another Italian Minorite, Friar John of Montecorvino, who was sent by Nicholas IV as papal legate to the Mongols in 1291.[50] What prompted this mission were the persistent reports reaching Europe that Nestorian Christianity was closely linked with the Mongol court, and that there were actual kinship ties between a Christian king of the East, related to Prester John, and the Great Khan of the Mongols. The reports clearly stemmed from the family links of the Öngüt king with the Mongol royal family and his supposed relationship with Prester John. By now contacts with the Mongol rulers of Persia, the Ilkhans, were frequent and a Nestorian monk whose original home was, in fact, the Öngüt kingdom, had arrived in Rome as ambassador of the Il-khan Arghun in 1287. This interesting man, Rabban Sauma, is, as it were, the eastern counterpart of Marco Polo and, like Marco, he has also left a vivid account of his journey from China to Persia and to Europe which is, unfortunately, very little known.[51] It was from men like

Rabban Sauma, and from the Genoese, Venetian, and Pisan merchants and diplomats, that stories about Kublai Khan, the Grand Cathay and the Nestorian Church of China were current in Europe several years before Marco's return.[52]

Friar John of Montecorvino arrived in Khanbaliq, the modern Peking, in 1294, shortly after the death of Kublai Khan. Almost immediately he proceeded to the Öngüt capital beyond the Great Wall, where he spent a year as a guest of Prince George. During that year he converted Prince George to the Catholic faith and baptised his son, to whom he gave the name of Iohannnes after himself. Unfortunately, soon afterwards Prince George died and his family reverted to Nestorianism. But the ruins of the beautiful Church of the Holy Trinity built by Montecorvino in the Öngüt capital were discovered and excavated by Japanese archaeologists before the war, and they still bear testimony to the conversion to Rome of the last Asiatic Prester John.[53] The young Prince Iohannes of the Öngüt died without issue about 1314 and the myth of Prester John as an Eastern king also died out soon after.

John of Montecorvino was appointed Archbishop of Khanbaliq in 1307 and spent many more years in China (where he eventually died) without, however, reconverting the Öngüt or making many converts among the Mongols and the Chinese. Nevertheless, his letters and those of the missionaries that were sent to join him supplied Europe with new information not only about China, but also about India, as by then the Eastern Mongol empire could be reached by sea, via Persia, Hormuz, Quilon, Sumatra and Champa, as well as by land.[54] Indeed, one of John of Montecorvino's letters embodies the first description of South India by a European, as it precedes by seven years Marco Polo's own account.[55]

The last mention of Prester John in China by a Western traveller is found in the travelogue of Odoric of Pordenone, written in 1330. Odoric who, as a roving Franciscan friar, had visited China and the Öngüt kingdom a few years before, virtually dismisses Prester John and his country as something barely worth mentioning.[56]

But, by that time, Prester John, true to his protean career, had reappeared in his former splendour as the emperor of Ethiopia.

The first mention of him in his new guise as African king is found in the *Mirabilia descripta* of Jordan Catalani of Séverac, written in 1323, although he was, apparently, already identified with the ruler of Ethiopia in a work,

now lost, of John of Carignano dated 1306.[57] By 1350 Nubia and Ethiopia are referred to in Europe as the country of Prester John.

The passage from Asia to Africa was made possible by several factors: the ambiguity of the term India throughout the Middle Ages; the view held by many, including Marco Polo and Catalani, that a Third (or Middle) India was identical with Ethiopia or Abyssinia; and the already-mentioned fact that Ethiopia was ruled by a Christian dynasty. Moreover, the negus of Ethiopia combined political and religious authority, and bore the title of *žān*, meaning 'king'. This word *žān*, you will agree, sounded too much like 'Jean' or 'John' to pass unnoticed.[58] If it is true that the history of mankind is a history of mistakes, many of these mistakes were certainly linguistic errors!

Thus, in order to survive, Prester John had to migrate to East Africa, opening a new and productive phase of his legendary life. His main role, if we can speak of roles in this context, had been to act as a subtle and irresistible force in attracting Western travellers deeper and deeper into remote and unknown lands. As we have seen, he was directly or indirectly involved in most of the travels and explorations of Asia in the thirteenth century, travels and explorations which, let me repeat it, revealed the true face of Asia to Europe for the first time in history. The fruits of this new revelation can be seen in early fourteenth century maps, especially those of Pietro Vesconte and Martin Sanudo, and of course the famous map of Frà Paolino, which incorporates information drawn from the pioneering works of John of Pian di Carpine and William of Rubruck. These maps also show the passage to Africa of the wandering Prester: in Frà Paolino's map of about 1320 he is still placed in Asia, but in that of Angelino Dulcert of 1339 he is already situated in Abyssinia.[59]

There, in his new country of adoption, Prester John continued to play his subtle game, firing the imagination of Europe and attracting other adventurous men. It was, again, in search of the elusive Christian king and of his rich and fabulous country that the captains of Prince Henry the Navigator undertook those voyages along the African coast in the first half of the fifteenth century which led to many new and exciting discoveries.[60]

Had the Prester John visualised by our ancestors really existed he could have hardly done a better job than he did by simply not being there!

NOTES

Many problems concerning the origin and development of the Prester John legend have been touched only cursorily or not at all in the text because of their controversial nature and complexity. For further investigation references to specialised studies have been given in the notes whenever posssible.

[1] There is a vast literature on Prester John. For a detailed study of the subject the following works are indispensable: G. Oppert, *Der Presbyter Johannes in Sage und Geschichte* (Berlin, 1870); F. Zarncke, 'Ueber eine neue, bisher nicht bekannt gewesene lateinische Redaction des Briefes des Priester Johannes', in *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. Philologisch-historische Classe*, vol. 29 (Leipzig, 1877), pp. 111-56; and, by the same author, 'Der Priester Johannes', in *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, vol. 7 (Leipzig, 1879), pp. 947-1028; vol. 8 (Leipzig, 1883), pp. 128-54 and 180-4; C. Marinescu, 'Le Prêtre Jean. Son pays. Explication de son nom', in *Bulletin de la section historique de l'Académie roumaine* 10 (1923), 73-112; and, by the same author, 'Encore une fois le problème du Prêtre Jean', in *Bulletin de la section historique de l'Académie roumaine* 26 (1945), 202-22; E. Denison Ross, 'Prester John and the Empire of Ethiopia', in *Travels and Travellers in the Middle Ages*, ed. by A. P. Newton (London and New York, 1926), pp. 174-94; F. Fleuret, 'La Lettre de Prêtre-Jean, Pseudo-Roi d'Abyssinie', in *Mercure de France* 268 (1936), 298-309; L. Olschki, 'Der Brief des Presbyters Johannes', in *Historische Zeitschrift* 144 (1931), 1-14; and, by the same author, *Storia letteraria delle scoperte geografiche* (Firenze, 1937), pp. 194-214; and *Marco Polo's Asia*, trans. by J. A. Scott (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960), pp. 381-97; R. Hennig, *Terrae Incognitae*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1956), vol. 2, pp. 438-64; vol. 3, pp. 11-23 et passim; vol. 4, pp. 12-14 et passim; P. Pelliot, *Mélanges sur l'époque des Croisades*, extr. from *Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres*, vol. 44 (Paris, 1951), p. 24 et passim; L. Hambis, 'La Légende du Prêtre Jean', in *La-Tour-Saint-Jacques* 8 (1957), 31-46; J. Richard, 'L'Extrême-Orient légendaire au Moyen Âge: Roi David et Prêtre Jean', in *Annales d'Ethiopie* 2 (1957), 225-42: V. Slessarev, *Prester John. The Letter and the Legend* (Minneapolis, 1959); and the unpublished work by the late A. A. Vasiliev, *Prester John, Legend and History*, which is preserved in the Dunbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection in Washington, D.C. Cf. also the recent book

by L. N. Gumilev, *Poiski vymyšlennogo carstva. Legenda o 'Gosudarstve Presvitera Ioanna'* [*In Search of an Imaginary Realm. The Legend of 'The Kingdom of Prester John'*], (Moscow, 1970). The eminent French scholar Paul Pelliot was working on Prester John and lectured on the subject in the United States shortly before his untimely death in 1945. Unfortunately, there are no transcripts of his lectures and, to my knowledge, no notes or any other material on Prester John have been found among his unpublished papers. (Personal communications from Prof. L. C. Goodrich, Columbia University, New York, and Prof. L. Hambis, Collège de France, Paris.)

[2] See D. F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe,* vol. 1: *The Century of Discovery,* book one (Chicago and London, 1965), chap. 1; R. Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters', in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 5 (1942), 159-97; and, by the same author, 'Marco Polo and the Pictorial Tradition of the Marvels of the East', in *Oriente Poliano*, ed. by the Is.M.E.O. (Rome, 1957), pp. 155-72.

[3] H. Carter (tr.), *The Histories of Herodotus of Halicarnassus* (London, 1962), p. 208. Cf. M. de Give S. J., *Les rapports de l'Inde et de l'Occident dès origines au règne d'Aśoka* (unpublished doctoral dissertation), Université Catholique de Louvain, 1967, pp. 238-41. On trade with Asia in ancient times, beside the well-known works of M. P. Charlesworth, E. H. Warmington, and M. Wheeler, see F. Hirth and W. W. Rockhill (tr.), *Chau Ju-kua: His Work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, Entitled Chu-fan-chï*, (St Petersburg, 1911), pp. 1-8; Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1, pp. 12ff.; and the recent work of J. I. Miller, *The Spice Trade of the Roman Empire 29 B.C. to A.D. 641* (Oxford, 1969).

[4] On this geographical misconception see H. Yule (ed. and tr.), *The Book of Sir Marco Polo the Venetian Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, 3rd ed. rev. by H. Cordier (London, 1903), vol. 2, pp. 431-2; P. Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo* (Paris, 1959-1963), s.v. 'Abasce' and 'Ethiopia'; Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East', p. 161 and n. 4. Cf. also the interesting remarks on the subject in C. F. Beckingham, *The Achievements of Prester John, An Inaugural Lecture Delivered on 17 May 1966*, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1966, pp. 17ff.

[5] Cf. de Give, *Les rapports de l'Inde*, p. 41 n. 48; G. L. Adhya, *Early Indian Economics* (Bombay, 1966), pp. 139-40, 145; G. F. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring* (Princeton, 1951), pp. 28ff., 42. On the ebony trade see B. Laufer, *Sino-Iranica. Chinese Contributions to the History of Civilization in Ancient Iran* (Chicago, 1919), pp. 485-7.

[6] Cf. C. J. Gadd, *Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient East* (London, 1948), pp. 33-62; Olschki, *Marco Polo's Asia*, p. 389 and n. 22.

[7] See U. Monneret de Villard, *Le leggende orientali sui Magi evangelici* (Città del Vaticano, 1952); cf. Olschki's earlier contribution 'The Wise Men of the East in Oriental Traditions', in *Semitic and Oriental Studies Presented to W. Popper* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951), pp. 375-95, as well as *Marco Polo's Asia*, pp.

308-9; Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1, pp. 22-5; Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East', pp. 166-71. On 'Gog and Magog' see also J. K. Wright, *Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades* (American Geographical Society, New York, 1925), passim; Hennig, *Terrae Incognitae*, vol. 2, pp. 169-85.

[8] On the missionary activity of the Nestorians see the masterly contribution of J. Dauvillier, 'Les Provinces Chaldéennes "de l'Exterieur" au Moyen Age', in *Mélanges F. Cavallera* (Toulouse, 1948), pp. 261-316. Cf. also the entries 'Nestorius' and 'L'Eglise nestorienne', in A. Vacant *et al.*, *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, 3rd reimpr. (Paris, 1930-1950), vol. 11, pp. 159-214 in particular (the article 'L'Eglise nestorienne' has been reprinted in S. Pop *et al.*, (ed.), *Recueil Cardinal E. Tisserant 'Ab Oriente et Occidente'* (Louvain, 1955), vol. 1, pp. 205-25); L. Hambis, 'Deux noms chrétiens chez les Tatar au XIe siècle', in *Journal Asiatique* 241 (1953), 473-5.

[9] See Dauvillier, 'Les Provinces Chaldéennes', pp. 312-14; E. Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India*, adapted from the French by E. R. Hambye S. J. (London, 1957), pp. 2-10. Cf. also L. W. Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 43-8; U. Monneret de Villard in *Rendiconti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, ser. 8, vol. 6 (Roma, 1951), pp. 77-104; M. Bussagli in *East and West* 3 (1952), 88-94. Cf. also J. B. Segal, *Edessa 'The Blessed City'* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 174ff.; Slessarev, *Prester John*, pp. 14ff.

[10] An excellent review of Western knowledge of China in classical times is found in K. H. J. Gardiner, 'Ta-Ch'in and the Seres', an unpublished paper read before the Asian Society of Canberrra on 26 August 1971. On the Seres, besides the references given in Olschki, *Marco Polo's Asia*, p. 40 n. 1, see M. Cary and E. H. Warmington, *The Ancient Explorers*, rev. ed. (Pelican Books, London, 1963), passim; Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, s.v. 'Cin'. For a discussion of the Hyperborean theory see J. D. P. Bolton, *Aristeas of Preconnesus* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 100-1.

[11] See Hennig, *Terrae Incognitae*, vol. 2, pp. 396-9; Slessarev, *Prester John*, pp. 10-14, 22-5. Cf. J. Richard, 'L'Extrême-Orient légendaire', pp. 231-2.

[12] On Yeh-lü Ta-shih and the Qara-Khitay empire see K. A. Wittfogel and Fêng Chia-shêng, *History of Chinese Society. Liao (907-1125)* (American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1949), pp. 619-74; V. V. Barthold, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia*, trans. by V. and T. Minorsky (Leiden, 1956), vol. 1, pp. 100-10; Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, s.v. 'Catai'; and *Mélanges*, pp. 56-7; J. A. Boyle (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5: *The Saljuq and Mongol Periods* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 147-50; Dauvillier, 'Les Provinces Chaldéennes', p. 291.

[13] Translation by C. F. Beckingham, *The Achievements of Prester John*, p. 4. Cf. C. C. Mierow (tr.), *The Two Cities. A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146 A.D. by Otto Bishop of Freising*, (New York, 1928; rep. 1966), pp. 443-4; Slessarev, *Prester John*, pp. 27-8, and 103, n. 44.

[14] After his successful exploits in Central Asia, Yeh-lü Ta-shih assumed the title of *gür-khan*, i.e. 'Universal Ruler', which was held also by his successors. It is unlikely

that this title was associated with the name Yuhunan on purely phonetic grounds; however, other titles of Mongol origin (like *gür-khan*) may qualify. For instance, the well-known Mongol title *yeke noyan*, meaning both 'Great Lord' and 'Commander-in-chief', could have easily been the title by which his followers designated him before he assumed that of *gür-khan*. 'Yeke noyan' is phonetically close to 'Yuhunan'; unfortunately, there is no indication that Ta-shih ever bore this title. For other theories on the origin of Prester John's name see Olschki, *Marco Polo's Asia*, p. 386; Slessarev, *Prester John*, pp. 80-7. For the religious and historical connotations that the name John had in the Nestorian tradition see ibid., pp. 88-92.

[15] The famous *Letter of Prester John* is discussed at length in Slessarev, *Prester John*, pp. 33ff. For references to other English translations see ibid., p. 105, n. 10. See, however, the critical remarks in Beckingham, *The Achievements of Prester John*, pp. 10ff.

[16] See Olschki, *Marco Polo's Asia*, pp. 388-9; Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1, p. 26 and n. 76 (for further references). Cf. Slessarev, *Prester John*, pp. 39ff.

[17] See L. Olschki, *Marco Polo's Precursors* (Baltimore, 1943), pp. 16-22; Beckingham, *The Achievements of Prester John*, pp. 11-13.

[18] On these prophesies see Hennig, *Terrae Incognitae*, vol. 3, pp. 11-23; Pelliot, *Mélanges*, pp. 73ff.

[19] For these events see S. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades* (Cambridge, 1951-4), vol. 3, pp. 167-70; R. Grousset, *Histoire des Croisades et du royaume franc de Jérusalem*, (Paris, 1934-6), vol. 3, pp. 207-46.

[20] On Küchlüg's exploits in Central Asia see R. Grousset, *L'empire des steppes* (Paris, 1939; rep. 1948), pp. 293-6; Wittfogel and Fêng, *History of Chinese Society*, pp. 652-4; 'Ata-Malik Juvaini, *The History of the World-Conqueror*, trans. by J. A. Boyle, 2 vols., (Manchester, 1958), pp. 61-8; W. Barthold, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion* (London, 1928; rep. 1958), pp. 356-9 et passim. On Chingis Khan's 'Western Campaign' see Grousset, *L'empire des steppes*, pp. 296-308; W. Barthold, *Turkestan*, pp. 393-462.

[21] See Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, vol. 1, pp. 304-5. Cf. Richard, 'L'Extrême-Orient légendaire', pp. 233-5.

[22] For brief surveys of these events cf. J. J. Saunders, *The History of the Mongol Conquests* (London, 1971), pp. 73-89; and I. de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* (London, 1971), pp. 58-84. Further details and documentation in G. Soranzo, *Il Papato, l'Europa cristiana e i Tartari* (Milano, 1930), pp. 42-76; G. Vernadsky, *The Mongols and Russia* (New Haven, 1953), pp. 45-58; and in the old, but still useful work by G. Strakosch-Grassmann, *Der Einfall der Mongolen in Mitteleuropa in den Jahren 1241-1242* (Innsbruck, 1893), passim.

[23] On these embassies, besides Soranzo, *Il Papato*, pp. 77-125, see P. Pelliot, 'Les Mongols et la Papauté', in *Revue de l'Orient chrétien* 23 (1922-3), 1-28; 24 (1924), 225-335; 28 (1931-2), 3-84 (in subsequent notes references to this article are to the reprint in one volume with continuous pagination); A. van den Wyngaert O.F.M.

(ed.), *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 1: *Itinera et relationes Fratrum Minorum saec. XIII et XIV* (Quaracchi-Firenze, 1929), pp. lix-lxiv; B. Altaner, *Die Dominikanermissionen des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Habelschwerdt, 1924), pp. 116-41; Hennig, *Terrae Incognitae*, vol. 3, pp. 23-46; C. Dawson (ed.), *The Mongol Mission. Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, trans. by a Nun of Stanbrook Abbey (London and New York, 1955; rep. as *Mission to Asia*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1966), pp. xv-xxi; Olschki, *Marco Polo's Precursors*, pp. 31-49; and *Marco Polo's Asia*, pp. 57-64; G. G. Guzman, 'Simon of Saint-Quentin and the Dominican Mission to the Mongol Baiju: A Reappraisal', in *Speculum* 46 (1971), 232-49; de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, pp. 84-124.

[24] The Latin text of Friar John's report, entitled *Ystoria Mongalorum*, is critically edited in van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 1, pp. 27-130. The best English translation is found in Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, pp. 3-72. See also J. de Plan Carpin, *Histoire des Mongols*, trans. by Dom J. Becquet and L. Hambis (Paris, 1965). On Friar John's contribution to Europe's knowledge of Asia, besides the above-mentioned (n. 23) works of Olschki, see R. Corso, 'Apporto all'etnografia di Fra Giovanni da Pian di Carpine', in *Fra Giovanni da Pian di Carpine, Nel VII Centenario della sua morte*, ed. Porziuncola (Assisi, 1952), pp. 59-71.

[25] Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, p. 58.

[26] Ibid., p. 80.

[27] Ibid., p. 30.

[28] On the Cynocephali see Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East', p. 160. On Pliny's mythical Indian race of Astomi — men who live on the odours of roasted flesh, fruit and flowers — see ibid., p. 162; and 'Marco Polo and the Pictorial Tradition of the Marvels of the East', p. 160.

[29] See H. Matrod, 'Notes sur le voyage de Frère Jean de Plan Carpin (1245-47)', in *Etudes Franciscaines* 27 (1912), 229.

[30] Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, p. 22.

[31] I refer to the so-called *Tartar Relation (Hystoria Tartarorum)* written by Friar C. de Bridia, apparently on the basis of information supplied mainly by Friar Benedict. See R. A. Skelton, T. E. Marston, and G. D. Painter, *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* (New Haven and London, 1965); and A. Önnerfors (ed.), *Hystoria Tartarorum C. de Bridia Monachi* (Berlin, 1967). For the 'people of the sun' *(Narayrgen)* see Skelton *et al.*, p. 64. The identification with the Japanese was first proposed by B. B. Szczesniak in his 'Notes and Remarks on the Discovered Tartar Relation and the Vinland Map', in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 86 (1966), 376. Cf. D. Sinor, 'Mongol and Turkic Words in the Latin Versions of John of Plano Carpini's "Journey to the Mongols"', in L. Ligeti (ed.), *Mongolian Studies* (Budapest, 1970), pp. 542-5; Iwamura Shinobu, *Tōyōshi no sanpo* [*Excursions in Oriental History*] (Tōkyō, 1970), pp. 153-61.

[32] Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, pp. 22-3.

[33] See Skelton *et al.*, *The Vinland Map*, p. 69 and n. 4.

[34] See Pelliot, 'Les Mongols et la Papauté', pp. 46-7, 56-7; Simon de Saint-Quentin, *Histoire des Tartares*, ed. by J. Richard (Paris, 1965), pp. 27-30; J. J. Saunders, 'Mathew Paris and the Mongols', in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Bertie Wilkinson* (Toronto, 1969), pp. 126-7.

[35] On the Mongols and Nestorian Christianity see P. Pelliot, 'Chrétiens d'Asie Centrale et d'Extrême-Orient', in *T'oung Pao* 15 (1914), 627-44; A. C. Moule, *Christians in China Before the Year 1550* (London, 1930), chaps. 4-9; P. Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 2nd ed. (Tokyo, 1951), pp. 419ff.; H. Bernard, S. J., *La Découverte de Nestoriens Mongols aux Ordos et l'Histoire ancienne du Christianisme en Extrême-Orient* (Tientsin, 1935). Cf. also B. Spuler, *History of the Mongols, Based on Eastern and Western Accounts of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, trans. by H. and S. Drummond (London, 1972), passim.

[36] On the Mongol embassy to King Louis in Cyprus and Andrew of Longjumeau's journey to the Mongol court see Pelliot, 'Les Mongols at la Papauté', pp. 150-222; de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, pp. 112-15, 120-5.

[37] On William of Rubruck's journey see van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 1, pp. 147-63; Olschki, *Marco Polo's Precursors*, pp. 49-70; *Marco Polo's Asia*, pp. 64-73; and, by the same author, *Guillaume Boucher: A French Artist at the Court of the Khans* (Baltimore, 1946), passim; Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1, pp. 33-4; de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, pp. 125-43. The best edition of his *Itinerarium* is in van den Wyngaert, pp. 164-332. Besides the classical translation (still useful for its valuable commentary) of W. W. Rockhill, *The Journey of William of Rubruck* (Hakluyt Society, London, 1900), see also Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, pp. 89-220. Important notes on the text by Pelliot are found in *Mélanges*, pp. 49-72.

[38] Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, p. 142.

[39] See S. V. Kiselev, *et al., Drevnemongolskie goroda* [*Ancient Mongol Towns*] Moscow, 1965), pp. 138ff.; and G. N. Rumyancev in *Materialy po ist. i filol. Centr. Azii*, vyp. 3 (Ulan-Ude, 1968), p. 155. Cf. Olschki, *Guillaume Boucher*, pp. 45ff.; E. D. Phillips, *The Mongols* (London, 1969), pp. 94-103.

[40] Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, pp. 122-3, 141. Cf. Olschki, *Marco Polo's Asia*, pp. 385-6. On Friar William's description of the Nestorian communities in Central Asia see J. Dauvillier in *L'Orient syrien* 2 (1957), 223-42.

[41] On the Öngüt see Pelliot, 'Chrétiens d'Asie Centrale', pp. 629-35; Moule, *Christians in China*, p. 93 et passim; Grousset, *L'empire des steppes*, pp. 369-74; Ch'en Yüan, *Western and Central Asians in China Under the Mongols*, trans. by Ch'ien Hsing-hai and L. C. Goodrich, *Monumenta Serica Monograph* 15 (Los Angeles, 1966), p. 42 et passsim.

[42] Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, p. 170.

[43] See J. H. Bridges (ed.), *The 'Opus Majus' of Roger Bacon* (Oxford, 1897), vol. 1, p. 305; Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1, p. 42.

[44] Or 1290; see *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 9 (1945-7), 51. Cf. also Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, vol. 1, p. 393.

[45] See A. C. Moule and P. Pelliot (ed. and tr.), *Marco Polo, The Description of the World,* vol. 1 (London, 1938), chaps. 65-8, 74, 108. Cf. Yule, *The Book of Sir Marco Polo,* vol. 1, pp. 238-45, 284-5; vol. 2, pp. 17-19.

[46] Moule and Pelliot, *Marco Polo*, vol. 1, p. 181.

[47] Yule, *The Book of Sir Marco Polo*, vol. 1, p. 235 n.

[48] 'Ung and Mongul' in the original. See Moule and Pelliot, *Marco Polo*, vol. 1, p. 183. Cf. Olschki, *Marco Polo's Asia*, pp. 26, 392-7.

[49] On Prince George see Pelliot, 'Chrétiens d'Asie Centrale', pp. 631-4; and *Notes on Marco Polo*, s.v. 'Giorge'; Moule, *Christians in China*, pp. 234-40; Ch'en Yüan, *Western and Central Asians*, pp. 53-7. Cf. also the important articles by N. Egami cited below, n. 53.

[50] On John of Montecorvino see van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 1, pp. 335-55 (the text of his letters is found on pp. 340-55); G. Golubovich O.F.M., *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente Francescano*, vol. 3 (Quaracchi-Firenze, 1919), pp. 86-96; and, by the same author, *Jean de Mont Corvin O.F.M. Premier Evêque de Khanbaliq (Pe-king) 1247-1328* (Lille, 1924); Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, pp. 222-31; Egami Namio, *Ajia bunkashi kenkyū* [*Studies on the Cultural History of Asia*], 'ronkō-hen', (Tōkyō, 1967), pp. 331-54; de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, pp. 160-78.

[51] The standard work in English on Rabban Sauma's life, containing a translation from Syriac of the account of his experiences, is E. A. W. Budge, *The Monks of Kûblâi Khân, Emperor of China* (London, 1928). On the relations between the Mongols and Europe in the second half of the thirteenth century see Soranzo, *Il Papato*, chaps. 5-9; D. Sinor, 'Les relations entre les Mongols et l'Europe jusqu'à la mort d'Arghoun et de Béla IV', in *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale* 3 (1956-7), 39-62; J. Richard, 'Le début des relations entre la Papauté et les Mongols de Perse', in *Journal Asiatique* 237 (1949), 291-7; and, by the same author, 'The Mongols and the Franks', in *Journal of Asian History* 3 (1969), 45-57; de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, pp. 149-54.

[52] On the activity of the Italian merchants in Asia at the time see L. Petech, 'Les marchands italiens dans l'empire mongol', in *Journal Asiatique* 250 (1962), 549-74.

[53] See N. Egami, 'Olon-Sume et la découverte de l'église catholique romaine de Monte Corvino', in *Journal Asiatique* 240 (1952), 155-67. See also the important contributions to the subject in Egami, *Ajia bunkashi kenkyū*, pp. 265-330.

[54] See the letters of Friars Peregrine of Castello and Andrew of Perugia in van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 1, pp. 365-8, 373-7; Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, pp. 232-7. Cf. also Moule, *Christians in China*, pp. 191-5, 207-210.

[55] For a translation of this leter see H. Yule (ed. and tr.), *Cathay and the Way Thither, Being a Collection of Medieval Notices on China* (Hakluyt Society, new ed., rev. London, 1913-1916; rep. by Kraus Reprint Ltd., Nendeln/Liechtenstein, 1967), vol. 3, pp. 58-67.

[56] See Yule's translation of Friar Odoric's memoirs in *Cathay and the Way Thither*, vol. 2 (the passage in question is on pp. 244-5). The best edition is in van den

Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana,* vol. 1, pp. 413-95. On Odoric see also H. Cordier (ed.), *Les voyages en Asie, au XIVe siècle, du bienh. Frère Odoric de Pordenone* (Paris, 1891); Moule, *Christians in China,* pp. 241-7; Hennig, *Terrae Incognitae,* vol. 3, pp. 191-8; M. Letts (ed.), *Mandeville's Travels. Texts and Translations,* 2 vols. (Hakluyt Society, London, 1953), p. xxxiii et passim; and Lett's *Sir John Mandeville, The Man and his Book* (London, 1949), p. 30 et passim (pp. 76-87 are devoted to Mandeville's description of Prester John and his kingdom). For a review of the opinions of thirteenth and fourteenth century missionaries about Prester John see van den Wyngaert, pp. cix-cxiv.

57 See H. Yule (tr.), *Mirabilia Descripta. The Wonders of the East, by Friar Jordanus of the Order of Preachers and Bishop of Columbum in India the Greater (circa 1330)* (Hakluyt Society, London, 1863), pp. 42, 45. On John of Carignano's world map cf. Skelton *et al., The Vinland Map,* p. 131.

58 On the title *žān* and the theory of the Ethiopian origin of the legend of Prester John, besides the two fundamental studies of C. Marinescu cited above, n. 1, see Slessarev, *Prester John,* pp. 86-7; Pelliot, *Mélanges,* pp. 86ff.

59 See Skelton *et al., The Vinland Map,* and Skelton's remarks in O. G. S. Crawford (ed.), *Ethiopian Itineraries circa 1400-1524* (Hakluyt Society, Cambridge, 1958), p. 213; Richard, 'L'Extrême-Orient légendaire', p. 238. On the African phase of the legend see also Hambis, 'La Légende du Prêtre Jean', pp. 36-8; J. Doresse, *L'empire du Prêtre-Jean* (Paris, 1957), vol. 2, pp. 216-48.

60 See, on the subject, Hennig, *Terrae Incognitae,* vol. 4, pp. 12ff.; Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe,* vol. 1, pp. 53ff.; Beckingham, *The Achievements of Prester John,* pp. 22-4.

The George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology

The George Ernest Morrison Lecture was founded by Chinese residents in Australia and others in honour of the late Dr G. E. Morrison, a native of Geelong, Victoria, Australia.

The objects of the foundation of the lectureship were to honour for all time the memory of a great Australian who rendered valuable services to China, and to improve cultural relations between China and Australia. The foundation of the lectureship had the official support of the Chinese Consulate-General, and was due in particular to the efforts of Mr William Liu, merchant, of Sydney; Mr William Ah Ket, barrister, of Melbourne; Mr F. J. Quinlan and Sir Colin MacKenzie, of Canberra. From the time of its inception until 1948 the lecture was associated with the Australian Institute of Anatomy, but in the latter year the responsibility for the management of the lectureship was taken over by the Australian National University, and the lectures delivered since that date have been given under the auspices of the University.

The following lectures have been delivered:

Inaugural: W. P. Chen, *The Objects of the Foundation of the Lectureship, and a review of Dr Morrison's Life in China.* 10 May 1932.

Second: W. Ah Ket, *Eastern Thought, with More Particular Reference to Confucius.* 3 May 1933.

Third: J. S. MacDonald, *The History and Development of Chinese Art.* 3 May 1934.

Fourth: W. P. Chen, *The New Culture Movement in China.* 10 May 1935.

Fifth: Wu Lien-tah, *Reminiscences of George E. Morrison; and Chinese Abroad.* 2 September 1936.

Sixth: Chun-jien Pae, *China Today: With Special Reference to Higher Education.* 4 May 1937.

Seventh: A. F. Barker, *The Impact of Western Industrialism on China.* 17 May 1938.

Eighth: S. H. Roberts, *The Gifts of the Old China to the New.* 5 June 1939.

Ninth: Howard Mowll, *West China as Seen Through the Eyes of the Westerner.* 29 May 1940.

Tenth: W. G. Goddard, *The Ming Shen. A Study in Chinese Democracy.* 5 June 1941.

Eleventh: D. B. Copland, *The Chinese Social Structure.* 27 September 1948.*

Twelfth: J. K. Rideout, *Politics in Medieval China.* 28 October 1949.

Thirteenth: C. P. FitzGerald, *The Revolutionary Tradition in China.* 19 March 1951.

Fourteenth: H. V. Evatt, *Some Aspects of Morrison's Life and Work.* 4 December 1952.

Fifteenth: Lord Lindsay of Birker, *China and the West.* 20 October 1953.

Sixteenth: M. Titiev, *Chinese Elements in Japanese Culture.* 27 July 1954.

Seventeenth: H. Bielenstein, *Emperor Kuang-Wu (A.D. 25-27) and the Northern Barbarians.* 2 November 1955.*

Eighteenth: Leonard B. Cox, *The Buddhist Temples of Yün-Kang and Lung-Mên.* 17 October 1956.*

Nineteenth: Otto P. N. Berkelbach van der Sprenkel, *The Chinese Civil Service.* 4 November 1957.

Twentieth: A. R. Davies, *The Narrow Lane: Some Observations on the Recluse in Traditional Chinese Society.* 19 November 1958.

Twenty-first: C. N. Spinks, *The Khmèr Temple of Prâh Vihar.* 6 October 1959.*

Twenty-second: Chen Chin-mai, *Chinese Landscape Painting: The Golden Age.* 5 October 1960.*

Twenty-third: L. Carrington Goodrich, *China's Contacts with Other Parts of Asia in Ancient Times.* 1 August 1961*.

Twenty-fourth: N. G. D. Malmqvist, *Problems and Methods in Chinese Linguistics.* 22 November 1962*.

Twenty-fifth: H. F. Simon, *Some Motivations of Chinese Foreign Policy.* 3 October 1963.

Twenty-sixth: Wang Ling, *Calendar, Cannon and Clock in the Cultural Relations between Europe and China.* 18 November 1964.

Twenty-seventh: A. M. Halpern, *Chinese Foreign Policy—Success or Failure?* 9 August 1966.*

Twenty-eighth: J. W. de Jong, *Buddha's Word in China.* 18 October 1967.*

Twenty-ninth: J. D. Frodsham, *New Perspectives in Chinese Literature.* 23 July 1968.*

Thirtieth: E. A. Huck, *The Assimilation of the Chinese in Australia.* 6 November 1969.*

Thirty-first: K. A. Wittfogel, *Agriculture: A Key to the Understanding of Chinese Society, Past and Present.* 6 April 1970.*

*All currently in print.