

15th September

Memory Verse

My times are in thy hand:

deliver me from the hand of mine enemies,
and from them that persecute me.

Make thy face to shine upon thy servant:

save me for thy mercies' sake. Psalm 31:15 and 16.

We had a map game with pretend travel in yesterday's lesson. Today we have some *real* travellers, both Italians. For both their journeys, the long and the short, you will understand what is happening better by using a map. There is a map for the first story with all the important places in the story marked on it in today's optional resources files. For the second story you will need a good atlas of Britain to follow the adventures of a traveller who did not have much choice over exactly where he went! In both stories I have marked in **green** the places you need to find on a map.

Map work 1 – an adventure from history



Do you have a magnetic compass? We cannot imagine how an explorer or traveller in days gone by could find his way without one. This useful tool was introduced to westerners by that intrepid traveller Marco Polo (1254-1324) who was born on **15th September** in **Venice**. Below the lesson is the map on which you can follow his travels.

The Venetians were a nation of sailors and Marco had a rather sad beginning to his life. His father was away with his uncle on a long journey in Asia when he was born and his mother died when he was just five years old. His father and uncle returned from their exploring adventures eventually but by that time Marco was fifteen years old!

Marco's father and uncle had travelled to parts of the world that were as yet unknown to Europeans. They had met the Mongol ruler, Kublai Khan, (1215-1294) who was to become the founder of the Yuan Dynasty in China, at his palace at **Karakorum**.¹ The Khan gave them a letter asking the pope to send Christian teachers to him. What an amazing request! How a missionary would love to be asked such a thing! Alas, the Polo brothers do not seem to have been able to explain Christianity for themselves.

Marco's life of adventure began at this point for his father and uncle set out to return to Kublai Khan and took Marco with them. They were also joined by a couple of monks sent by the pope to fulfil Kublai Khan's request but these left when the going got dangerous at **Ayas**.

Throughout his adventures Marco Polo encountered things that amazed him, from the market at Tibliz (**Terbil**) with its masses of beautiful carpets to the Chinese roads, shaded and marked out by trees and with frequent posting inns to allow the emperor's messengers swift passage. Some of the novelties that he saw, such as paper money and coal, are now common in Western countries. Others, however, are not. For instance he says:

¹ We looked at the Ming Dynasty in the lesson for January 23rd. The Mongols ruled China before the Ming Dynasty.

In this province [Carajan modern day Yunnan] are found snakes and great serpents of such vast size as to strike fear into those who see them, and so hideous that the very account of them must excite the wonder of those to hear it. I will tell you how long and big they are.

You may be assured that some of them are ten paces in length; some are more and some less. And in bulk they are equal to a great cask, for the bigger ones are about ten palms in girth. They have two forelegs near the head, but for foot nothing but a claw like the claw of a hawk or that of a lion. The head is very big, and the eyes are bigger than a great loaf of bread. The mouth is large enough to swallow a man whole, and is garnished with great pointed teeth. And in short they are so fierce-looking and so hideously ugly, that every man and beast must stand in fear and trembling of them. There are also smaller ones, such as of eight paces long, and of five, and of one pace only.

If you remember the lesson about George and the dragon on 23rd April you will not be surprised that many people consider it is possible that what Marco Polo is describing here are dragons, or as we might say now, dinosaurs!

When the Polo brothers and Marco reached Kublai Khan it was eight years since they had left at the end of their previous visit. Things in China had changed while they were away. The Mongols were at war with the Chinese Song dynasty, and the conquest that resulted in the establishment of the Yuan dynasty was underway. The capital city had moved too. It was now at The City of the Khan or **Khanbaliq** which is still the capital of China today although its name is now Beijing. The Khan had his summer palace at **Shangdu** or Xanadu about 200 miles north of Khanbaliq where the weather was cooler and here the Polo family arrived in 1274. Here the Khan, abandoning the traditional Yurt tents of his grandfather Genghis Khan, had built himself a magnificent palace in an area on the edge of a huge grassy plain where the Mongol love of hunting could be indulged to the full. The Polo family stayed in the Khan's palace. As Marco later wrote:

...proceeding three days' journey in a north-easterly direction, you arrive at a city named Shandu, built by the grand khan Kublai, now reigning. In this he caused a palace to be erected, of marble and other handsome stone, admirable as well for the skill displayed in its execution. The halls and chambers are all gilt, and very handsome... Within the bounds of the royal park there are rich and beautiful meadows, watered by many rivulets, where a variety of animals of the deer and goat kind are pastured, to serve as food for the hawks, and other birds employed in the chase... In the centre of these grounds, where there is a beautiful grove of trees, he has built a royal pavilion, supported upon a colonnade of handsome pillars, gilt and varnished... This spot he has selected for his recreation on account of the mild temperature and salubrity of the air and he accordingly makes it his residence during three months of the year, namely June, July, and August.



In the picture² you can see two painted sculptures that were found at Xanadu and which date from the time of Marco Polo. Did he perhaps see them? One is a turtle, symbol of the cardinal direction, North in Chinese lore. The other is a dragon, symbol of the cardinal direction, East. You can see that it resembles the creature Marco Polo described.

Kublai Khan seems to have liked Marco and he decided to employ him in his service, sending him off on a mission to the South West of China. He travelled probably as far as **Pagan**, a recent Mongol conquest, and also to the east where, south of the Yellow River, he saw the massive rice growing plains. He also visited the city of **Yangzhou** which had been the old Song Dynasty capital. His travels in this part of China ended at **Quanzhou** a huge international port city.

2 Image:

But now the Polos were thinking about the best way of returning to their Venetian home again. They had been in China for sixteen years. As it happened the Mongol ruler of the **Ilkhanate** (part of the modern Middle East), who was also a grandson of Genghis Kahn, had sent to Kublai Khan for a new wife. Kublai Khan obliged by sending off the princess Kōkōchin to replace the deceased queen. The Polo family joined the royal party that set out six-hundred strong on fourteen ships. After many adventures they land at **Hormuz** and made their way back over land to Tibiliz (**Terbil**) where the princess had to be handed over. Unfortunately the ruler to whom she had been betrothed had died in the meantime but no matter, she married his son instead!

The Polo family had been well rewarded by Kublai Khan for their services so it is not surprising that on their way home they were attacked and robbed at **Trebizond**. However, they by no means lost all their wealth as we shall see. From here the Polo family took ship back to **Venice**.

Something to write

How did Marco Polo's adventures come to be written down?

After his return to Venice Marco Polo was involved in the conflict between Venice and **Genoa** and was for a while in a Genoese prison, having been captured. Here his fellow prisoner was a story-writer named Rustichello of Pisa. He persuaded Marco to tell him his adventures so that he could write them down, rather like a modern ghost-writer who interviews a traveller or sportsman to write down their story for them. We would know nothing of Marco Polo's travels if it were not for Rustichello. Marco Polo seems to have been quite reluctant to tell the stories of what he had seen for he thought people would not believe him. Rustichello must have patiently listened to Marco Polo and known how to ask just the right questions. Then he put everything together in his book. The book proved very popular. Of course, there was as yet no printing and the book of Marco Polo's adventures could only be circulated in hand-written manuscript copies. Those that survive today are actually very different to one another!

Today ghost-writers write on behalf of famous or interesting people but their own names do not usually appear on the book cover. They remain in the background, although they are paid for their services. There are many people who have an interesting story to tell but who are unable or disinclined to write down it for themselves. A ghost-writer can step into this gap.

Ghost-writing is a very skilled job. The ghost-writer must be able to sensitively interview or question the subject of the book, record what they say either in notes or (nowadays) electronically and then marshal the material into order. After that he must write in a style that reflects the subject's own personal character and present the material in a way that will interest the reader.

The brothers and the young Marco had been away from home for a very long time when they finally got home to Venice. To find out what happened when they arrived, look at today's Optional Resources files which contain the story in a translation of what was written down by Marco Polo's "ghost-writer".

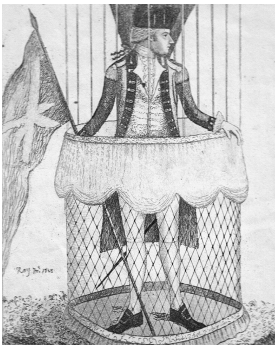
Do you know anyone who has an interesting story to tell? Could you "interview" them and write it down for them? You might even be able to persuade a local newspaper to publish what you ghost-write – but do make sure you have the permission of the person you interview before you submit anything for publication!

Something to think about

The Polo brothers were asked by Kublai Khan to request that Christian teachers be sent to him to explain Christianity. If only the Polo brothers had been able to do this themselves! The men assigned by the pope to return with them never got to Kublai Khan. They gave up when things got difficult. So as far as we know Kublai Khan never heard the gospel. What a responsibility we have if we are Christians! What would you say if someone asked *you* to explain what Christianity is? How would you answer?



Map work 2: a flying adventure³



Who was the first person to make a manned flight across the skies of England? A scientist? An explorer? When did it happen? It was longer ago than you might imagine!

On **September 15th** 1784 Vincent Lunardi (1754-1806) made his first balloon flight from **Moorfields** where the Honourable Artillery Company had their training grounds. Spectators crowded to watch, including the Prince of Wales and were so impatient for him to be launched that he finally took off before he was really ready, with his oiled silk balloon not fully inflated with the hydrogen that would give it lift and his intended passenger left behind. He

took a cat, a dog and a pigeon with him though, although by the time his journey came to an end his only companion was the dog. The poor cat became ill with cold, and Lunardi touched down in **North Mymms** to let her go. He then ascended even higher and eventually landed in a field at **Standon End Green** near **Ware** in Hertfordshire to the bemusement of the local farmers.

³ Adapted from Owen, Evan, *What Happened Today?* Book 3 available on the *Mothers' Companion* flashdrive <https://motherscompanion.weebly.com/>

Lunardi went on to make several more balloon flights. His balloon was exhibited at the fashionable Pantheon on Oxford Street and his exploits caused a trend for “balloon skirts” and “balloon bonnets.” Lunardi was a young man interested in making himself popular, a celebrity rather than a scientist or an explorer. He had little personal knowledge of the science behind his activities which were publicity stunts rather than experiments. The fickle crowds, which initially applauded him wherever he went, eventually turned against him when, through no fault of his, someone was accidentally killed during one of his balloon ascents.⁴

4 If you would like to collect some hydrogen of your own you could try this experiments:
<https://navigatingbyjoy.com/2014/09/18/chemistry-kids-separate-water-hydrogen-oxygen-using-electrolysis/>