

## REAL AND IMAGINARY JOURNEYS IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

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For a proper understanding of the actions of men in the past it is necessary to have some idea of how they conceived the world and their place in it, yet for the medieval period there is a serious imbalance in the sources. For the way in which the learned saw their position in time, there is the steady stream of universal histories which became an established *genre* during the central middle ages; by comparison, general works on geography were few and short, and were often more concerned with astronomy and cosmography than with the actual surface of the earth.<sup>1</sup> The classical link between history and geography never quite died out in the Middle Ages, but it survived only in a much attenuated form. The medieval chroniclers who felt obliged to give some geographical information were relatively few, and they generally were content with stale compilations derived from Pliny, Solinus, Orosius and Isidore which appear century after century with little change. A number of the world chronicles were illustrated with maps, but the case of Matthew Paris, a chronicler with a serious interest in cartography, was rare, almost unique.<sup>2</sup> The encyclopaedias of the period faithfully reflect the imbalance between history and geography; even Dante's teacher Brunetto Latini, who was avowedly writing a book of practical knowledge for laymen, paid far more attention to rhetoric than to geography, where the carelessness of his borrowings from Solinus suggests the lack of interest which he had in this part of his task.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For history see K.H. Krüger, *Die Universalchroniken*, Typologie des sources du Moyen-Age Occidental 16 (Turnhout, 1976), and for geography C.R. Beazley, *The Dawn of Modern Geography*, 3 vols. (London, 1897-1906), i. 340-350; ii. 467-548; iii. 500-507.

<sup>2</sup> A map or maps are associated with Isidore of Seville, Gervaise of Tilbury, Paolo Minorita and Ranulph Higden; see L. Bagrow, *History of Cartography*, revised R.A. Skelton (London, 1964) p. 45; for the St. Albans chronicler, see R. Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, 2nd. ed. (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 235-250.

<sup>3</sup> For example, in Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Majus* (edn. of 1624 reprinted Graz, 1965), the geographical/ethnographic introduction amounts to

Sources like these tell us little of how practical men grappled with the problems of space and distance which are so vital for the administration of states and the organisation of war and commerce. The academic geographies did not belong to the world of day-to-day decisions, where the area of our ignorance increases alarmingly. When, for example, Philip VI of Valois' council rejected the advice of the experts who knew the Mediterranean at first hand, and recommended that the proposed crusade should travel by way of Rome so that prayers could be offered at the shrines of the Roman saints, were they stating the real reasons for their preference, or rather advancing a pretext which would be hard to oppose for a decision which they had reached on other grounds?<sup>4</sup> Recently the point has been made that the topographical map which attempts to portray in detail a small portion of the world's surface has a separate origin and development from the great world maps.<sup>5</sup> A similar gap exists between accounts of particular journeys and the perfunctory descriptions of the face of the earth, such as were to be found in a few chronicles and the great medieval encyclopaedias. Of the considerable body of medieval travel literature, only a small proportion was produced with the avowed intention of adding to geographical knowledge. Yet it is from accounts of particular journeys, in which the factual and the fictional cannot be rigidly divided, that we can attempt to form an idea of the way in which men saw and found their way about the world and how such concepts were received and disseminated among diverse groups of readers and hearers.

From the point of view of travel and discovery, the century 1250-1350 has a central importance. During those hundred years a convergence of three factors served to modify the accepted view of the world handed down from antiquity. The expansion of the Mongol Empire, which for a time extended from southern China to the fringes of Eastern Europe, presented Christendom with a

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no more than 10 pages out of 1334 pages of the *Speculum Historiale*; moreover, they are almost identical with the geographical section of the *Speculum Naturale*, ed. cit. i. coll. 2399-2415. Brunetto Latini, *Li Livres dou Tresor*, ed. F.J. Carmody (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1948), has 12 pages out of 422 on geography; for their poor quality see P. Toynbee, "Brunetto Latini's Obligations to Solinus", *Romania*, xxiii (1894), 62-77.

<sup>4</sup> J. Delaville Le Roulx, *La France en Orient au XIV<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1886), ii. doc. 2.

<sup>5</sup> P.D.A. Harvey, *The History of Topographical Maps* (London, 1980), p. 9.

challenge and an opportunity. It allowed western missionaries, merchants and craftsmen, with little more than the inevitable discomforts and dangers, to travel more freely on the Eurasian continent than ever before.<sup>6</sup> Although obviously quite unconnected to European developments, the establishment of the Mongol Empire happened to coincide with the high-water mark of the medieval economy, when western Christendom was materially better prepared to respond to such a challenge than at any time in the medieval period. The European probings into Africa and the Atlantic islands at this time and the continued eastward expansion in the Baltic suggest that there would have been some Western effort even without the Mongol stimulus, though it might, like the crusades of the thirteenth century, have been frustrated, not through lack of energy so much as through the opposition of insurmountable *force majeure*.

The second factor was the development of the Mediterranean sea-chart into the portolan map, which for the first time gave Europeans a reasonably accurate picture of the sea coasts frequented by western mariners. By a fitting together of the maps of the various coastlines, a recognisable outline of Europe and the Mediterranean emerged, and the portolan map passed from the hands of navigators and merchants into the studies of the learned, apparently by way of crusade plans, which were a subject of lively interest to both.<sup>7</sup> The effect was, potentially at any rate, to transform descriptive geography from an exercise in literary compilation into one in which the traditional lists of natural features, towns and provinces, had to be fitted convincingly into pre-existent spaces. Long-standing confusions, like that between Dacia and Denmark, or questions like the southward extent of Africa, which had passed by easily enough before, now cried out for clarification. If the short-term results were disappointing and the mass of accepted geographical lore remained largely unaltered, it must be remembered how long it took for the discoveries of the sixteenth century to modify, let alone dissolve, the time-honoured world picture, and this despite the availability of printing and the vastly improved cartography undreamed of in the fourteenth

<sup>6</sup> For a convenient summary, see D.F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, I (Chicago, 1965) and R.S. Lopez, "Nuove luci sugli italiani in estremo oriente prima di Colombo", *Studi Colombiani nel V. centenario della nascita* (Genoa, 1952), iii. 337-398.

<sup>7</sup> Bagrow, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-66.

century. Speaking of the era of the great discoveries, Professor J. H. Elliot has made a fourfold distinction between observation, description, dissemination and comprehension which is equally valid and even more significant for the medieval period, when the habit of writing and the channels of written communication were less well established than in the early modern age. In his view, the full assimilation of the knowledge of the new lands and peoples did not really begin until the middle of the seventeenth century, despite the relative ease of access to the new information.<sup>8</sup> We should avoid judging the middle ages too harshly.

Although the fourteenth century did not know printing—though it did have paper as well as parchment—there was a significant opening up of communication which co-incided with the two factors already mentioned. This was the emergence of extended writings in prose in a number of European vernaculars, notably Catalan, Castilian and various forms of Italian, which widened out the reading public to those whose Latin was sketchy or non-existent.<sup>9</sup> Even French, which had enjoyed a head-start over the other romance languages, was making significant advances in prose during this period; it is easy to overlook that the first extended prose work in French was Villehardouin's account of the Fourth Crusade.<sup>10</sup> The new readership was predominantly lay and composed mainly of nobles and merchants whose everyday needs did not require a mastery of Latin. It was a public avid for knowledge in palatable form; information combined with entertainment was at a premium.

The problems of the recording and dissemination of knowledge can be seen in an extreme form in the case of Marco Polo who—against the odds—succeeded in making the most substantial addition to western information about the world during the *pax Mongolica*. Marco returned to Venice in 1295 after twenty-six years in the East, most of them spent as a minor agent and administrator in the service of the Mongol Khan. His knowledge of the Orient was unrivalled—the boast at the opening of his book that “from the time when our Lord God formed Adam our first parent with his hands down to this day, there has been no

<sup>8</sup> J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New* (Cambridge, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> W. D. Elcock, *The Romance Languages*, 2nd ed. (London, 1975), pp. 428, 453-4, 473-4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

man, Christian or pagan, Tartar or Indian or of any race whatsoever, who has known or explored so many of the various parts of the world and its great wonders as this same Marco Polo", was probably no more than the simple truth, bearing in mind his numerous journeys within the Mongol Empire and his epic return voyage from South China to the Persian Gulf.<sup>11</sup> By his own account he spoke four Eastern languages, of which two must have been Mongol and Persian, but while it seems that he could read French, it is most unlikely that he had sufficient command of any western language to write an extended account in it.<sup>12</sup> He had, after all, left Venice in 1269 at sixteen, when Venetian was far from an established literary language, and while in the East he must have conversed with such Westerners as he met in a mixture of romance dialects. On his return, he did not rush to record his experiences, and it required a spell in prison—that great catalyst of literary production—and the company of Rustichello, an Italian writer of French prose romances who was willing to put Marco's words into an acceptable literary form, to produce the book later known as *Il Milione*. Rustichello exacted a price in the form of the romantic colours which obscure some of Marco's prosaic observations and clog the book with a good deal of conjectural history, but if the reader is tempted to resent his interventions, he should reflect that without his encouragement, Marco might never have written at all. For all his acute powers of observation and memory, which stand out through the fog of Rustichello's verbiage, there is nothing to suggest that Marco had the literary skill to write that most difficult thing, a so-called plain unvarnished account.<sup>13</sup> No other western layman, among the many who took advantage of the Mongol peace, left any account of the Orient in this period.

Rustichello not only wrote the book, but did so in such a form as to ensure that it was widely read and copied, as the numerous manuscripts in many languages show. The locations of the manuscripts and the works with which they are associated sug-

<sup>11</sup> The only edition of the basic French text is by L. F. Benedetto, *Il Milione* (Florence, 1928). The English translation I have used is by Ronald Latham, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, 1958).

<sup>12</sup> *Il Milione*, p. 10; knowledge of French may be inferred from Marco's familiarity with the *livre Alexandre* (ibid., pp. 16-7, 222).

<sup>13</sup> For Rustichello and his influence on the book, see Benedetto, op. cit., pp. xiii-xxvii.

gests that the book did not particularly appeal to merchants, who for practical purposes preferred the sparse instructions on routes and logistics like those preserved in Francesco Pegolotti's *Practica della Mercatura*.<sup>14</sup> The vernacular versions of Marco's book, whose original title may have been *Le Divisement dou Monde*, were favoured by laymen interested in the crusade and *mirabilia*; the Latin translation was directed towards the clergy, who were interested in missions and *mirabilia*.<sup>15</sup> Yet for all Rustichello's sugaring, Marco's story contained cold comfort for either group. His news that there existed vast, powerful and wealthy kingdoms in the East was unrelieved by any hopeful report of Christian powers among them or any easy prospect of conversions; after so long away from Christendom, Marco's outlook had become remarkably secular and, without realising it, he dashed his readers' fondest hopes to the ground. Prester John, of whom the West had dreamed wishfully for a century and a half, he identified as a king killed by Ghengis Khan, his kingdom in central Asia becoming a subject province of the Mongol Empire.<sup>16</sup>

To underline this point, it is necessary to look at the manuscript tradition of Marco's book. It is generally accepted that the Franco-Italian manuscript of the early fourteenth century, known as F., stands nearest to the original although the text is already very corrupt. Further material, amounting to some two hundred passages, is found in a fifteenth-century manuscript known as Z., which is a Latin compendium translated from a lost, presumably French, original. Three-fifths of these additions are also found in the version of the sixteenth-century editor Ramusio, who says that he took his text from a very old Latin manuscript belonging to the Ghisi family of Venice.<sup>17</sup> The modern editor of F., Benedetto, postulated a complete version lying behind both traditions and assumed that the lost passages had for some reason been dropped in the tradition which led to F. However, this would be plausible only if the dropped passages were of average, or below average, interest to the fourteenth-century reader or co-

<sup>14</sup> Ed. A. Evans (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), pp. 21-23; comparison is enough to show that Marco was not writing a merchants' book.

<sup>15</sup> Benedetto, *op. cit.*, pp. xi-ccxii.

<sup>16</sup> *Il Milione*, pp. 51-2, 60-1, 218-220.

<sup>17</sup> Benedetto, *op. cit.*, pp. clviii-clxxiii. Z., which Benedetto knew only from a late copy, is described in Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, ed. A.C. Moule and P. Pelliot, 2 vols. (London, 1938), i. 47-52.

pyist. In fact, the reverse is the case; a number of the passages found only in Ramusio or Z. are among the most striking in the book. In particular, there are two paragraphs found only in Ramusio where Kubilai Khan is represented as expressing sympathy for Christianity, and Marco comments that he would have been converted if only the Pope had sent the preachers as requested.<sup>18</sup> Another incident, this time found only in Z., is the haunting story of an obscure sect discovered by Maffeo and Marco in the Chinese city of Fu-chau, which they identified as Christian by translating their holy book, which turned out to be a psalter. The members of the sect had lost all knowledge of Christian doctrine, and Maffeo and Marco had to explain to them that they were indeed Christian; subsequently, we are told, the Khan accorded them the status of Christians "and it was found that throughout the province of Manzi, here and there, there were more than 700,000 households who adhered to this rule".<sup>19</sup> This must have been exactly the kind of thing that Marco's audience desperately wanted to hear, and it is incredible that any copyist would omit such passages once they had been inserted into the text. It is far more probable that they represent late additions made by Marco himself, dredged perhaps from his memory by persistent questioning, written down too late for incorporation into the main tradition, which is known to have proliferated well before the date of Marco's death.<sup>20</sup>

It took almost a century for Marco's discoveries to begin to make an impact on the world of academic geography and history. While laymen were learning about China from the *Milione* and "Mandeville", a world-chronicler like Ranulph Higden could still describe a world in which India represented the easternmost habitable part.<sup>21</sup> The fact that neither Marco nor Rustichello show any knowledge of theoretical geography may have made it easier to ignore the awkward implications of the *Divisement dou*

<sup>18</sup> G.B. Ramusio, *Delle Navigazioni e Viaggi*, 3 vols. (Venice, 1588-1606), ii. 20-21.

<sup>19</sup> *Description of the World*, ed. Moule and Pelliot, ii. pp. lii-liv.

<sup>20</sup> A copy was obtained in Venice by a French knight in 1307 and Pepino's Latin translation dates from c. 1315; according to an annotation of 1452, a Tuscan version was copied in Florence before 1309 (Benedetto, op. cit., pp. lvi-lvii, lxxx-lxxxi, cliii-cliv).

<sup>21</sup> *Polychronicon*, ed. Churchill Babington, Rolls Series vol. 41 (London, 1865), i. 44, 78.

*Monde*. Readers learned in such matters would have missed any reference to the climatic zones, and the muddled passage where it is claimed that an Asiatic province is so far North that "the Pole Star is left behind towards the South" may have raised some condescending smiles.<sup>22</sup> To his eternal credit the Paduan natural philosopher Pietro d'Abano had the initiative to seek out the Venetian and draw from him a fact of great significance of which the Venetian was hardly aware—that is, that having practically reached the equator during his voyage home, Marco had settled the age-long controversy concerning the habitability of the torrid zone.<sup>23</sup>

It has often been remarked that Dante shows no knowledge of Marco Polo, sometimes with the implication that this was somehow Marco's fault. As Benedetto sensibly pointed out, a poet does not have to write all he knows, and in the symbolic geography of the *Comedy*, Marco's Orient would have been literally out of place. In a work of this kind it was natural that Dante should adhere to the traditional geography of the academics, with the habitable world centred on Jerusalem and extending ninety degrees East to the mouth of the Ganges and ninety degrees West to Cadiz. That this involved doubling the true length of the Mediterranean is something that any experienced sea-captain would have been able to point out. Moreover, if Dante's western world was too large, his East was far too small; with its eastern extremity at the Ganges, there was no room for China, let alone the island of Cipangu, which the Venetian placed 1,500 miles eastward of the China coast. To adjust to this knowledge would have shattered the symbolic symmetry of the world of the poem.<sup>24</sup>

Yet Dante was not one of those imaginative writers, of whom there were many in the middle ages, who disregarded the facts of space and time in their works; on the contrary, his imagined world was constructed with all the cunning and precision of a well-made clock. Dante provides sufficient information to permit a very accurate reconstruction of the form and dimensions of the three

<sup>22</sup> *Il Milione*, ed. cit., p. 58.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, introd., pp. cxxii-cxxiv.

<sup>24</sup> E. Moore, "The Geography of Dante", *Studies in Dante, Third Series* (Oxford, 1903), pp. 109-143; L. Olschki, "Marco Polo, Dante Alighieri e la cosmografia medievale", *Oriente poloniano: Studi e conferenze in occasione del VII. centenario della nascita di Marco Polo* (Rome, 1957), pp. 45-65.



worlds described in the *Comedy*, and includes a number of siderial time-checks which provide a consistent time-table for his infernal, purgatorial and celestial journey.<sup>25</sup> Once the reader has accepted a few basic premises, like the possibility of a man "in the body" walking and climbing, with only a few short "lifts", some three thousand miles down, followed by six thousand miles up in the space of six days, everything else follows, if not quite naturally, certainly in accordance with well-defined rules. Even Dante's flight into the heavens is not miraculous; once his soul has been purged of the weight of sin, it is entirely natural that it should rise towards the centre of its love. Naturally, it is in Purgatory that time and space are most in evidence, since this is the only part of the afterlife which exists within time; the way in which the poet uses the tricks of light caused by the movement of the sun as the pilgrims begin their ascent of the mount at dawn on Easter morning has recently, with much else, been admirably described by Patrick Boyde.<sup>26</sup>

What may, with no disrespect, be called the science fiction aspect of the *Comedy* makes it certain that, if he had chosen, Dante could have described an earthly journey with a high degree of verisimilitude. The poem contains a few geographical periphrases which give a taste of what he might have done, and the linguistic survey of Italy contained in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* shows that the poet had a very clear mental picture of his native land.<sup>27</sup> Without doubt, the most impressive earthly journey described by Dante was the famous voyage of Ulysses in *Inferno* XXVI, five months westward and southward from Seville, which ended in disaster within sight of the antipodean mount of Purgatory itself. There seems no way of knowing whether this story was inspired by the equally disastrous attempt to circumnavigate Africa by the Vivaldi brothers, recorded in the Genoese chronicles under the year 1291.<sup>28</sup> Maybe Dante's fable helped to sensitise the learned world towards the region south and west of the Pillars of Hercules.

<sup>25</sup> M.A. Orr, *Dante and the Astronomers* (London, 1913), pp. 353-426.

<sup>26</sup> P. Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 79-81.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

<sup>28</sup> Among the considerable and controversial literature on this episode, F.M. Rogers, "The Vivaldi Expedition", *Annual Report of the Dante Society*, lxxiii (1955), 31-45, provides a convenient summary of the sources and problems.

We cannot be sure that Dante had ever seen a portolan map, though his strong sense of geographical space makes it seem very likely.<sup>29</sup> Marco Polo twice refers to a mariners' chart of the Indian Ocean, which from his account appears to have been far from accurate; moreover, his reports on the provinces of the Mongol Empire are so remarkably orderly, considering that he cannot possibly have visited them all himself, that it is reasonable to assume that he was acquainted with the small-scale maps which had been in use in China since the third century.<sup>30</sup> However, for incontrovertible evidence for the influence of the portolan map in literature, it is necessary to turn to Boccaccio's prose romance *Il Filocolo* completed towards the end of his Neapolitan period around 1336-8. This long and ambitious work tells the well-known love story of Fiorio and Biancifiore, which by the fourteenth century was circulating in many versions in most European languages. Although the text Boccaccio had in front of him has not been identified, enough is known about the character of these simple *cantari* to make it reasonably easy to detect Boccaccio's inventions and amplifications of the story.<sup>31</sup> His is a young man's book, packed with literary reminiscences and erudition of the most varied kinds. To a core of medieval romance is added, on the one hand echoes of the Latin poets, especially Ovid, Lucan and Statius, and on the other personal experiences of the writer's Neapolitan days and autobiographical elements buried in allegory which have teased and baffled the commentators.<sup>32</sup> Here we are concerned only with the way in which Boccaccio located his story both in place and time with a precision which may have owed something to Dante and was certainly influenced by intellectual contacts in Naples and the Angevin court.

<sup>29</sup> According to *A Concordance to the Divine Comedy*, ed. E.H. Wilkins and T.C. Bergin (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), the word *carta* appears eight times in the poem, always with the meaning of page (of writing); the word *mappa* does not appear at all.

<sup>30</sup> J. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, iii (Cambridge, 1959), 538-554.

<sup>31</sup> V. Crescini, *Il cantare di Fiorio e Biancifiore*, 2 vols. (Bologna, 1889, reprint 1969).

<sup>32</sup> V. Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and His Works* (New York, 1976), pp. 44-47; A.E. Quaglio, *Scienza e mito nel Boccaccio* (Padua, 1967); idem., "Tra fonti e testo del Filocolo", *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, cxxxix (1962), 321-369, 512-540, and cxl (1963), 321-363.

The first two and a half books of the *Filocolo* take place in the never-never land of medieval romance. A noble Roman couple on their way to the shrine of St. James of Compostella to give thanks for their expected child are intercepted by the Saracen king of Spain and, after the husband has been killed in battle, the wife is carried back via Seville to the pagan court of Marmorina which, it gradually becomes clear, is Verona. This light-hearted disregard for the facts of geography and history was traditional with this story. A French version makes the couple Parisians and places the Saracen court in Naples; later in this version the hero sails to Babilonia on the Euphrates which nevertheless has a Mediterranean port.<sup>33</sup> To return to Boccaccio, in Marmorina the Roman lady dies giving birth to Biancifiore, who is then brought up with the Saracen king's son Florio. A touch of realism is introduced when the king, disturbed by his son's growing love for a kinless and foreign girl, sends him away to the city of Montorio, in fact a village with a medieval castle some four miles north-east of Verona.<sup>34</sup> However, it is only when Florio's rival Fileno (an invention of Boccaccio), leaves the court, that the geographical setting takes on a life that is more than conventional. His wanderings round Italy are described with references which show that we are in a period when Padua is a seaport, Venice does not exist, and the ruins left by Attila, *flagellum Dei*, are still much in evidence. Finally, Fileno finds a ruined pagan temple on a tree-covered hill by the river Elsa — particulars precise enough to make the site clearly indentifiable as that of Boccaccio's home town of Certaldo.<sup>35</sup> Soon after, Biancifiore is sold to Eastern merchants, and their voyage from Padua to Alexandria via Rhodes would be entirely realistic and rational were it not for an unexplained diversion to Sicily on the way. Florio follows in pursuit, but his journey takes him overland to Pisa and thence by sea to Naples, providing Boccaccio with opportunities for autobiographical references and descriptions of a *festa* and a court of love in the

<sup>33</sup> Crescini, *Fiorio e Biancifiore*, i. 171, 396.

<sup>34</sup> "Qui a noi molto vicino è una città chiamata Montoro, dotata di molti diletti..." *Filocolo*, ed. A. E. Quaglio in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. V. Branca, i (Florence, 1967), 135. Boccaccio took the name Montorio from the *cantare*, where its position is not defined, and, characteristically, made it apply to a specific place. Can it have been this which made him locate the Saracen court in Verona?

<sup>35</sup> *Filocolo*, ed. cit., pp. 301-4.

Angevin capital.<sup>36</sup> After this interlude, Florio takes up the trail to Sicily and thence east, and it is here that the influence of the portolan map makes itself clear. Leaving behind Gozo and Malta, Florio's ship takes him to Alexandria by the normal route touching Crete and Rhodes; on the way, Boccaccio mentions a number of points passed, including some headlands and islands so obscure that they can only have been taken from a map. He seems to have used one of those drawn by the Genoese Pietro Vesconte, which may have come his way through their association with the *Secretum Fidelium Crucis*, a crusade plan by the Venetian Marino Sanudo which had been examined by Boccaccio's mentor Paolino Minorita about fifteen years before the writing of the *Filocolo*.<sup>37</sup>

Boccaccio's is the only version of the Fiorio-Biancifiore story where the eastern adventures take place in Alexandria rather than in "Babilonia", which is either Cairo or Bagdad. This is undoubtedly due to the portolan map which marked the Torre dell'Arabo, a fortification on the site of the Pharos used as a navigation mark, arousing the writer's imagination so that he made it the scene of Biancifiore's incarceration. After the rescue of Biancifiore from the tower, the happy couple return by the now familiar route via Sicily to Naples, where another opportunity is taken to describe the city and its surroundings.<sup>38</sup> The pair then travel overland through Tuscany, where they move through a pastoral Ovidian landscape, eventually discovering the tomb of Fileno on its lonely hill. Florio mediates between two rival groups of tribesmen and persuades them to found a town together which will become Certaldo. He then leaves with his bride to visit her ancestral city of

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 323, 330-335, 354 ff. The natural route Marmorina (Verona)-Mantua-Alfea (Pisa) is diverted so that Boccaccio can bring his hero to the future site of Certaldo; his lame explanation "Ma i fati da non poter fuggire volsero in arco la diretta via..." at least shows that he was aware of, and uneasy about, the anomaly.

<sup>37</sup> V. Bertolini, "Le carte geografiche nel Filocolo", *Studi sul Boccaccio*, v (1968), 211-225; *Filocolo*, ed. cit., p. 464. By chance, this route is almost exactly the one described by the pilgrim Nicolò da Martoni, who passed that way in 1394; see J. K. Hyde, "Navigation of the Eastern Mediterranean in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries according to Pilgrims' Books", *Papers in Italian Archaeology*, i, British Archaeological Reports, Supplementary Series 41 (1978), p. 524.

<sup>38</sup> *Filocolo*, pp. 470 ff. (description of Torre dell'Arabo); pp. 553-589 (Naples).

Rome and there is converted to Christianity before returning to Marmorina to succeed his father on the throne.<sup>39</sup>

It is in the latter part of the romance that the chronological frame is firmly established. We are in the reign of Justinian, Florence has been destroyed by the Goth Totila but Perugia is still holding out; the emperor has been "converted" by Pope Agapitus, who has been succeeded by Virgilius. Working back from these indications, A. E. Quaglio has been able to reconstruct the chronology of the whole story, from the conception of the protagonists in August 529 to Fiorio's coronation in 552.<sup>40</sup> Most events can be dated within a year and season (usually Spring) with all the intervals consistent with each other. The topographical setting is not so well worked out, with an unexplained juxtaposition of sixth-century and fourteenth-century features. The journeys to the East through Naples and Sicily would be much more plausible if Marmorina were not identified with Verona but with somewhere further west; perhaps the decision was taken at an early stage in the writing, before the idea of a realistic geographical frame had developed in Boccaccio's mind. Imperfect as it is, there is enough in the *Filocolo* to show that by the end its author had seized on the possibilities of a true historical novel, in which fictitious characters move in front of a setting the truth of which is established by research in chronicles and maps. He sought to give his readers the special pleasure which comes from the recognition of familiar places made strange by the imaginative reconstruction of how they were in the past.

The road to the historical novel which opened in the *Filocolo* was one which Boccaccio declined to take. The *Decameron* is, of course, far more realistic than the earlier romance and the brilliantly sketched backgrounds add immeasurably to the total effect. Even some of the settings which seem at first sight to be quite unspecific, like a brigand-infested forest near Rome, turns out, as Branca has shown, to refer to the Selva d'Aglio, notorious to travelling merchants.<sup>41</sup> But the restricted space of a hundred short *novelle* did not provide room for the extended explorations of space and time attempted in the *Filocolo*. The story set in

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 589-602 (Tuscany); pp. 603-643 (Rome); pp. 643-675 (return to Marmorina).

<sup>40</sup> Quaglio, "Tra fonti e testo", p. 340.

<sup>41</sup> Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and His Works*, pp. 276-327.

Cathay shows no specific knowledge of the country or its customs.<sup>42</sup>

After the *Decameron*, Boccaccio turned away from imaginative writing and became increasingly occupied with his studies of classical literature. Some idea of his interests at this time is provided by a commonplace book which he began to keep around 1351 and which is now in the National Library in Florence. From the balance of the contents of the *Zibaldone Magliabechiano*, it seems that he was chiefly concerned with world history, seen in the traditional way as a succession of rulers and dynasties. By far the longest extracts are from the universal history of his old acquaintance Paolino Minorita, with which he persisted despite an increasing exasperation with the author which is duly recorded in a series of marginal exclamations. There was some geographical material in Paolino as well as information on Asiatic kingdoms in the Armenian prince Hayton's *Flor des Estoires*, which Boccaccio briefly epitomised. But there is no evidence of any special interest in these matters; the overall impression is of an indiscriminate search for general knowledge, and if Boccaccio had any particular aim in mind, it can only have been some kind of compendium of world history.<sup>43</sup>

In this setting the entry on ff. 123v-124r is totally unexpected. It is a Latin translation, undoubtedly by Boccaccio, of a Florentine merchant's letter describing an expedition to the Canary Islands in 1341, led by Italians but financed by the Portuguese.<sup>44</sup> This unique intrusion of the world of contemporary action into pages otherwise concerned with traditional learning is very striking, and raises the question why it should have been this particular event which aroused Boccaccio's interest. As the original letter has never been found, one can only guess what changes of substance, as opposed to language, Boccaccio introduced into his account. It has been suggested that it was the nudity or near-nudity of the aboriginal

<sup>42</sup> *Decameron*, X.3. The tale is thought to be of Persian origin, but the theme is the universal one of liberality. One attempt at local colour misfires badly when Boccaccio has a Chinese wearing a turban (*benda*).

<sup>43</sup> A.M. Costantini, "Studi sullo Zibaldone Magliabechiano", *Studi sul Boccaccio*, vii (1973), 21-58.

<sup>44</sup> G. Padoan, "Petrarca, Boccaccio e la scoperta delle Canarie", *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica*, vii (1964), 263-277; M. Pastore Stocchi, "Il 'De Canaria' boccaccesco e un *locus desperditus* nel 'De Insulis' di Domenico Silvestri", *Rinascimento*, x. 146-153, with text of the *De Canaria*, pp. 153-156.

Canarians which attracted his attention. More seriously, there is some element of the noble savage in the observation of the natural dignity of the islanders, who are alleged to have been more *domestici* than many Spaniards, which may have links with the nostalgia for primitive innocence expressed in the biography of Ceres in Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*.<sup>45</sup> What do not seem to have been noticed are some echoes in the *De Canaria* of certain attitudes found in the *Filocolo*, particularly the interest in paganism and its visible manifestations. Most of the *Filocolo*, it must be remembered, is about pagans, and one of the fruits of Boccaccio's immersion in classical literature can be seen in the natural and convincing way in which he represents his characters sacrificing and praying to their pagan gods. His sixth-century setting allowed him to describe with evident delight a deserted hilltop temple and an overgrown marble fountain, relics of Roman civilisation crumbling through the dual onslaught of the barbarians and the new religion. In the *De Canaria* Boccaccio also describes a pagan temple discovered by the explorers, unadorned except for a male nude statue of stone, holding a ball, his vitals decorously concealed by palm leaves — an image far too like a classical statue to be true.<sup>46</sup>

Information about the Atlantic islands was far more readily absorbed by men of learning than the much more significant discoveries in the East. Petrarch even claims that in his times the Canaries have become, through oral and written accounts, as well-known as Italy and France. He also mentions the bizarre coronation of the Spanish prince Luis de la Cerda as king of the Canaries, carried out by the pope in Avignon on 15 November 1344; the ceremony was marred by heavy rain which proved unpropitious, for Luis died four years later without ever having entered his

<sup>45</sup> Pastore Stocchi, art. cit., p. 152.

<sup>46</sup> "Invenerunt et insuper oratorium unum seu templum in quo penitus nulla erat pictura nec aliud adoratum preter statuam unam ex lapide sculptam, ymaginem hominis habentem manuque pilam tenentem, nudam, femoralibus palmeis more suo obscena tegentem..." (ibid., p. 154). Boccaccio refers to the images of pagan gods in the Torre dell'Arabo and to a garlanded Cupid worshipped by Florio and Biancifiore (*Filocolo*, pp. 471, 508), but does not describe them; his fascination with deserted ruins emerges on pp. 304, 571-572. References to pagan prayers and sacrifices abound, eg. pp. 199, 234-5, 591-2. Another resonance can be felt between the description of the primitive founders of Certaldo (*Filocolo*, pp. 596-7) and *De Canaria*, pp. 153-4.

kingdom.<sup>47</sup> Domenico Silvestri in his *De Insulis* and Domenico Bandini in his encyclopaedic *Fons Memorabilium* both incorporate the new information on the Canaries, drawing directly on Boccaccio.<sup>48</sup> Traditional geography, of course, provided a foothold for the Canaries with its references to the Fortunate Islands of antiquity, but the same was true of China and even more of India. It looks as if the half-naked Canarians were easier to accommodate to the established world-picture than the disturbingly powerful and wealthy provinces of the Mongol Empire and India.

The interests revealed in the main body of Boccaccio's *Zibaldone* found expression in the *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, which illustrated through *exempla* the variableness of fortune in every age. From his literary and philological studies arose the influential *De Genealogia Deorum* on classical mythology, and the smaller *De Montibus*, *Silvis*, *Fontibus* etc. begun around 1355-7 and sporadically revised up to the author's death. As the preface makes clear, the *De Montibus* was designed as an aid to reading rather than travel; the aim was to help the reader of the pagan poets distinguish the various natural features among the proper names found in Latin literature. Thus the great majority of the entries in this alphabetical gazeteer concern the Mediterranean-centred world of Greek and Roman literature, including even the legendary rivers of the underworld; there is no consistent attempt to find modern equivalents to the ancient names which, as Boccaccio disarmingly confesses in his conclusion, is too difficult and not his job. Hence there is no trace of the information about Eastern kingdoms which he had copied into the *Zibaldone* from Hayton. Boccaccio was unconcerned that his work contained duplications; from his point of view it was better for a reader to find what he wanted twice rather than not at all.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Padoan, art. cit., p. 272. "Fortunatas insulas ad austrum partim visu, partim assiduo comitantium testimonio, non aliter pene quam ipsam Italiam aut Galliam nosceremus" (Petrarch, *Epistolae Familiares*, iii. 1, 3).

<sup>48</sup> Pastore Stocchi, art. cit.

<sup>49</sup> M. Pastore Stocchi, *Tradizione medievale e gusto umanistico nel 'De Montibus'* (Padua, 1963); A. Hortis, *Accenni alle scienze naturali nelle opere di Giovanni Boccaccio* (Trieste, 1877). The first modern edition of the *De Montibus*, in *Tutte le opere* ed. V. Branca, has not yet appeared; I have used the Venice edition of 1473 which, like all old editions of this work, is unpaginated. Boccaccio explains his aims and methods in his preface and conclusion.



However, Boccaccio did not entirely stick to his purist, antiquarian intentions. The inclusion of an appreciation of his friend Petrarch under *Sorigia fons* and rather immodestly of himself under *Elsa flumen*, can be construed as a claim for a place in the world of the poets. He draws on two twelfth-century writers, Giraldus Cambrensis for Wales and Ireland and Geoffrey of Monmouth for Britain.<sup>50</sup> He comments freely on places which he knew from personal experience or hearsay, and cannot resist an occasional verbal thrust against some of his personal *bêtes noires*; Avignon is denounced as the New Babylon and the Venetians are castigated for claiming the Adriatic as their own. Yet he is unexpectedly well-informed about the rivers of the Veneto, where he gives many modern names as, for example, all the mouths of the Po; when brought together, this seems to constitute a distinctive block of contemporary information derived from some specific written or oral source.<sup>51</sup> On one point only does Boccaccio confront a contradiction between his ancient authorities and modern reports. Isidore had said that the Caspian was a gulf of the Borean Ocean, but Boccaccio had either heard from merchants or missionaries, read in Marco Polo or William of Rubruck, or seen from the Vesconte map, that the Caspian was a landlocked lake. Uncertain, but true to his principles, he entered the Caspian twice, as *lacus* and as *mare*, in the second entry discussing the problem briefly and settling for a generalised description which would fit either case.<sup>52</sup> Otherwise, the world of the *De Montibus* is the traditional one, in outline recognisably the same as that of Solinus or Dante and quite unaffected by the spectacular discoveries in the East.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Pastore Stocchi, op. cit., p. 66, n. 15 reckons some 20 *voci* are derived from Giraldus; among those drawn from the *Historia Regum Britanniae* are the *montes Agned*, *Ambrius*, *Dolorosus* and *Paledur*.

<sup>51</sup> *De Montibus*, s.v. Athesis, Aponus, Brenta, Meduacus, Padus, Timavus and Togisonus flumina. The remarks on Avignon and Venice are s.v. *Druentia* and *Rhodanum flumina* and *Venetum maris*.

<sup>52</sup> Pastore Stocchi, pp. 43-45. Neither here, nor on the question whether the Tigris flows into the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea, does Boccaccio cite the evidence of modern maps.

<sup>53</sup> The easternmost point of the world of the *De Montibus* appears to have been not the Ganges but the "Vulturino promontorio apud quod Sericum terminatur", meeting point of the Indicum and Iperboreus *maria*. The name comes from that of the S.E. wind.

The taste for painless, armchair travel for readers of Tuscan was catered for by Fazio degli Uberti's *Dittamondo*, a long poem in *terza rima* mainly set in 1345 but showing signs of later revision and remaining incomplete at the author's death in 1367. It is difficult to be fair to Fazio, for such modest poetic gifts as he had were smothered under the overwhelming influence of Dante, whom he no doubt venerated but unconsciously parodied. In his hands the sublime poetry of the Comedy is made banal and the weaknesses of the divine poet are duly reproduced and exaggerated. Notwithstanding these maddening features, the *Dittamondo* appears to have been widely read and even plagiarized, so one must assume that it met a need.<sup>54</sup> While Dante had traversed the afterworld accompanied by Virgil, Fazio toured most of this one guided by Solinus. The choice of this third-century recounter of fables as guide faithfully reflects the main source of the geography of the *Dittamondo*, which largely resembles a conservative world-chronicle in verse, containing tedious potted histories of empires and dynasties connected with the countries visited. The areas described are mostly those best known to the ancients, though there is a significant injection of information about northern and central Europe derived from the mid-thirteenth-century encyclopaedia of the English friar Bartholomaeus Anglicus.<sup>55</sup> Fazio realised the need to give some account of Islam, and introduces the Florentine friar Ricoldo da Montecroce, who summarises his book on Mohammed and the Koran.<sup>56</sup> But Fazio made no

<sup>54</sup> *Il dittamondo e le rime*, ed. G. Corsi, 2 vols. (Bari, 1952); 57 MSS. are listed, mostly of the fifteenth century (ii. 71-73), and there is a fifteenth-century commentary by Guglielmo Capello (ii. 223-245). Giovanni Sercambi of Lucca inserted passages from the *Dittamondo* into his chronicle c. 1398; ed. S. Bongi, 3 vols. (Rome, 1892), ii. 83-117, 144-154.

<sup>55</sup> Fazio indicates the change of source with the lines

Tanto son vago di cercare a dentro  
ch'io mi lascio Solino alquanto a dietro  
ed esco fuor del suo segnato centro. (*Dittamondo*, i. 287).

Corsi believed this and other passages to be derived from the *Polychronicon* of Ranulph Higden, but the *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, the original source, was much better known and had been translated into Italian before 1320. See G. Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science* (Washington, 1931), ii. 586-87.

<sup>56</sup> *Dittamondo*, ed. cit., i. 365-370. Ricoldo's *Confutatio Alcorani* is in Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, cliv, coll. 1035-1170. For his *Itinerarius* see U. Monneret de Villard, *Il libro delle parti d'Oriente di Frate Ricoldo da Montecroce* (Rome, 1948); this was used by the Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani and translated into Tuscan during the fourteenth century.

attempt whatever to incorporate the new information on the Orient; his India is the land of wonders of the ancients, and China is even more conspicuously absent than usual, since he places the Seres first among the trans-Caucasian peoples.<sup>57</sup>

Despite these traditional features, there are signs in the *Dittamondo* of some attempts to relate new information, and even personal experience, to a frame handed down from the remote past. Sometimes the result is confusion, as when Fazio fails to realise that Hibernia and Islanda are the same island, or when he mixes ancient and contemporary names for places on the African coast.<sup>58</sup> At other times he is able to reconcile the old and the new quite well; his account of the Danube seems to have been filled out from some contemporary map or itinerary, and one chapter appears to have been inserted when he had quite a good modern map of the Baltic in front of him.<sup>59</sup> Otherwise, as Fazio, the quintessential tourist, indulges his indiscriminating curiosity in, for example, a history of Greece illustrated by sculptures or a genealogy of the kings of France, until moved on by Solinus, the quintessential courier, who is mainly anxious to get back home—the main interest for us lies in the asides and occasional passages which seem to reflect Fazio's personal experience or that of the travellers of his time. In the account of France and the surrounding provinces there seems to be a glimpse of the world of the Italian merchants, particularly in the striking description of the devastated lands between Normandy and Paris still suffering from the recent depredations of “Adoart d'Engleterre, cil de Gales et li bon quens de Arbi.” In this interpolation of around 1362, the course of the Hundred Years' War is outlined in French by a messenger of the king whom the travellers meet on the road.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Dittamondo*, pp. 23-26. This brief survey of Asia is mainly based on Solinus.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 328-329, 349-355 and notes; ii. 327-330. Fazio warns his readers of his problems:

Lettor, com'io t'ho detto altra fiata  
quasi cambiato ha nome ogni contrada  
e qual più e qual men cresce e dilata.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 280, 287-289. See E. Rosato, “Le notizie sui paesi settentrionali nel *Dittamondo*”, *Bollettino della società geografica italiana*, Ser. VI, iii (1926), 126-150.

<sup>60</sup> *Dittamondo*, i. 301-303. Reference to the Earl of Derby at this date is unexpected, since Henry of Grosmont had inherited the earldom of Lancaster as far back as 1345. It is most likely that Fazio was following Giovanni Villani, who

Fazio's Italy, by comparison, is clogged with erudition, though the fascinating comment that the people of the Barbagia region of Sardinia speak a dialect no-one understands, has the freshness of a direct observation.<sup>61</sup>

Fazio should not be judged too harshly for his juxtaposition of traditional lore with up-to-date information from contemporary reports and maps, for it is very much the same mixture that is to be found in Boccaccio's *De Montibus*; both are mainly concerned, not with the everyday world but with the world of literature. The opening of *Il Dittamondo*, where the poet is urged on by virtue and dissuaded by cowardice, leaves the reader in no doubt that the journey is an imaginary one, a literary device. The Castilian Franciscan responsible for *El Libro del Conosçimiento de Todos los Reynos y Tierras y Señorios que son por el Mundo* adopted a different approach, claiming to recount his travels around virtually the whole known world.<sup>62</sup> It is not difficult to show, however, that most of his journeys are imaginary and have been constructed by the use of a contemporary map, probably one of Catalan origin. The inclusion of the flags of all nations, many of them invented, is significant, since these were portrayed on such maps. In the West, the author knows much more about the coastlines than the inland areas; his knowledge of the Baltic, for example, is impressive and his route from there to England is plausible; when, however, he tries to make us believe that he passed from England to Ireland by a short crossing of only one mile, it is quite plain that he has simply misread the map.<sup>63</sup> The account of the Mediterranean, its islands and surrounding lands, is particularly remote and second-hand and does not follow any credible sailing route; the Castilian thinks that Bosnia is the name of a mountain and that Creta is a city of the island of Rhodes.<sup>64</sup> As one would

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calls him *il conte d'Orbi* throughout his account of the campaign of 1345 (*Cronica*, xii. 47, ed. I. Moutier (Florence, 1823), vii. 118-123).

<sup>61</sup> *Dittamondo*, i. 218-219.

<sup>62</sup> Ed. M. Jiménez de la Espada (Madrid, 1877); English translation, *Book of the Knowledge of All the Kingdoms, Lands, Lordships etc.*, C. Markham, Hakluyt Society Ser. II, vol xxix (London, 1912).

<sup>63</sup> *Libro*, ed. cit. pp. 17-19. The nomenclature is quite different from that in *Dittamondo*, i. 287-288.

<sup>64</sup> *Libro*, pp. 28-31. The writer claims to have sailed from the Adriatic via the Morea to Rhodes, thence to Candia and on to Satalia, on the south coast of Asia Minor, suggesting that he confused the positions of Crete and Rhodes.

expect in the case of a Spaniard, he is much better informed about Africa and accurately reports some recent events in the Moorish kingdoms.<sup>65</sup> He may have sailed, as he claims, down the African coast to Cape Bojador in a galley (*panfilo*) and, more doubtfully, have visited the Canaries in a Moorish ship, but the Seven Mountains of Guinea come from Solinus, probably by way of a map.<sup>66</sup> He had genuine information about the western Sahara and its oases and knew something of Dongola and Nubia, but his claim to have reached the upper Nile direct from West Africa is incredible.<sup>67</sup> Unlike Marco Polo, he placed the kingdom of Prester John in East Africa and reports that the crew of a Genoese galley wrecked at Amenuan on the Guinea coast was brought to Ethiopia; he alleges that he heard in Mogadishu that the Genoese Sorleone di Vivaldo had penetrated thus far in search for his father.<sup>68</sup> These unbelievable stories show that the Vivaldi expedition of 1291 continued to arouse curiosity and interest in the West. A reader of the *Libro del Conoscimento* would come away with the idea that the circumnavigation of Africa would entail no insuperable problems.

The Franciscan shows his independence from traditional geography by not neglecting the new discoveries in the East. Much of what he has to say derives from the common stock of legend and *rapportage* of the missionaries who had passed that way, and his passages on India, South-East Asia and its islands could have been taken from a map which was well-endowed with explanatory legends. The description of Cathay has no obvious links with either Marco Polo or Orderic of Pordenone; though brief, it makes clear that China rather than the mouth of the Ganges, is the eastern extremity of the Asian land mass; though he knows nothing of Cipangu, the Castilian remarks pregnantly that "Catayo is at the end of the face of the earth in the line of Spain."

<sup>65</sup> *Libro*, pp. 42, 45. The reference to the defeat of Abu-I-hasan near Kairouan in 1348 provides the *terminus post quem* for the book.

<sup>66</sup> *Libro*, pp. 49-53.

<sup>67</sup> *Libro*, pp. 55-56. On the persistence of the idea that there would be no great difficulty in reaching Ethiopia from the West African coast, see C. F. Beckingham, "The Quest for Prester John", *Bulletin*, lxii (1979-80), 299-304.

<sup>68</sup> *Libro*, pp. 63-4, 67-8. It is hard to dismiss this story as a pure invention, since the Franciscan was right about the name of Vivaldo's son; moreover, the legend crops up again in the fifteenth century. See Rogers, "The Vivaldi Expedition", *Annual Report of the Dante Society*, lxxiii (1955), 39-42.

The inclusion of two itineraries from the West to China, one via the Black Sea and the Steppes and the other by way of Armenia, Persia and Samarkand, support the impression that he may be tapping information current among merchants.<sup>69</sup> Snippets of circumstantial information about Persia and Constantinople have suggested to some that he may have visited these parts, but it is much more likely that his knowledge was indirect in view of his ignorance about the eastern Mediterranean, unless, that is, one believes his claim to have returned from the East by way of Russia and the Baltic.<sup>70</sup>

With all its faults the *Libro de Conosçimento* marks a significant step in the drawing together of the world of merchants and missionaries and that of literature. Instead of the symbolic geography of Dante or the traditional lore drawn from encyclopaedias by Fazio, the Castilian set out to portray the world as it was known in his time, basing his account almost entirely on up-to-date information and maps. He does not indulge in the same mixture of out-of-date and contemporary data which we find in the *Dittamondo* and the *De Montibus*. Datable on internal evidence to between 1348 and 1375, the *Libro* was written just as the trickle of first-hand information was drying up. The Mongol Empire was breaking up, making travel to the East more and more difficult, and Western initiatives in Africa seem to have slackened at about the same time. In 1368 the establishment of the Ming dynasty effectively closed the window to the East.

There was no simple line of progress in the accession and dissemination of geographical knowledge in the century 1250-1350. The worlds of learned and practical men were not totally isolated from one another, nor were they consistently integrated, so that knowledge and ignorance, curiosity and complacency are found side by side. Imaginary journeys helped to bridge the gap by disseminating information and stimulating interest. The Ulysses legend may have sensitised Boccaccio and Petrarch to the news from the Canaries; readers of the *Filocolo* and the *Libro de Conosçimento* were offered what were intended as credible rather than merely conventional or fantastic journeys. Perhaps the greatest advance in the period was in the growth of a reading public for real and imaginary journeys alike. In 1298 Marco Polo's

<sup>69</sup> *Libro*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-99, 115-116.

experiences had to be partly dressed up as romance to attract a lay readership, yet by 1350 Boccaccio could parody travellers' tales in such a way as to suggest that they were so well-known as to be a ripe target for ridicule.<sup>71</sup> From the end of this period come both the collections of Oriental journeys edited by Jean le Long of Ypres and the immensely readable and popular fantasies of "Mandeville".<sup>72</sup> The element of fantasy was probably necessary to nourish the readership and keep interest alive during the following period when practical applications, whether by merchants or missionaries, were virtually non-existent. And in the end, the discoveries made during the century of Mongol peace were decisive, for it was to find Marco Polo's Cipangu that Christopher Columbus, following a long line of Genoese in the service of Iberian princes, set out across the Atlantic in 1492.

<sup>71</sup> See the sermon of Fra Cipolla, *Decameron*, vi. 10.

<sup>72</sup> Benedetto, *Il Milione*, p. xxxv. A good introduction to the complexities of Mandeville is M. Letts, *Sir John Mandeville: the Man and his Book* (London, 1949).