

**Primary Source Document  
with Questions (DBQs)**

**THE BOOK OF SER MARCO POLO: THE VENETIAN CONCERNING  
KINGDOMS AND MARVELS OF THE EAST, CHAPTER LXXVIII:  
TREATING OF THE GREAT YEARLY REVENUE THAT THE GREAT  
KAAN HATH FROM KINSAY**

**Introduction**

Marco Polo (1254-1324) was born in Venice, an Italian city-state, to a powerful merchant family with extensive trade contacts. Marco Polo had the standard education for a young gentleman of his time—knowledge of classical authors and the basic beliefs of the Catholic church, a good grasp of French and Italian, and skills in accounting.

In 1260, Marco Polo's father and uncle traveled through the Mongol empire, all the way to its capital in China. There they requested trade and missionary contacts. Tradition has it that on a second trip, taken in 1271, on which they carried messages from the Pope, the elder Polos took along young Marco, who was then seventeen. Many years later, Marco Polo, with the assistance of a romance novel writer, composed a book entitled *The Travels of Marco Polo, or, A Description of the World*. If the book is to be believed, Marco Polo spent seventeen years in China, during which time he not only conducted business, but also was hired by the Mongol Yuan emperor to serve as the governor of Yangzhou, a large southern Chinese port city.

The veracity of Marco Polo's account is hotly debated among scholars. Some uphold Polo's claim to have been to China, while others argue that he simply picked up tales of China from Arab traders and compiled them into a book. None dispute, however, that the book does contain descriptions of Yuan-dynasty China, albeit with the embellishments and inaccuracies that one would expect from text that has been copied and recopied since the thirteenth century.

In the excerpts that follow, Marco Polo (or his Arab sources) describes the cities and urban life of Yuan-dynasty China.

**Selected Document Excerpt**

From *The Book of Ser Marco Polo: The Venetian Concerning Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, Volumes I and II, translated and edited by Colonel Sir Henry Yule (London: John Murray, 1903).

**The Book of Ser Marco Polo:  
The Venetian Concerning Kingdoms and Marvels of the East**

**BOOK SECOND. PART III.**

**CHAPTER LXXVIII. TREATING OF THE GREAT YEARLY REVENUE THAT THE GREAT  
KAAN HATH FROM KINSAY**

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**THE BOOK OF SER MARCO POLO: THE VENETIAN CONCERNING KINGDOMS  
AND MARVELS OF THE EAST, CHAPTER LXXVIII: TREATING OF THE GREAT YEARLY REVENUE  
THAT THE GREAT KAAH HATH FROM KINSAY**

Now I will tell you about the great revenue which the Great Kaan draweth every year from the said city of Kinsay<sup>1</sup> and its territory, forming a ninth part of the whole country of Manzi.<sup>2</sup>

First there is the salt, which brings in a great revenue. For it produces every year, in round numbers, fourscore *tomans* of gold; and the *toman* is worth 70,000 *saggi* of gold, so that the total value of the fourscore *tomans* will be five millions and six hundred thousand *saggi* of gold, each *saggio* being worth more than a gold florin or ducat; in sooth, a vast sum of money! [This province, you see, adjoins the ocean, on the shores of which are many lagoons or salt marshes, in which the sea-water dries up during the summer time; and thence they extract such a quantity of salt as suffices for the supply of five of the kingdoms of Manzi besides this one.]

Having told you of the revenue from salt, I will now tell you of that which accrues to the Great Kaan from the duties on merchandize and other matters.

You must know that in this city and its dependencies they make great quantities of sugar, as indeed they do in the other eight divisions of this country; so that I believe the whole of the rest of the world together does not produce such a quantity, at least, if that be true which many people have told me; and the sugar alone again produces an enormous revenue.— However, I will not repeat the duties on every article separately, but tell you how they go in the lump. Well, all spicery pays three and a third per cent on the value; and all merchandize likewise pays three and a third per cent. [But sea-borne goods from India and other distant countries pay ten percent.] The rice-wine also makes a great return, and coals, of which there is a great quantity; and so do the twelve guilds of craftsmen that I told you of, with their 12,000 stations apiece, for every article they make pays duty. And the silk which is produced in such abundance makes an immense return. But why should I make a long story of it? The silk, you must know, pays ten per cent, and many other articles also pay ten per cent.

And you must know that Messer Marco Polo, who relates all this, was several times sent by the Great Kaan to inspect the amount of his customs and revenue from this ninth part of Manzi, and he found it to be, exclusive of the salt revenue which we have mentioned already, 210 *tomans* of gold, equivalent to 14,700,000 *saggi* of gold; one of the most enormous revenues that ever was heard of. And if the sovereign has such a revenue from one-ninth part of the country, you may judge what he must have from the whole of it! However, to speak the truth, this part is the greatest and most productive; and because of the great revenue that the Great Kaan derives from it, it is his favourite province, and he takes all the more care to watch it well, and to keep the people contented.

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<sup>1</sup> Hangzhou

<sup>2</sup> South China