



## Marco Polo, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and Zheng He: Three Afro-Eurasian Travellers, 13th-15th Centuries

12 June 2024

Warwick Venice Centre

Palazzo Giustinian Lolin, San Marco 2893, Venice

The Later Middle Ages saw an intensification of cross-continental travel accounts. The Venetian Marco Polo, whose 700 years since his death is commemorated in 2024, became the best-known European traveller since the early XIVth century. He travelled along the silk roads that stretched from the Black and Caspian Seas to China and back via the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. This conference puts Polo into conversation with other travellers and explorers from c. 1270 to 1450. While Polo was a merchant, the Moroccan traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was a scholar and pilgrim to Mecca. He completed at least four trips from his hometown of Tangier to Mecca, India, Southeast Asia, and perhaps China, as well as to the Kingdom of Mali, which lasted for over thirty years, starting in 1326. Two generations later, from China, Zheng He, the admiral of the Chinese imperial fleet, completed seven voyages to the "Western Ocean" (Indian Ocean), including Southeast Asia, India, the coasts of Arabia and East Africa between 1405 and 1433. His travels were recorded by Ma Huan. Focusing on Marco Polo, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, and Zheng He, this conference brings together experts in the history of travel and travellers from different parts of Eurasia to re-contextualise Polo's attainments in a global framework.

**Introduction.** Chair: Luca Molà (Warwick University)

10:15-10:30 - Welcome address by Tiziana Lippiello (Rettrice, Ca' Foscari University) and Michael Scott (Pro Vice-Chancellor International, Warwick University)

10:30-10:40 - Welcome address by Luca Molà (Warwick University) and Giorgio Riello (European University Institute / Warwick University)

### **Keynote Speech**

10:40-11:20 - Andrea Nanetti (Nanyang Technological University Singapore) - *Marco Polo, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, and Zheng He. The Renowned Afro-Eurasian Travel Accounts from Tradition to Digital Scholarship*

**Session 1. Marco Polo and Venetian Merchants.** Chair: Eugenio Burgio (Ca' Foscari University)

11:20-11:50 - Marina Montesano (University of Messina) - *The Orient in Marco Polo's Travels*

11:50-12:20 - Marcello Bolognari (Ca' Foscari University) and Luca Molà (Warwick University) - *Before and After Marco Polo. Venetian Merchants in Asia and China*

12:20-12:30 - Short break

12:30-13:00 - Discussion

13:00-14:30 - Lunch Break

**Session 2. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa.** Chair: Giorgio Riello (European University Institute / Warwick University)

14:30-15:00 - Antonella Ghersetti (Ca' Foscari University) - *Ibn Baṭṭūṭa: an Arab Marco Polo?*

15:00-15:30 - Vicente Martí Tormo (Ca' Foscari University) - *Introducing Students of Arabic to Digital Humanities through the Digital Engineering of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's Riḥla*

15:30-16:00 - Discussion

16:00-16:20 - Coffee Break

**Session 3. Chinese Travelers and Zheng He.** Chair: Luca Molà (Warwick University)

16:20-16:50 - Anne Gerritsen (Warwick University) - *The Materiality of Travel in Zhao Rukuo's Gazetteer of Foreign Lands (1225)*

16:50-17:20 - Tansen Sen (New York University Shanghai) - *The Zheng He Expeditions and the Issue of Periodization of Indian Ocean Interactions*

17:20-17:40 - Discussion

17:40 - Final discussion



The conference is organized by the University of Warwick, the European University Institute - Capasia ERC Research Project, and Nanyang Technological University of Singapore, and it is supported by Ca' Foscari University of Venice

