

ERRANT LATIN: THE TRANSFORMATION OF LANGUAGE IN MEDIEVAL MISSIONS
TO THE MONGOL EMPIRE

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department
of English and Comparative Literature.

Chapel Hill
2019

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ABSTRACT

Meredith F. Ringel-Ensley: Errant Latin: The Transformation of Language in Medieval Missions
to the Mongol Empire
(Under the direction of Shayne Legassie)

This dissertation examines the status of Latin outside Western Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries through the narratives of missionary friars to the Mongol Empire. It shows that Latinity was a key component in Western Europeans' construction of their identity vis-à-vis other cultures, and contributes to wider scholarly conversations about interactions between Europe and Asia in the global Middle Ages. More specifically, it argues that, during the friars' time abroad, the uses of both spoken and written Latin were substantially different than the uses they had in Europe. The *lingua franca* of prestige and the sacred did not function as such in Asia and therefore took on new social functions in new contexts. To demonstrate this, I examine a variety of texts across several genres: travel reports, letters, chronicles, and codices. Beginning with the long travel reports of William of Rubruck, John of Plano Carpini, and Odoric of Pordenone, I then move to looking at the shorter letters of Pope Innocent IV, John of Montecorvino, Peregrine of Castello, and Andrew of Perugia. Subsequently, I turn to Latin books in Asia, especially as discussed by Riccoldo of Montecroce. Lastly, I look at how missionary narratives could be appropriated and transformed by the most famous medieval pseudo-traveler, John Mandeville. Broadly, I analyze how Latin functions in a different space, and the new forms it can take on.

For my parents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the help of many brilliant and generous scholars, friends, and family. First thanks must go to my adviser, Shayne Legassie, a veritable encyclopedia of all things medieval and always a wellspring of good advice. Deepest thanks as well to the rest of my committee: Robert Babcock, Marsha Collins, Brett Whalen, and Jessica Wolfe.

To every one of my students throughout the often exhausting years of completing a graduate degree, thank you for reminding me why doing this is worthwhile. You are some of the smartest and kindest people I've met, and I am privileged to have been one of your teachers.

In Chapel Hill, thanks to Doreen Thierauf, without whose camaraderie in those first years of grad school I might have never made it past coursework. I also could not have done without the friendship and wisdom of fellow medievalists Rebecca Shores and Caitlin Watt.

The medievalist community in New Haven has offered intellectual and convivial support than I could have imagined. Many thanks to Jessica Brantley and Emily Thornbury for welcoming me so warmly into the scholarly community at Yale. The graduate students of the Scriptorium working group were an invaluable intellectual resource for feedback on drafts and ideas. In particular, Seamus Dwyer, Kristen Herdman, Mireille Pardon, Alex Reider, Emily Ulrich, Celine Vezina, and Clara Wild went above and beyond in their willingness to talk through many of my jumbled ideas and read half-baked chapters on the spur of the moment. Even more

importantly, they sustained me with jokes, drinks, yikes moments, hilarious and supportive group texts, and the kind of friendship that feels like family.

To my parents, Ed and Eileen Ringel, I owe more than I could possibly say, including any worthwhile pieces of my intellect and personality. I am so proud to be your daughter.

Finally, to my husband, Eric Ensley, to say that your love, support, and good humor has meant everything to me is not enough. I'm so glad I took that Medieval Latin Comedy class. I love you x3.

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Introduction

“Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt”

(“The limits of my language mean the limits of my world”) - Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (1921)

“Me autem non permisit amplius loqui.” (“He did not allow me to speak more.”) – William of Rubruck, in the presence of the Grand Khan Möngke

This dissertation examines the status of Latin outside Western Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries through the narratives of missionary friars to the Mongol Empire. It argues that, during the friars’ time abroad, the uses of both spoken and written Latin were substantially different than the uses they had in Europe; the *lingua franca* of prestige and of the sacred did not function as such in Asia and therefore took on new social functions in new contexts. To demonstrate this, I examine a variety of texts across several genres: travel reports, letters, chronicles, and codices. Beginning with the long travel reports of William of Rubruck (c. 1220 – c.1293), John of Plano Carpini (c.1185-1252), and Odoric of Pordenone (1286-1331), I then move to looking at the shorter letters of Pope Innocent IV (c.1195 – 1254), John of Montecorvino (1247-1328), Peregrine of Castello (fl.1315), and Andrew of Perugia (d.1322). Subsequently, I turn to Latin books in Asia, especially as discussed by Riccoldo of Montecroce (c.1243-1320). Lastly, I look at how missionary narratives could be appropriated and

transformed by the most famous medieval pseudo-traveler, John Mandeville (c.1357). Broadly, I analyze how Latin functions in a different space, and the new forms it can take on.

Rationale and Historical Background

There are several reasons for focusing on friars, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the Mongol Empire, all of which are intertwined with one another. On a purely practical level, the founders of the fraternal orders, Saints Dominic and Francis, both lived and worked in the last quarter of the twelfth century and the first quarter of the thirteenth, and both orders they established grew quickly after their foundation. Both orders sent their members on evangelizing missions to Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe throughout the thirteenth and the first part of the fourteenth centuries. Those missions came to an end around the mid-fourteenth century when the Mongol Empire waned in power and much of Western Asia was invaded by Muslim groups who were not as tolerant of the friars' proselytizing efforts. The missions to the Mongol Empire are therefore a relatively discrete historical moment, and for the purposes of this project separable from other contemporary missionary efforts to other geographical spaces.

Moreover, medieval Latin Christian writing about the Mongol Empire is qualitatively different from their writings about other, still relatively exotic places, especially the Holy Land. For example, the Crusader States in the Middle East, first established in 1099 after the Crusaders took Jerusalem, literally extended the bounds of Christendom and gave Western Europe ownership of that space. Even after Muslim armies gradually retook the states of Jerusalem, Antioch, Edessa, and Tripoli, Western European powers such as France, England, and the Holy Roman Empire saw those territories as rightfully theirs. The Holy Land was, furthermore, a

major pilgrimage site for Western Europeans. It was also the home of large numbers of Greek Christians, and while Greek religious practices could vary substantially from Latin ones (as many of the friars here point out), they did have some overlapping beliefs. Additionally, as the language of the New Testament, Greek was another of Christianity's sacred languages. The Mongol Empire, on the other hand, was uncharted territory and arguably represents a space that was entirely exotic.

Exoticism in language is particularly part of the rationale for centering the project on friars, as opposed to crusaders, merchants, or pilgrims: the friars' preferred form of interaction with foreign communities was preaching and disputation. As I will explain in more detail below, friars were Latinate but were trained to move between Latin and the vernacular in their preaching efforts. Other medieval European visitors to foreign lands were not necessarily forced to think about the role of sacred language in places where it was not sacred. The goals of the crusaders were explicitly militaristic, and while they may have desired conversion, they brought it about through violence instead of language. (This does not mean that friars didn't encourage crusading, but their mechanisms for expanding Christendom were linguistic and pacific as opposed to militaristic; some friars even saw crusading and preaching as compatible with one another.) Pilgrims did not need to know Latin, and could even avoid interacting with the local populations if they chose. Saewulf (fl.1102) an English pilgrim who traveled to the Holy Land, while he wrote an account of his journey in Latin, does not mention speaking to anyone outside his own traveling party. More famously, Margery Kempe (c.1373-c.1438) was herself illiterate and dictated the story of her pilgrimage to the Holy Land to scribes in English. While merchants needed to interact with locals where they traded, Latin was not a requirement. Marco Polo, for

example, apparently learned four Asiatic languages while staying at the court of the Mongol Khan, and his scribe, Rustichello da Pisa, subsequently wrote his travel narrative in a hybrid Franco-Italian dialect (1298). It was only approximately three years afterward (c.1302) that a Franciscan friar, Francesco Pipino, translated the text into Latin.

This is not to say that Christianity had no presence at all east of the Holy Land. In the pre-modern era, the percentage population of Christians in what is now China and Western Asia was almost certainly substantially higher than it is today, although precise numbers are difficult to pin down. The majority of said Christians were Nestorians, a sect that believed Christ's divine and human natures were separate from one another within his person as opposed to unified into a single nature. Nestorianism was deemed heretical by both the Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Council of Chalcedon in 451, and in the subsequent schism it became the official doctrine of the church of the Sasanian Empire in Persia. Independent of the Roman Church, Nestorians made efforts to evangelize, both in the Middle East and in Central Asia. They met with a good deal of success among Turkic tribes, with mass conversions taking place in 644, 781-782, and 1007.¹

While Nestorianism died out in Europe and eventually the Middle East, it flourished for hundreds of years in Central and Eastern Asia.² Richard Foltz states, in fact, that by "the dawn of the Mongol period, Christianity was certainly the most visible of the major religions among the steppe peoples."³ It was somewhat less popular among the Chinese, although Nestorians had permission to evangelize and practice their religion as they pleased until the year 845. The major

¹ Foltz, Richard C. *Religions of the Silk Road: Premodern Patterns of Globalization* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 67.

² Many of Nestorianism's doctrines are present today in the Assyrian Church of the East.

³ Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*, 68.

religious influence was ultimately Buddhism, and Christianity was only reintroduced to the area by the Mongols approximately three centuries later.⁴

Unlike the Western church, the liturgical language of the Nestorians was Syriac, although the language through which it was disseminated in Asia was primarily Sogdian. The Sogdians were an Indo-European, Iranian people who became some of the Silk Road's most successful merchants, and thus some of its most successful linguists. Besides Syriac, they also translated many texts from the Buddhist and Manichaean traditions into Sogdian, and then into local vernaculars⁵, which were generally either Indo-European or Turkic. Foltz observes the following: "In general, there would appear to be a connection between the success of a religion in winning converts and the readiness with which the substance of that religion was communicated through local vernaculars."⁶ Along with doctrinal differences, these factors help to explain why Nestorian and Latin Christians saw themselves as fundamentally different from one another. It may also be part of the reason why Nestorianism had made little headway among the Mongols, since their language was not Sogdian but Mongolian.

The Western European reasons for extending mendicant missions to this uncharted territory were both theological and practical. Especially in the first half of the thirteenth century, the period during which Chinggis Khan (c.1162-1227) and his sons considerably expanded their rule, European leaders felt an increasing imperative to learn and assess the Mongols' intent for the future of their empires. While the Mongols had been a vague, threatening presence before

⁴ Foltz, 70.

⁵ Foltz, 17.

⁶ Foltz, 18.

this time, Chinggis' successor, Ögödei Khan (1186-1241), sent his armies to conquer Eastern and Central Europe, taking Kiev and the Rus principalities in 1240. They took Poland and Hungary not long after, eventually moving almost as far west as Vienna (in July of 1241). Reports from Eastern Europe "terrified" the west.⁷ To that end, the missions across Asia were both of a religious and political bent; religious in that the friars heading the missions urged conversion and baptism, political in their purpose to conduct reconnaissance.

Beyond outside threats, the Roman Church had no shortage of identity crises in the Middle Ages. While Nestorianism had faded as a concern after approximately the 6th century, potentially threatening heresies, theological disputes, and political infighting continued. As Brett Whalen points out, "Christendom is a common term, but difficult to define with complete satisfaction."⁸ Bonds are religious, political, and linguistic, and while they can unite otherwise disparate communities, they can also conflict with one another. At the tail end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the twelfth, Pope Innocent III (1160-1216) saw the resolution of these conflicts and the unification of all Christians as part of his mission. He attempted to bring political rulers – kings and the Holy Roman Emperor especially – further under papal control, reunite the Roman and Eastern Orthodox churches, and retake Jerusalem from the Muslims by issuing a fourth crusade. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which he also oversaw, concerned itself a great deal with the extirpation of heresy. Louis IX (1214-1270), the crusading French king who sent William of Rubruck on his mission, relentlessly persecuted Jews and Cathars in

⁷ Ryan, James D. "Introduction," in *The Spiritual Expansion of Medieval Latin Christendom: The Asian Missions*, ed. James D. Ryan (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), xxv.

⁸ Whalen, Brett Edward. *Dominion of God: Christendom and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009) 2.

his own country. This is all to say that, even prior to the friars' missions, Christendom saw its lack of a totally unified identity as a substantial cause for concern. Assessment of the Mongol threat and the potential for new allies could be advantageous for situations at home as well as abroad.

The friars I discuss here were not the only ones who went to the Mongol Empire. They are the ones, however, for whom the best records survive. John of Plano Carpini's extended account of the Mongols and their history is the first Latin missionary description of a voyage to the Far East, but this is only accidental. At the same time as John, Pope Innocent IV sent three other envoys to the Great Khan: another Franciscan, Lawrence of Portugal, and two Dominicans, Andrew of Longjumeau and Ascelinus (all fl.1245). What happened to Lawrence is unknown. Andrew met with Mongol chiefs in the Middle East on his first journey, going as far east as Tabriz, and almost to Karakorum on his second journey. Ascelinus stopped at the Mongol chief Baiju's camp in what is present-day Armenia. Andrew's and Ascelinus's own reports are lost, and what we know of their missions survives through the writings of others, Matthew Paris and Vincent of Beauvais, respectively. Moving forward to the time when Franciscans had established bishoprics in the region that is now China, we also have John of Marignolli (fl.1338-53); however, his narrative is unfortunately fragmentary.

So much for people (itinerant friars), time (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) and place (Mongol Empire). As for approaching these texts through the lens of Latin and Latinity, I argue that an important component of the itinerant friars' self-identity was tied to their education and abilities in Latin. Travel in the Middle Ages has emerged over the last decade as its own field of

inquiry within Medieval Studies,⁹ especially as part of what the Medieval Academy of America has described as the “global turn” within the discipline; in fact, the theme for the organization’s annual conference in March 2019 was “The Global Turn in Medieval Studies.”¹⁰ The number of important and insightful monographs, chapters, and articles that have expanded the discipline’s horizons beyond Western Europe to Asia, Africa, and the Americas has proliferated in the last decade. Even the journal *Medieval Worlds* was founded in 2015, providing “a new forum for interdisciplinary and transcultural studies of the Middle Ages.”¹¹ In many of these studies, however, an examination of language has been either tangential or absent, especially in discussions of European interactions with the Mongols. For example, Geraldine Heng’s chapter on the Mongol Empire in her recent monograph *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018) usefully discusses the European friars’ reactions to Mongol physiognomy, diet, economy, and political structure. While she does also discuss William of Rubruck and prayer (as I do), she does not give attention to the language of prayer. Shirin Khanmohamadi meanwhile, in her article “The Look of Medieval Ethnography: William of Rubruck’s Mission to the Mongol Empire” (2008) discusses William’s interpreter and the failure of language without, again, reference to William’s own Latinity. I posit instead that this Latinity was an integral component in shaping the friars’ interactions with the Mongols, and considering Latin Christianity’s place vis-à-vis foreign cultures.

⁹ K.M. Phillips, “Travel, Writing, and the Global Middle Ages,” *History Compass*, 14 (2016): 81– 92. doi: 10.1111/hic3.12301.

¹⁰ “2019 Annual Meeting,” *The Medieval Academy of America*, 2019, <https://www.medievalacademy.org/page/2019Meeting>.

¹¹ Walter Pohl and Andre Gingrich. “Approaches to Comparison in Medieval Studies,” *Medieval Worlds* 1, no. 1 (2015): doi: 10.1553/medievalworlds_no1_2015

Because this project focuses on the social function of Latin and Latinity outside of Europe, this needs to be measured against the social function of Latin and Latinity in its home context of Western Europe. Moreover, the term *social function* (sometimes *social work*) requires a definition itself.

Social Work and Social Function

Throughout this project, the terms *social work* and *social function* refer to a broad range of impacts that differing cultural phenomena and practices can have on one another. It encompasses the action, the parties, and the context— so not only does it describe an individual action, but it also includes the effects and the perception of said action. These effects might include conversion from one religion to another, establishing a diplomatic relationship, or merely fulfilling a request. So, the social function of a friar’s preaching to a Mongol is conversion to Latin Christianity; the social function of Innocent IV’s letters to the Khan is establishing friendly diplomatic relations; the social function of Riccoldo’s books is to act as weapons in the conflict between Christianity and Islam. In all four chapters, *Latin* and *Latinity* are tools that can be used for a social function. With that said, the use of any tool can have unintended consequences or fail entirely. The adage, “When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail,” proves true here: not everything is a nail and one might find themselves with a sore thumb. When William of Rubruck preaches in Latin, he does not convert anyone, and the Mongols around him absorb his prayers into their syncretic religion. When Riccoldo sees Muslims destroying sacred Latin books and turning the pages into drum-skins, the Latin in them cannot accomplish its intended social

function of helping to maintain Christianity's foothold in the Holy Land. The Muslims have leveraged it for another purpose.

My definition of social function here has much in common with speech-act theory as first advanced by J.L. Austin (1955/1962) and subsequently by J.R. Searle (1969 and 1985) and Kent Bach/Robert Harnish (1982). While scholarship on speech-act theory has proliferated in myriad disciplines from cognitive science to literary studies, and has developed in myriad ways from its first iterations, my use of the term aligns most closely with its instantiation in Austin's *How To Do Things With Words*.¹² In it, speech acts have the components of locutionary force, illocutionary force, and perlocutionary force; that is, an utterance, the meaning behind said utterance, and the effect of that utterance. If an utterance is successful, it is felicitous; if it is not, infelicitous. A friar preaching with the illocutionary force to convert a pagan to Christianity would have performed a felicitous speech act if the pagan converts. I am certainly not the first to apply speech-act theory to medieval conversion narratives,¹³ and I have found it a useful analogue for thinking about intentionality in the speech and writing of the friars under discussion here. I still use the term "social function" or "work," however, because this term is somewhat broader than speech-act as I understand it in this context. In Chapter 3, for example, wherein I examine the materiality of Latin books outside Europe, the materiality of a book is arguably not a speech act. The Latin within it arguably could be, but in conjunction with thinking about the book *qua* object, "social function" seems more appropriate here.

¹² J.L. Austin, "Lecture VIII," in *How To Do Things With Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011). doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198245537.003.0008.

¹³ See, for example: Kathleen M. Self, "Conversion as Speech Act: Medieval Icelandic and Modern Neopagan Conversion Narratives," *History of Religions* 56, no. 2 (November 2016): 167-197.

Latin and Latinity

If the social function of Latin and Latinity abroad was complicated and fraught, its place in Western Europe was equally so. In 1253, William of Rubruck's literacy in Latin was expected if he was to be a competent missionary, but the necessity for Latinate friars was a relatively recent development; St. Francis himself never completed his academic education, and many recruits to the brotherhood also lacked any kind of formal schooling. The Franciscan dictate of absolute poverty and humility conflicted with the necessity of an education that would let them effectively preach, and it was not until 1260 that statutes were adopted providing that a cleric entering the order must be educated in grammar, or he must be a prominent layman.¹⁴ St. Dominic, wealthier by birth than St. Francis and better educated, founded a more learned order, but still a vexed relationship existed between friars and universities. In the early thirteenth century the Dominicans set up schools in Oxford, Paris, and Cambridge and integrated themselves into the universities already there, but as their influence and presence increased the secular masters grew uncomfortable. Conflicts arose over qualifications for entry, differing curriculum requirements for friars, and the increasing number of young men they recruited to their own theological schools and to the orders generally. Nonetheless, in the latter half of the thirteenth century, Roger Bacon (1214-1292) was a Franciscan and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) a Dominican; both these renowned theologians had extensive formal schooling. This trajectory illustrates the sort of identity crises the friars dealt with over their first hundred years of existence in terms of their intellectual status.

¹⁴ C.H. Lawrence. *The friars: the impact of the early mendicant movement on Western society*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

To further complicate matters, the medieval arts of grammar and rhetoric themselves carried ethical implications; as Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter explain, texts not only explicitly discussed ethical questions, but also the “very terms of the art itself, the intellectual system that it comprised, was understood as a cultivation and preparation of the mind through language.”¹⁵ One could achieve spiritual perfection through study of language arts – Copeland and Sluiter cite Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and John of Salisbury (c1115-1180) in particular to emphasize this idea – and, as such, there were not merely matters of practicality tugging friars toward sedentary learning, but moral matters too. That is to say, by improving one’s Latin, one improved one’s ethical maturity.

Conversely, bad Latin is indicative of bad ethics. William of Conches (twelfth century) expounds on the difference between correct and incorrect writing and speech: “Barbarism is every fault which occurs in the parts of a word [*dictio*]...Every such fault is called a barbarism, that is, the usage of barbarians. For barbarians, since they lack the rules of the art of grammar, err in many respects.”¹⁶ In a similar vein, the misuse of grammar demonstrates an evil character, as explained by Alan of Lille (c.1128-c.1202) in his *Anticlaudianus*:

Our Apostate strings out tracts on grammar and, somewhat tiresome in style, is the victim of sluggish dreams. As he strays far and wide in his writings, he is thought to be drunk or quite insane or to be drowsy. He falters in his faith not to

¹⁵ Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300-1475* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52.

¹⁶ Copeland and Sluiter, 387.

lose the sales from his book; his faith goes astray to prevent popular fame from straying away from him.¹⁷

The Apostate mentioned here is the Emperor Julian the Apostate (d.363), who attempted a religious reformation of the Roman Empire by encouraging a return to Hellenistic polytheism, resulting in persecution of Christians. (Copeland and Sluiter note that Alan is referring to Priscian's *Institutiones*, which is dedicated to a patron named Julian who is almost certainly not the long-dead emperor. Alan, however, is working within a long tradition of the dedication's misattribution.) Alan compares him to other grammarians, of which one is Aelius Donatus (fl. Mid 4th c.), who "teaches the rules of grammar, corrects mistakes, ennobles, exalts, enriches, defends, adorns grammar by scholarship, exhortation, zeal, reasoning, inflection. He earns himself a special name so that he is not called grammarian but emphasis calls him *Mr. Grammar*, indicating the divinity under his name."¹⁸ The moral line between good grammar/divinity and bad grammar/apostasy should be clear.

Beyond issues of theology, there was a hierarchy of intellectual prestige that centered on one's relative abilities in the Latin language, as clerks' and masters' professions, of course, centered on the ability to read and write Latin. In *Entheticus Maior*, John of Salisbury complains of incompetent *magistri* when he warns, "so that you may know, the garb and the name do not

¹⁷ Copeland and Sluiter, 526. "Gramatice tractus pertractat apostata noster,/ Pigrius in dictis torporis somnia passus;/ In scriptis errans propriis, aut hebrus esse,/ Aut magis insanus, aut dormire putatur./ Claudicat ille fide, ne fama claudicet eius/ Tractatus, uenditque fidem, ne premia libri/ Depereant, erratque fides, ne rumor aberret." Alain de Lille, "Liber II." ll. 500-507. *Anticlaudianus, texte critique avec une introduction et des tables, Textes philosophiques du moyen âge, I*, ed. R. Bossuat, (Paris, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1955). doi: https://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost12/Alanus/ala_ac02.html

¹⁸ Copeland and Sluiter, 526.

make the master;”¹⁹ and Walter of Châtillon (12th c.) complains that there has been a decline in the quality of reading and lecturing as he writes, “Books are now read only cursorily, and many abuse the name of *magister*.”²⁰ Even in the late fourteenth century, Chaucer mocks the corrupt Summoner by belittling his Latin:

And whan that he wel dronken hadde the wyn,
Thanne wolde he speke no word but Latyn.
A fewe termes hadde he, two or thre,
That he had lerned out of som decree.
No wonder is, he herde it al the day,
And eek ye knowen wel how that a jay
Kan clepen “Watte” as wel as kan the Pope.²¹

If the Summoner were more intelligent and of better moral character, he would be able to do more than merely recite Latin phrases he had heard. Furthermore, although corrupt and stupid while sober as well, he seems to be even worse when inebriated. Like William of Rubruck’s interpreter (see Chapter 1), the vice of drunkenness is connected with poor skills in Latin. The message is clear: there are better and worse clerks, summoners, and *magistri*. The good ones know their Latin.

Neither were the concerns only moral and intellectual, in that Latin was the language of political and cultural prestige as well. Christopher Baswell describes how in England, a “celebratory tone of public scholarship, revived classical culture and international urbanity all helped foster a high level of Latinity and a self-consciously sophisticated, classicizing culture in

¹⁹ John of Salisbury, quoted in Ziolkowski 108: “Non facit, ut sapias, habitus nomenque magistri.” Translation my own. Jan M. Ziolkowski, “Mastering Authors and Authorizing Masters” in *Latinitas Perennis. Volume I: The Continuity of Latin Literature*. Eds. Wim Verbaal, Yanick Maes, and Jan Papy (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006).

²⁰ Walter of Châtillon, quoted in Ziolkowski 108: “Superficietenus /libri nunc leguntur, et magistri nomine/plures abutuntur.” Translation by Ziolkowski. 102, 108

²¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, “The General Prologue,” in *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) lines 637-643.

the second half of the twelfth century.”²² Baswell explains, for example, the increasing demand that legal cases be brought to courts in written (Latin) form, and how, on the literary end of things, authors looked to Greek and Roman culture to lend gravity to their work (e.g. Geoffrey of Monmouth bringing the origins of the British back to the Trojan Brutus). And even as Baswell recognizes that the divide between the Latin literate and illiterate was always “unstable and permeable,”²³ Latin’s wider diffusion on the island helped to improve the prestige of English culture and literature across the rest of Europe.

Furthermore, it is necessary to recognize that languages inherently create communities or can rearticulate the relationships between existing ones (the same is true for travel). Even today, Italian is often a second language to many whom, even though born in Italy, grew up speaking the dialect of their own small village – a dialect virtually unintelligible to someone who grew up in a different village only ten miles over. The situation in the medieval period was similarly, if not more, fractured. However, the *lingua franca* was not, as it is today, one of several vernaculars that is the primary language of a world power (or that was once a world power): English, French, Spanish, Mandarin, or a few others. Across Europe, the literate could understand Latin, and this as Benedict Anderson notes, shared understanding of a sacred language “incorporated conceptions of immense communities”²⁴. Christendom was Christendom not only because of a shared belief system (which, without a common language, could not be verified) but also because of a shared ideograph. Anderson also points out the classical languages’ supposed access to

²² Christopher Baswell, “Latinitas,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Literature*, ed. David Wallace, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 136.

²³ Baswell, 144.

²⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, (London: Verso, 2006) 12.

cosmic truth made it possible for the religious community to expand; it was not just conversion, but learning Latin that “made it possible for an ‘Englishman’ to become Pope”²⁵. Learning the sacred language meant absorption into the community. At the same time, Latin and its translation also worked to divide members of Christendom. As Claire Waters points out, “opposition to vernacular translation of Scripture was already an issue in [the twelfth and thirteenth centuries]”²⁶ and that “the Latin-vernacular relationship in thirteenth-century preaching seems to recapitulate a hierarchy in which the laity – *rudes, simplices, illiterati* – were always on the bottom, accorded no independent will or ability”²⁷. This hierarchy needed to be carefully maintained, lest the clergy’s authority be undermined.

Waters also explains how the itinerant friars, to a degree, broke down this hierarchy in their own preaching. She cites the Dominican Humbert of Romans’ (1200-1277) treatise on preaching, in which he stresses the need for preachers to have an “abundance” of language. As travelers unfamiliar with the communities in which they preach, unlike parish priests, who probably began their lives as members of the same lay community to whom they are preaching, they need to form a connection with their audience in order to get their religious message(s) across. This is best effected through the use of the vernacular.

More practical aspects of the friars’ lives besides those above required them to frequently evaluate their own relationship between Latin and vernacular language. In the first place, travel and translation went hand-in-hand as part of their vocations as preachers. Friars were supposed

²⁵ Anderson, 15.

²⁶ Claire Waters, “Talking the Talk: Access to the Vernacular in Medieval Preaching” in *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity*, eds. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003) 32.

²⁷ Waters, 33.

to preach outside the walls of a monastic community and make their living from offerings they received from others. In contrast to monasticism, travel was part of their mandate. In order to preach while traveling, it was necessary to know how to put their knowledge of Latin theology into the vernacular. (As described above, both orders required a certain level of education in order to preach, which also made them necessarily members of scholastic communities.) We can see this in Siegfried Wenzel's *Macaronic Sermons: Bilingualism and Preaching in Late Medieval England* (1994): written sermons could often switch back and forth between English and Latin from sentence to sentence, or even within sentences, and the sentences or phrases were often translations of one another. Thus friars positioned themselves linguistically between the Latin-educated clergy and the laity.

At the universities where they had established themselves, friars set up their own schools as well. Friars arrived in Paris (especially Franciscans) and at Oxford (especially Dominicans) from various regions and provinces, and their own schools and lectors might be spread throughout the city itself. As such, "[t]he general school thus housed a cosmopolitan community"²⁸. Both living in a community such as this, and their project of preaching to the laity, meant that working between Latin and the vernacular was a part of their daily lives. What's more, their more formal intellectual pursuits often involved translation as well. C.H. Lawrence describes the state of the Vulgate Bible in the thirteenth century, which, he states, had as many variants as it did copies. To remedy this situation, groups of friars made concerted efforts to acquire knowledge of Greek and Hebrew through their contacts with Jewish converts and their houses in Constantinople. In 1312, the Council of Vienne called for "the establishment of

²⁸ Lawrence, 135.

salaried chairs of Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and Chaldaic, at the universities of Paris, Bologna, Oxford, and Salamanca”²⁹. That is, being a part of a multi-lingual community went hand-in-hand with their day-to-day existence.

Given this framework, it is unsurprising that many European travelers to Western and Eastern Asia expected Latin to be able to perform certain types of social work for them that – outside the bounds of Latin Christendom – it ultimately did not have the power to do. On the other hand, to say that the friars expected Latin to be able to perform certain social functions for them does not mean that they expected the peoples living in Asia to know Latin. Missionary friars traveling East certainly knew they would encounter multiple unfamiliar languages on their journeys; after all, having captured a vast swathe of Eurasia by the mid-thirteenth century, the Mongol Empire naturally included numerous disparate linguistic communities under its rule. This resulted in the need for both translators and the existence of one or more *linguae francae* – but once a traveler arrived in the Eastern Mediterranean and Asia, none of those languages were Latin. The Mandeville author provides, depending on the manuscript, anywhere from six to eight foreign alphabet charts that, while he suggests that they are for the reader’s general edification, could function as a reference for travelers. Writing later in the mid-fourteenth century, this demonstrates that the author had been made aware of the multitude of unfamiliar languages one would encounter outside of Western Europe – and the centrality of the problem of translation.

However, while they did not expect Asiatic people to know any Latin, it was what gave form to the friars’ own sense of intellect, theology and ethics, as explained above. Even if they expected to need translators, the notion that Latin had a privileged position among other

²⁹ Lawrence, 140.

languages was hard to shake. A fictional example illustrates this: in the middle of Chaucer's "The Man of Law's Tale," (c. 1387) the story's protagonist, the pious and virginal Custance, washes up on the shore of Northumberland after drifting at sea in a tiny boat. She does not speak English, but makes herself understood by "a maner Latyn corrupt,"³⁰ and through a series of miracles she ultimately converts the pagans on the island. It is not a coincidence that Chaucer's source for this tale is by an English Dominican, Nicholas Trevet, who models his Custance after a Dominican missionary that can speak any language and dispute with non-Christians to convert them (although Chaucer removes her Dominican education in translating the story from French to English). Indeed, when John of Montecorvino chooses a group of young, baptized protégés to educate further in Christianity, teaching them Latin is necessarily a part of that.

On the other hand, in the chapters that follow, the European friars assume their own competent grasp on foreign languages, even when what they hear is filtered through a translator. Simultaneously they fret that foreigners had difficulty understanding them, and concoct shaky rationalizations when Latin rites and Latinity generally do not carry the same degree of power and prestige that they do in Western Europe. The result of this is a self-perpetuating narrative cycle of cultural superiority on the part of the missionary friars. More generally, language is a vital component of assessing how Western Europe began to construct its own identity vis-à-vis some of its first sustained contacts with East Asia.

³⁰ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Man of Law's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson, (Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin, 1987) l. 519.

Chapter Overview

I begin in Chapter 1 with a discussion of the texts of William of Rubruck, John of Plano Carpini, and Odoric of Pordenone. I group these three texts together for two reasons. The first is genre; of the works under consideration in this project, these three are the only long narratives. The second is content; these texts all approach the troublesome question of how a medieval European makes his speech understood in Asia. More specifically, the Latin speech of the missionaries undergoes mediation through translation in either spoken or written form, and cannot complete its intended evangelizing function. William finds himself frustrated that his interpreters among the Mongols often fail to translate his speech correctly or at all; mediated through misunderstandings of linguistics and culture, William's Latin cannot evangelize how he would want it to, and the messages he sends while preaching are absorbed into Mongol syncretic religious practices. John of Plano Carpini, meanwhile, does not feel the same sort of frustration that William does about the potential mistranslation of Latin, but he does worry that anything he says could be mediated and thus misinterpreted through gestures and participation in rituals that he does not understand. Finally, the degree to which Odoric's preaching efforts were effective among Asian communities is questionable, and the impact he made on anyone's religious attitudes was more in Europe than abroad. Mediated through a tradition of oral transmission and translation into the vernacular, Odoric ironically inspired piety not in Asia but in Italy, and less for God than Odoric himself.

After an examination of how Latinate speech can function abroad, Chapter 2 moves to a discussion of several shorter letters that were transmitted across the Asian continent in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Using the lens of medieval *ars dictaminis* manuals – that is,

texts on the art of letter writing – I argue that the authors of the letters in this chapter could manipulate epistolary conventions to send messages beyond those explicitly stated in the letters’ contents. The first letters under consideration are those of Pope Innocent IV, titled *Cum non solum* and *Dei patris immensa*, and they were carried by John of Plano Carpini to the Mongol Khan. The way in which Innocent employs epistolary genre conventions in these letters indicates that he was less sincerely interested in converting the Mongols to Christianity than he was in presenting himself as the center and sole authority of Latin Christendom in the face of his ongoing feud with the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1194 – 1250). The other three letters I discuss in this chapter, those of the Franciscan friars John of Montecorvino, Peregrine of Castello, and Andrew of Perugia, are in several ways the inverse of Innocent’s. Sent from Asia to Europe instead of vice versa, the ways in which they used epistolary conventions falls in line with the *stilus obscurus*, an especially allusive style that placed heavy demands on a reader’s hermeneutical abilities. Using this style they could make implications about the status of their mission among the Mongols without offending a potential Mongol reader. In this case, the shared cultural knowledge involved in Latinity becomes the site at which members of the Western Christian community can communicate implicitly. In both Innocent’s and the friars’ letters, written Latinity outside Europe can use form – adjacent to content – to send its message in unexpected ways.

From short letters, Chapter 3 moves on to books. The central figure of the chapter is Riccoldo of Montecroce, a Dominican friar who traveled to the Holy Land and Mongol Ilkhanate in the last years of the thirteenth century. First putting Riccoldo into a wider historical context, I examine how friars thought about the place of Latinate books in the larger project of their

missionary efforts. While acknowledging variation among individuals, I argue that their books can function as an important symbolic anchor to their faith while abroad. Subsequently, I look at how Latin friars and some other Christian clerics thought about Islam's sacred book, the Qur'an. Because the scholarly literature on this topic is vast, I limit myself to how they thought about the Qur'an's form and status as a material object, and argue that while they - and particularly Riccoldo - tend to admire its aesthetic qualities, they fear that aesthetics hide nefarious content. In the chapter's last section, I turn to how friars and clerics viewed the destruction of sacred books, their own and that of other religions. While some medieval authors touch briefly on this topic, Riccoldo seems to be unusual in how he addresses it in a sustained manner. While drawing on some of the ideas presented in the earlier sections, I argue that Riccoldo's unique take on book destruction posits them - and, by extension, the Latin in them - as potentially copulative, generative bodies that can function as weapons in the conflict between Christianity and Islam in the Holy Land.

I conclude in Chapter 4 with a discussion of *The Book of John Mandeville*. Though the Mandeville author, whoever he may be, does not claim to be a friar himself, he sources the majority of the material for his pseudo-travel narrative from two genuine friars who actually traveled: Odoric of Pordenone (discussed separately from Mandeville in Chapter 1) and William of Boldensele (c.1285-1338). In reworking these friars' accounts for his own text, Mandeville plays with Latinity in sometimes contradictory ways. In the first section, I argue that there are many points at which Mandeville demonstrates suspicion of Latin's supposed *auctoritas*, and works to circumvent this authority. In the second section, I point out that, in spite of this suspicion, Mandeville integrates Latin liturgical quotations into his text at regular intervals.

Employing Latin in a vernacular mode allows him to make the exotic wonders he describes familiar to his Western European audience and, furthermore, bring them into the purview of Western Christendom. The culmination of this line of thought in the third section is a discussion of the way Mandeville treats foreign words for objects in his text. Against a simultaneously vernacular and Latinate background, I argue that untranslated foreign words themselves function as foreign wonders, artifacts brought back from travels to exotic lands. As exotic artifacts, they lend prestige to a manuscript and by extension its owner.

Chapter 1: Preaching Gone Awry in the Travel Narratives of Three Franciscan Friars

This chapter examines how the Latin of three Franciscan friars on missions to the Mongol Empire took on new social functions both abroad and back in Europe after their journeys. The reports of William of Rubruck, John of Plano Carpini, and Odoric of Pordenone set against each other highlight in particular the various ways in which spoken Latin transforms in its travels east. Specifically, the Latin speech of the missionaries undergoes mediation through translation in either spoken or written form, and cannot complete its intended evangelizing function. William, by far, finds himself most frustrated by this. He has the most difficulty with reconciling to himself the fact that what is his religion's sacred language and *lingua franca* of the educated class in Europe means little in Asia. More specifically, he becomes frustrated when the Mongols absorb his attempts at preaching into their syncretic religious traditions. Meanwhile, John seems substantially less troubled by this. Instead, he finds that efforts at spoken Latin are less meaningful than participating in Mongol rituals and gestures. Attempting to sidestep the problem of verbal translation, he attempts to learn this sign language instead. Odoric, in contrast to these first two friars, explicitly mentions language relatively little in his narrative; instead, the mediation and translation of his language occurs back in Europe. As his text was dictated, translated, and disseminated in Italy, it inspires curiosity and religious feeling – not for evangelizing, but for Odoric himself.

William of Rubruck and Useless *Latinitas*

Working as an envoy for Louis IX of France, the Franciscan friar William of Rubruck (c. 1220 – c.1293) traveled to the court of Möngke Khan from 1253-1255 for purposes both religious and political. After traveling for a little over five months from Constantinople and through Western Asia, having crossed the Volga, probably somewhere in the northern Caucasus, the William has a strange encounter:

One day a Coman joined us, who saluted us in Latin, saying: “*Salvete, domini!*” Much astonished, I returned his salutation, and asked him who had taught it to him. He said that he had been baptized in Hungary by the brethren of our order, who had taught it to him. He said, furthermore, that Baatu had asked him a great deal about us, and that he had told him of the condition of our order.³¹

The man he meets is a Cuman – a nomadic, Turkic people – and William likely knew that the Dominicans had been preaching to the Cumans since 1221, and the Franciscans since not long after³². This could account for how quickly his surprise ameliorated after the man explained himself. Nonetheless, he is shocked (the verb he uses is *mirans*) to encounter another Latin speaker outside Europe. He seems pleased, however, to have found someone with whom he can communicate easily, and even in the Caucasus Latin can occasionally function as a *lingua franca* among strangers.

³¹ All English translations from William of Rubruck, *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1235-55, as narrated by himself, with two accounts of the earlier journey of John of Plano Carpine*, trans. William Rockhill (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1900), 127-128. “Quadam die iunxit se nobis quidam Comanus, salutans nos latinis verbis dicens: “*Salvete, domini!*” Ego mirans, ipso resalutato, quesivi quis eum docuerat illam salutationem, et ipse dixit quod in Hungaria fuit baptizatus a fratribus nostris, qui docuerunt eam. Dixit etiam quod Baatu quesiverat ab eo multa de nobis, et quod ipse dixerat ei conditiones Ordinis nostri.” All Latin translations from William of Rubruck, “Itinerarium,” in *Sinica Franciscana: Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum Saeculi XIII et XIV*, ed. Anastasius van den Wyngaert, vol.I. (Quarachhi-Florence: Collegium S. Bonaventure, 1929) 217.

³² Peter B. Golden, “The Codex Cumanicus,” in *Central Asian Monuments*, ed. H.B. Paksoy (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1992), 29-51.

This changed, however, the further east he traveled. Although he came prepared with provisions, gifts for the Khan, and a letter from King Louis, he was dismayed when these were not enough to earn the Mongols' deference. He was especially frustrated to find that his position as a friar and, particularly, his Latin education did not earn the respect they did at home. At multiple points in his narrative, he expresses dismay that he cannot preach effectively in Asia, and laments that, because of this, there is much good that he cannot do. Ultimately, his thinking about Latinity largely shapes his interactions with the Asiatic communities he encounters on his journey. More specifically, he becomes frustrated that his attempts at preaching must pass through the filter of interpreters and Mongol culture. His interpreters often prevent or mangle William's words; the Mongols in general assimilate his attempts to discuss Christianity to their own syncretic religion. In all these scenarios, William's thinking is conflicted and contradictory in that he expects his own language skills to command respect while exhibiting reluctance to fully absorb even converted, Latinate members of Asian ethnic groups as equal members of the community of Christendom.

William and Religious Syncretism

On his journey, William expects that his Latinity, status as a Christian cleric, and glittering priestly artifacts will accord him especial respect from the Mongols. He finds, however, that while the artifacts impress them, this reaction engenders cupidity as opposed to reverence. During the first part of his journey, William finds himself at the court of Sartaq Khan, who is interested in both the Christians' books and vestments, and William is happy to oblige: he and two of his companions don the "most costly of vestments" and carry with them the

“beautiful psalter”³³ They enter Sartaq’s dwelling singing “*Salve regina!*” and William describes the great interest Sartaq takes in their clothes, the psalter, Bible, and cross. He furthermore mentions that he has King Louis’ letters translated into Mongol, and records Sartaq’s reaction to the King’s message: “When he [Sartaq] had heard them, he caused our bread and wine and fruit to be accepted, and our vestments and books to be carried back to our lodgings.”³⁴ The tone here is optimistic, as William implies that the Latin chanting, books, and letters have influenced Sartaq to be more kindly disposed to the missionary party, and that he is primed to be more receptive to the Christians’ conversion efforts. (Ironically, the friars’ procession into the court, accompanied by chanting and a display of treasures, recalls the earlier interaction with the Cuman in which the greeting, “*Salvite, domine!*” seemed to have engendered camaraderie.)

The events of the next day, however, reveal William’s overestimation of the power that the performance had on the khan. The Mongols apparently thought of the treasures as gifts of tribute, which in their culture would have been expected of visiting dignitaries. William’s guide at Sartaq’s camp reports, “ ‘The lord King hath written good words to my lord; but they contain certain difficulties, concerning which he would not venture to do anything without the advice of his father: so you must go to his father. And the two carts which you brought here, with the vestments and the books, leave them to me, for my lord wishes to examine them carefully.’ ”³⁵ Not unreasonably, William suspects him of wanting to steal the books and vestments, but finds

³³ Rockhill, 103. “preciosioribus vestibus” and “psalterium pulcherrimum.” *Sinica franciscana*, 202.

³⁴ Rockhill, 105, “Quibus auditis, fecit recipi panem et vinum et fructus, et vestimenta et libros fecit nos reportare ad hospitium.” *Sinica franciscana*, 203

³⁵ Rockhill 105 “ ‘Dominus Rex scripsit bona verba domino meo, sed sunt in eis quedam difficilia de quibus nichil auderet facere sine consilio patris sui; unde oportet vos ire ad patrem suum. Et duas bigas quas adduxistis heri cum vestimentis et libris dimittetis michi, quia dominus meus vult res diligentius videre.’ ” *Sinica franciscana*, 203-204.

himself unable to refuse. As will be discussed further in Chapter 3, according to William's reckoning, as objects they are inseparable from the Latin words that invest them with meaning: those inside the books and those that accompanied them in the procession. To Sartaq and his court, however, the words are gibberish and only the objects themselves are of interest. Chanting Latin and a display of religious artifacts may have engendered reverence in Europe, but here it has occasioned the desire to own material, costly foreign objects. The Mongols' previous insistence on gifts likely has primed William's suspicions, and he concludes the previous night's performance of the Christian rites has not moved Sartaq any closer toward conversion. He expands on this idea a few paragraphs later after his guide's insistence that Sartaq is not a Christian but a Mongol (Moal): "For the name of Christian seems to them that of a nation. They have risen so much in their pride, that though they may believe somewhat in the Christ, yet will they not be called Christians, wishing to exalt their name Moal over all others, nor will they be called Tartars."³⁶ This passage walks a careful line between optimism and disdain. In writing about William's use of prayer on his journey, Geraldine Heng pragmatically says that this scene is where William begins to learn that he can use prayers as currency when he lacks material goods to exchange in the Mongol gift economy, and that he is fully a participating member of the "prayer economy"³⁷ by the time he reaches Möngke. There is another complicating dimension to this, however, which is William's own frustration with and resistance to this economy that misreads his intentions and treats casually what is sacred to him. Convinced of the admiration

³⁶ Rockhill, 105 "Quia enim nomen christianitatis videtur eis nomen cuiusdam gentis, in tantam superbiam sunt erecti quod quamvis forte aliquid credant de Christo, tamen nolunt dici christiani, volentes nomen suum, hoc est Moal, exaltare super omne nomen, nec volunt vocari Tartari." *Sinica franciscana*, 205.

³⁷ Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) 312.

that the procession - with its chanting - must have generated, William thinks it must have been at least somewhat effective in nudging Sartaq towards conversion. Notwithstanding, William accuses the Mongols of pridefulness and misunderstanding Christianity; they are a corrupt people, and there is also hope for converting them. It is this ambivalence that allows him to maintain his sense of cultural superiority while also ostensibly attempting to fulfill his mission.

A comparable case of linguistic fetishism presents itself as William and his Mongol guides voyage across the arid landscape of central Asia. On their way to the court of Möngke Khan, the friars and their Mongol companions pass through an infamous gorge in which “devils were wont suddenly to bear men off.”³⁸ Fearful of the reputation of the vale, the guide requests that William speak some prayers that would put devils to flight. William complies:

So we chanted in a loud voice “*Credo in unum Deum*,” when by the mercy of God the whole of our company passed through unharmed. From that time they began asking me to write cards for them to carry on their heads, and I would say to them: “I will teach you a phrase to carry in your hearts, which will save your souls and your bodies for all eternity.” But always when I wanted to teach them, my interpreter failed me. I used to write for them, however, the “*Credo in Deum*” and the “*Pater noster*,” saying: “What is here written is what one must believe of God, and the prayer by which one asks of God whatever is needful for man; so believe firmly that this writing is so, though you cannot understand it, and pray God to do for you what is written in this prayer, which He taught from His own mouth to His friends, and I hope that He will save you.” I could do no more, for it was very dangerous, not to say impossible, to speak on questions of faith through such an interpreter, for he did not know how.”³⁹

³⁸ Rockhill, 161. “solebant ipsi demones homines asportare subito” *Sinica franciscana*, 240.

³⁹ Rockhill, 161-162. “Tunc cantavimus alta voce *Credo in unum Deum*, et transivimus per gratiam Dei cum tota societate illesi. Ex tunc ceperunt me rogare ut scriberem eis cartas, quas ferrent super capita sua; et ego dicebam eis: “Docebo vos verbum quod feretis in corde vestro, per quod salvabuntur anime vestre et corpora vestra in eternum.” Et semper cum vellem docere, deficiebat michi interpret. Scribebam tamen eis: *Credo in Deum* et *Pater noster* dicens: “Hic scriptum est illud quod homo credere debet de Deo, et oratio in qua petitur a Deo quicquid est necessarium homini; unde credite firmiter quod hic scriptum est, quamvis non possitis intelligere, et petite a Deo ut faciat vobis, quod in oratione hic scripta continetur, quam ipse docuit proprio ore amicos suos, et spero quod salvabit vos.” Aliud non poteram facere, quia loqui verba doctrine per interpretem talem erat magnum periculum immo impossibile, quia ipse nesciebat.” *Sinica franciscana*, 240.

That the Mongol guide would ask for Christian prayers is hardly surprising, given that the empire led by Genghis Khan and his descendents was – for its time – remarkably pluralistic in religious matters. As will be discussed in greater detail shortly, Mongol officials were in the habit of asking for prayers from priests and monks of multiple faiths. Protective words as a sort of



Figure 1.1. *Mongol passport (paizi)*. China. Yuan dynasty (1279?1368), thirteenth century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. <http://www.metmuseum.org>.

passport through the valley might have also reminded them of the safe conduct passes issued by the khans for travel throughout the empire. William seems to take the request in the gorge as an indication that his fellow travelers might be susceptible to conversion; however, he also appears to be conflicted about whether he ought to teach the men to parrot prayers without also teaching them the greater significance of the Latin phrases.

As is often the case during William's travels – and as will be discussed in greater detail in the next section – the interpreter that he has employed is little help in this situation. According to William his interpreter “did not know how” to translate the Christian prayers and teachings from Latin into Mongol. The word that Rockhill translates as “phrase” in this passage is the Latin *verbum*, a term more loaded than any single English word can convey (in an amusing twist, Rockhill seems to have found himself in the same position as William's interpreter). Especially placed so closely to the prayers *Pater Noster* and *Credo in Deum*, *verbum* implies not just a word, but the Word; as the sacred language of the Roman Church, Latin is the only medium that can name God. This idea is borne out in the fact that as William writes the prayers on the cards, he writes them without the aid of the interpreter, in Latin. The implication is that the prayers would not be as effective in another language.

Unquestionably, both reciting and understanding the sense of the prayers would be ideal, but absent that option William decides that recitation without understanding is better than no recitation at all. How he comes to this conclusion is unclear. He may be thinking that superficial religious education is better than no religious education; after all, that could easily have been the case for many European Christians. David D'Avray notes that, prior to the preaching revival of the early thirteenth century and efforts to use the vernacular, “we cannot even be sure whether or not the overwhelming majority of the population could have known the basic doctrines of their religion.”⁴⁰ Nevertheless, William ultimately decides that the prayers that he writes out will bring these men at least a little closer to conversion.

⁴⁰ D.L. D'Avray, *The preaching of the friars: sermons diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 20.

However, the fact that the Mongols request that he write the foreign words on cards so that they can wear them on their heads implies a different understanding of the power of liturgical Latin. In short, William's traveling companions have asked him to fashion apotropaic amulets to shield them from demonic influence. Perhaps surprisingly to a modern reader, the practice of writing out prayers for such purposes was likely not problematic for William. Thomas Aquinas argues at length that "it is lawful to wear sacred words at one's neck, as a remedy for sickness or for any kind of distress."⁴¹ In his *Opus Maius*, the Franciscan Roger Bacon⁴² relates the story of a man cured from epileptic fits by wearing a textual amulet around his neck.⁴³ Both theologians, however, caution that the piety of the wearer is necessary for an amulet's effectiveness. Aquinas remarks, "It is indeed lawful to pronounce divine words, or to invoke the divine name, if one do so with a mind to honor God alone, from Whom the result is expected: but it is unlawful if it be done in connection with any vain observance."⁴⁴ The amulet in Bacon's story becomes ineffective when tampered with by someone who lacks Christian piety.⁴⁵ Given this context, it seems that the concern that William expresses about his companions' request for written words is that the cards on which he writes – and by extension the sacred language of the

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote (1947; The Aquinas Institute, 2018): II-II, Q. 96, Art.4, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST.II-II.Q96>. "Ergo videtur quod licitum sit aliqua sacra scripta collo suspendere in remedium infirmitatis vel cuiuscumque nocimenti."

⁴² Bacon and William likely knew one another, and Bacon is one of two sources besides William's own narrative that testifies to his journey.

⁴³ Roger Bacon *The "Opus majus" of Roger Bacon*, vol. 3, ed. John Henry Bridges (London, Edinburgh, and Oxford: Williams and Northgate, 1900) 123-124 (pt. 3, chap. 14).

⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II.96.4.

⁴⁵ Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

Latin Church - will be treated no differently than any of the other magical objects that he observes in use among the Mongols.

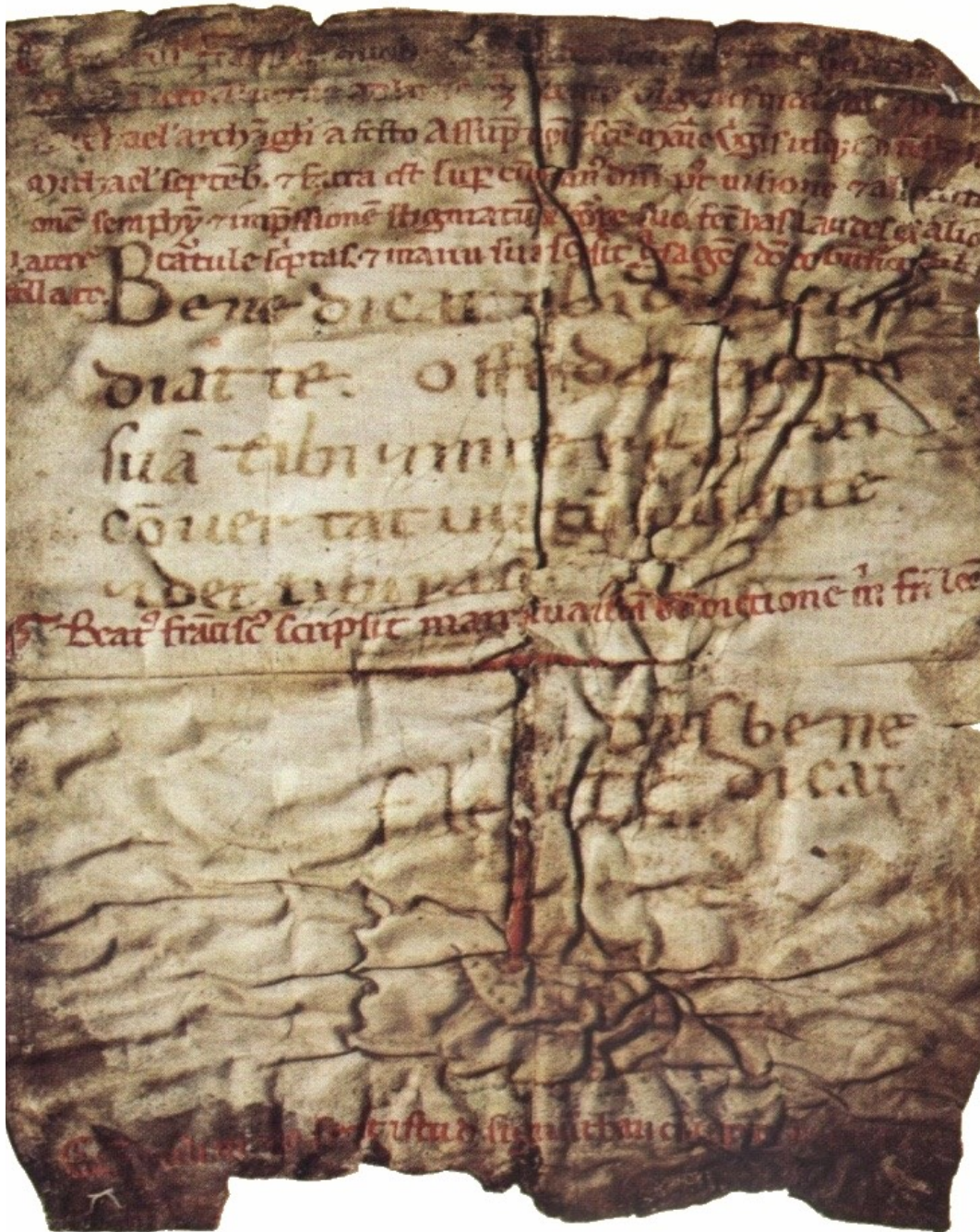


Figure 1.2. *The Chartula of St. Francis*. Assisi, Sacro Convento, MS. 344. A prayer amulet written by St. Francis c. 1214 for his companion, Brother Leo, containing the *Laudes Dei altissimi* and *Benedictio Fratris Leonis*.

William's experiences at Möngke Khan's court do little to allay his concerns that his preaching is not being received in the spirit in which he offers it up. Perhaps the most telling of these incidents occurs at the sickbed of Lady Kota, one of Möngke's concubines. The Franciscans find that they are not the only religious figures invited to minister to the ailing woman; Möngke has also called upon an Armenian monk, several Nestorian priests, and "the sorcerers of the idolators,"⁴⁶ (who had already failed in curing her and had so been sent away). The Nestorians -- a Christian sect that William disdains -- instruct her to venerate a cross, but intermingle this teaching with more dubious ones. As Lady Kota's condition improves, he explains, "we went to the said lady, and we found her well and bright, and she drank of holy water, and we read the Passion over her. But these miserable [Nestorian] priests had never taught her the faith, nor advised her to be baptized."⁴⁷ William witnesses swords, a silver chalice, ashes, and a black stone arranged about the room in arcane fashion and concludes: "The priests do not condemn any form of sorcery...and these priests never teach that such things are evil. Even more, they themselves do and teach such things."⁴⁸ On William's medical advice, a Nestorian monk makes a solution of crushed rhubarb suspended in holy water, for the patient to drink and apply to her skin. William hopes to augment the healing power of this medicine by reading from the Vulgate Latin translation of the Gospel of John while stationed near the patient's sickbed. To William's mind, what he is doing is not sorcery or idolatry, precisely because he is reading from

⁴⁶ Rockhill, 192. "sortilegia ydolatrorum" *Sinica franciscana*, 265

⁴⁷ Rockhill, 194. "ivimus ad predicatm dominam et invenimus eam sanam et alacrem et bibt adhuc de aqua benedicta, et legimus passionem super eam. Et miseri illi sacerdotes nunquam docuerunt eam fidem, nec monuerunt ut baptizaretur." *Sinica franciscana*, 267.

⁴⁸ Rockhill 194. "Nec reprehendunt sacerdotes in aliquo sortilegio...et de talibus nunquam docent eos sacerdotes quod mala sint. Immo ipsi faciunt et docent talia." *Sinica franciscana*, 267.

what he believes to be the sacred scripture. By distinguishing himself from them in this way, William makes a rhetorical maneuver that was increasingly common among late-medieval Catholic clerics. As Michael Camille has shown, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there was a concerted effort within the Latin Christian church to differentiate the veneration of cult statues from the comparable, supposedly idolatrous practices of other faiths.⁴⁹ Seen from the outside, William's potions and incantations might be difficult to distinguish from the "sorcery" of his Armenian and Nestorian counterparts or from the "idolatry" of the shamans and Buddhists who have visited the sickbed before him. However, from the Franciscan's perspective, it is the recitation of Latin scripture that distinguished him from the other medicine men, even as the Khan treats them all as interchangeable with one another.

More generally, William presents his Latin literacy as part of a body of knowledge that sets him apart from the less "authentic" representatives of the Christian faith, particularly Armenians and Nestorians. Of one Armenian monk, William relates: "I told him also that if he were a priest, the sacerdotal order had great power in expelling devils. And he said he was; but he lied, for he had taken no orders, and did not know a single letter, but was a cloth weaver, as I found out in his own country, which I went through on my way back."⁵⁰ Here, Latinity is not just a hallmark of theological knowledge and institutional authority, but also becomes assurance of honesty and good intent.

⁴⁹ Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art*, (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁵⁰ Rockhill, 193. "Dixi etiam quod si ipse esset sacerdos quod magnam vim habet ordo sacerdotalis ad expellendos demones. Et ipse dixit quod sic: et tamen mentitus est, quia nullum habebat ordinem, nec aliquam sciebat litteram, sed textor telarum erat, ut postea intellexi in patria sua per quam reversus sum." *Sinica franciscana*, 266.

Even though William has little good to say about eastern Christian sects, he nevertheless accords some degree of deference to those who have studied Latin. Of one Nestorian monk, he remarks: “I showed him the respect I would my bishop, because he knew the language (*ydioma*). He did, however, many things which did not please me.”⁵¹ The respect is given grudgingly, and is immediately followed by a description of the monk’s pride and suspect ritual practices; it is, however, a rare display of respect nonetheless. By extension, William believes his superior skills in Latin should command the respect of others. As we have seen, they do not.

William and His Interpreters

In contrast to the missionary friars discussed in other chapters, William frequently discusses his interpreters, but more often than not distrusts them and complains of their inadequacies. When he first specifically mentions one, his annoyance is clear: “(Scatay’s) interpreter came to us, and as soon as he learnt that we had never been among them he begged of our provisions, and we gave him some. He wanted also a gown, for he was to act as translator of our words in the presence of his master. We excused ourselves.”⁵² From the first, William has the suspicion that the interpreter is trying to take advantage of him, a suspicion seen again when he writes that when in front of the Tartar lord Scatay, “Then I spoke to him in the terms previously used, for it was essential that we should everywhere say the same thing; about this we had been

⁵¹ Rockhill, 195. “Honorabam eum tamquam Episcopum meum quia sciebat ydioma. Tamen multa faciebat que non placebant michi.” *Sinica franciscana* 267-268.

⁵² Rockhill, 86. “[E]t venit ad nos interpres ipsius, qui statim cognito quod nunquam fueramus inter illos, poposcit de cibis nostris: dedimus ei. Poscebat etiam vestimentum aliquod, quia dicturus erat verbum nostrum ante dominum suum. Excusavimus nos.” *Sinica franciscana*, 190.

well cautioned by those who had been among them, never to change what we said.”⁵³ Changing the “terms previously used” could result in misunderstanding or misinterpretation – which, in turn, might lead to a failure of the mission, or even danger for William and the other Christians.

The most problematic component of the discussion with Scatay occurs just after this passage:

He then asked what we would say to Sartach. I answered: “Words of the Christian faith.” He asked which, for he would be pleased to hear them. Then I expounded to him as well as I could through my interpreter, who was neither over intelligent nor fluent, the symbol of faith. When he had heard it, he remained silent, but wagged his head. Then, having made the choice of two men to watch over us, and over the horses and oxen, he made us drive about with him until the return of the messenger whom he had sent to have the letters of the emperor translated, and we went about with him until the day after Pentecost (8th June).⁵⁴

Given the proliferation of *artes praedicandi* (art of preaching) manuals in the thirteenth century, with their specific instructions about what and how to preach to a lay audience, it must have been almost unthinkable to William that this seemingly rather dimwitted man, without any formal rhetorical training, should have been allowed to be the bearer of Christian theology’s most fundamental messages. Unfortunately for William, the response Scatay gives them after the interpreter’s explanation is ambiguous; he merely “wagged his head,” which indicates he may have understood nothing, some, or all of what William was saying. What’s more, William mentions that this meeting has occurred *before* another, better interpreter can return with a

⁵³ Rockhill, 87. “Tunc dixi ei verba supradicta. Ubique enim oportebat nos dicere idem verbum. Super hoc enim eramus bene premoniti ab illis qui fuerant inter illos, quod nunquam mutaremus verba nostra.” *Sinica franciscana*, 190.

⁵⁴ Rockhill, 88. “Quesivit etiam que verba diceremus Sartach. Respondi: “Verba fidei christiane.” Quesivit: “Que?” quia libenter vellet audire. Tunc exposui ei prout potui per interpretem meum, qui nullius erat ingenii nec alicuius eloquentie symbolum fidei. Quo audito ipse tacuit et movit caput. (6) Tunc assignavit nobis duos homines qui nos custodirent et equos et boves, et fecit nos bigare secum donec reverteretur nuncius, quem ipse miserat pro interpretatione litterarum Imperatoris, et ivimus cum eo usque in crastinum pentecostes.” *Sinica franciscana*, 191.

translation of King Louis' letters, implying that there is yet another hindrance to understanding – and the missionary project fails again.

The irony of this interaction occurring during the season of Pentecost was surely not lost on William. The first Pentecost is often interpreted as the reversal of the Tower of Babel's, divisive effects on language; this one, however, seems to have (from William's point of view) precluded the possibility of unifying the group because of an incompetent interpreter. On the day of Pentecost itself, William and his group almost baptize a Muslim (referred to in the text as a "Saracen"), who then changes his mind at the last minute based on the misunderstanding that he won't be allowed afterward to drink *cosmos*, the fermented mare's milk essential to the steppe diet. This is an incorrect assumption, and William himself drinks *cosmos* at several points in the text. In this case, another misunderstanding has even more explicitly led to an inability to expand community.

This is not even the most frustrating instance of language barrier problems for William. By the middle of June, he and his fellow travelers are having a thoroughly difficult time on the road, subsisting on insufficient rations, suffering in intense heat, and finding themselves disgusted by the peoples they encounter:

If they were seized with a desire to void their stomachs, they did not go farther than one can throw a bean: they did their filthiness right beside us while talking together, and much more they did which was vexatious beyond measure. Above all this, however, I was distressed because I could do no preaching to them; the interpreter would say to me: "You cannot make me preach, I do not know the proper words to use." And he spoke the truth; for after awhile, when I had learned something of the language, I saw that when I said one thing, he said a totally

different one, according to what came uppermost in his mind. So, seeing the danger of speaking through him, I made up my mind to keep silence.⁵⁵

In the first of these two episodes, while William does not say explicitly what he means by “symbolum fidei,” one can guess that they are the twelve articles of faith, based off the Apostles’ Creed. D.L. d’Avray discusses Richard Wetheringsett’s *Summa ‘Qui bene presunt’*, which describes in detail for priests what they ought to preach to their congregation; the first of these is “simbolum fidei, duodecim articulos fidei continens”⁵⁶. Taking this as a typical example of the *artes praedicandi* genre (as d’Avray does), it can be surmised that William was attempting to explain to the Mongols concepts such as resurrection, redemption, and the Holy Spirit, topics it might be difficult enough to explain to a Christian laity, who at least already share a cultural background with the preacher. Unsurprising then, that the interpreter doesn’t know how “talía verba dicere” in either passage, and that Scatay finds himself confused by the message. Worth noting too is that William despairs of his inability to preach in almost the same breath as he mentions his disgust with the continuous demand to share their food with the Mongols, as well as their bathroom habits. The implications can be read as twofold: first, that an inability to preach is adversity on par with near starvation and being surrounded by people defecating in front of you; second, that if only he could preach, he could cure them of their habits. Rather than risk his words being mistranslated, however, he chooses to say nothing at all.

⁵⁵ Rockhill, 95-96. “Si arripiebat eos appetitus purgandi ventrem, non elongabant se a nobis quantum possit faba iactari, imrao iuxta nos colloquentes mutuo faciebant immunditias suas, et multa alia faciebant que erant supra modum tediosa. 6. Super omnia autem gravabat me quod, quando volebam eis dicere aliquod verbum edificationis, interpres meus dicebat : “Non faciatis me predicare, quia nescio talia verba dicere.” Et verum dicebat. Ego enim percepi postea, quando incepi aliquantulum intelligere idioma, quod quando dicebam unum, ipse totum aliud dicebat secundum quod ei oecurrebat. Tunc videns periculum loquendi per ipsum, elegi magis tacere.” *Sinica franciscana*, 196.

⁵⁶ MS BL Royal 4 B. viii, fo. 222^{ra-b}, cited in D.L. d’Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars*, 83.

Later in the journey, William implicates his interpreter in failures that go beyond intellectual incompetence. As they stand before Möngke Khan for the first time, the Khan offers them a drink:

So he had given us of the rice drink, which was clear and flavoured like white wine, and of which I tasted a little out of respect for him, but for our misfortune our interpreter was standing by the butlers, who gave him so much to drink, that he was drunk in a short time. After this the chan [sic] had brought some falcons and other birds, which he took on his hand and looked at, and after a long while he bade us speak. Then we had to bend our knees. He had his interpreter, a certain Nestorian, who I did not know was a Christian, and we had our interpreter, such as he was, and already drunk.⁵⁷

The Fourth Lateran Council's prescription that clergy refrain from drunkenness⁵⁸ was not, of course, directed at the interpreter. The rationale behind the rule, however, is telling: "All clerics shall carefully abstain from drunkenness. Wherefore, let them accommodate the wine to themselves, and themselves to the wine. Nor shall anyone be encouraged to drink, for drunkenness banishes reason and incites to lust."⁵⁹ Drunkenness is immoral, and William juxtaposes his polite, moderate sips with Möngke Khan's and the interpreter's inebriation. The detail William includes about the falcons seems innocuous enough at first, but actually serves to heighten the Khan's lack of rationality in his drunkenness; he merely stares at them, without explanation, as if he is unsure why they are there. Later in the interview, communication entirely

⁵⁷ Rockhill 173. "Tunc fecit nobis dari de potu de risio claro et sapido sicut vinum album, de quo gustavi propter reverentiam eius paululum. Et ad infortunium nostrum, interpret noster stabat iuxta pincernas qui dederunt ei multum bibere, et statim fuit ebrius. Tunc ipse Chan fecit afferri falcones et alias aves quas accepit super manum suam et respexit, et post longum spatium precepit ut loqueremur. Tunc oportuit nos flectere genua. Et ipse habebat suum interpretem quendam nestorinum, de quo ignorabam quod christianus esset, et nos habebamus nostrum interpretem talem qualem, qui iam etiam erat ebrius." *Sinica franciscana*, 249-250.

⁵⁸ Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215. Canon 15. (In *The Internet Medieval Sourcebook*, ed. Paul Halsall, 1996) <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran4.asp>.

⁵⁹ Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215. Canon 15. English translation from *The Internet Medieval Sourcebook*. "A crapula et ebrietate omnes clerici diligenter abstineant unde vinum sibi temperent et se vino nec ad bibendum quispiam incitetur cum ebrietas et mentis inducat exilium et libidinis provocet incentivum."

fails, as William relates, “So far I understood my interpreter, but after that [last translation] I could not understand the whole of any one sentence; ‘twas by this that I found out he was drunk, and Mangu [sic] himself appeared to me tipsy.”⁶⁰ Language fails in drunkenness, drunkenness is a moral failure, and thus the failure of language becomes tied to immorality.⁶¹

Even at a moment William believes could be a turning point in potentially converting “idolaters,” language fails again, this time for a most human of reasons. Well into the territories of Möngke Khan, and speaking with some Uygher priests (likely Buddhists), he debates them on the nature of god and human souls, but “[t]hen, just as I wanted to continue reasoning with them, my interpreter got tired, and would no longer express my words, so he made me stop talking.”⁶²

Even as William blames the quality of his interpreter for this failure, his medieval readers might interpret it symbolically. The interpreter’s name, according to William, is Homo Dei (spelled in some editions Omodei); whether this is an epithet given him by William, or, as Rockhill thinks, a Latin translation of the Arabic name *Abdullah*, is debatable. Regardless, if this interpreter is a man of god, it is difficult not to ascribe his failures in translation as the work of god. Andrew of Longjumeau, a Dominican who made a journey to the Great Khan in 1245, had identified for King Louis that the Mongols were the descendants of Gog and Magog, shadowy Biblical figures that were said to be coming with the Antichrist at the end of the world.

⁶⁰ Rockhill 174-175. “Usque huc intellexi interpretem meum, sed ulterius nullam integram sententiam potui comprehendere, unde percepi bene quod ebrius erat. Et etiam ipse Manguchan videbatur michi temulentus.” *Sinica franciscana*, 251.

⁶¹ It should be noted that, at Möngke Khan’s court, William is furnished with another interpreter to supplement Homo Dei, this one the son of a Parisian goldsmith named William Buchier. William of Rubruck finds this young man more competent than his original interpreter.

⁶² Rockhill, 148. “[t]unc cum vellem plura ratiocinari cum illis, interpretes meus fatigatus, non valens verba exprimere, fecit me tacere.” *Sinica franciscana*, 232.

Furthermore, Gog and Magog are traditionally (according to Josephus and Isidore of Seville, among others) descendants of Noah, those who populated the world after God confused the world's languages at the destruction of the Tower of Babel. By that logic, it may have been possible to read the failure of the interpreter on William's journey as a sign that God didn't want the mission to succeed; after all, the Mongols and their ancestors – a potentially monstrous people – had been separated from the Judeo-Christian world since ancient times. Perhaps God did not want the people of this earth to be as one again; perhaps these Mongol people were not human enough to be brought back into God's favor.

But even as William implicitly questions the inherent ability of the Mongols to ever join the Christian community, he doesn't appear to see any barriers to his own understanding. Khanmohamadi argues that William's text "paradoxically announces the inefficacy and inadequacy of language at every turn,"⁶³ and that his missionary efforts make better headway with the use of visuals (his illustrated Bible, for one). While primarily true, the problem, according to William, appears to be one-way, as he rarely questions whether he understands what is being said to him. He declares, "The language of Pascatir is the same as that of the Hungarians,"⁶⁴ and, "The language of the Ruthenians, Poles, Bohemians and Sclavons is the same as that of the Wandals..."⁶⁵ The translator of the most widely disseminated English translation of Rubruck's work, William Rockhill, agrees that there may have been some

⁶³Shirin Khanmohamadi, "The Look of Medieval Ethnography: William of Rubruck's Mission to Mongolia" *New Medieval Literatures* 10 (2008): 98.

⁶⁴ Rockhill, 129. "Ideoma Pascatur et Ungarorum idem est" *Sinica franciscana*, 218-19.

⁶⁵ Rockhill, 130. "Lingua Rutenorum et Polonorum et Boemorum et Sclavanorum eadem est cum lingua Wandalarum..." *Sinica franciscana*, 219.

similarity between the Bashkir language and Hungarian, and between Ruthenian, Polish, Bohemian, Slovenian, and the Vandalic languages (in fact, in a footnote he claims that Rubruck's observations about the last five languages are "perfectly correct," although "somewhat correct" may be a better way to describe it). Still, the identification of four Slavic languages with a Germanic one is unlikely to be correct – and if he is describing five groups all speaking the same language, he has likely misidentified the peoples. Either way, he confidently makes claims that, in reality, are untrue and may well be the fault of linguistic misunderstandings on his part.

William at the Court of Möngke Khan

The climax of William's narrative occurs about three-quarters of the way through the text, when Möngke Khan requests that he, Nestorians, Muslims, and Buddhists engage in a public debate about which religion is "the truest."⁶⁶ This scene proves to be the culmination of William's frustrations with having his language mediated through both an interpreter and Mongol religious syncretism. At first, however, his response to the Khan's request is enthusiastic,⁶⁷ and he exclaims, "'Blessed be God, who put this in the Chan's [sic] heart.'"⁶⁸ This is coupled with his caveat to the Mongols that "'the servant of God should not dispute, but should show mildness to all,'"⁶⁹ which implies he believes he could win the debate without any kind of forceful argumentation.

⁶⁶ Rockhill 228. "veriores" *Sinica franciscana*, 292.

⁶⁷ The scenario in which he found himself may have reminded him on the parable of the Three Rings. The first European version of this story appeared in Stephen of Bourbon's *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus* (1260), but, as Iris Shagrir argues, is likely considerably older.

⁶⁸ Rockhill 228. "Benedictus Deus qui hoc misit in cor ipsius Chan!" *Sinica franciscana*, 292.

⁶⁹ Rockhill 228. "Servum Dei non decet litigare, sed mansuetum esse ad omnes" *Sinica franciscana*, 292.

In fact, in a strange twist, he teams up with the Nestorians for the purpose of the debate, and seems prepared to let them do a great deal of the talking. Before the debate actually occurs, the Khan asks each party for written statements of their precepts:

Pentecost eve came (30th May). The Nestorians had written a whole chronicle from the creation of the world to the Passion of the Christ; and passing over the Passion, they had touched on the Ascension and the resurrection of the dead and on the coming to judgement [sic], and in it there were some censurable statements, which I pointed out to them. As for us, we simply wrote out the symbol of the mass, “*Credo in unum Deum*. Then I asked them how they wished to proceed”⁷⁰

Given William’s many previous disparaging comments about Nestorians, Benjamin Z. Kedar notes the strangeness of this Nestorian-Catholic alliance, suggesting in his analysis that it was probably “their [own] decision to present a common Christian front.”⁷¹ As there is no evidence that the Khan forced them to work as a unit, this assessment is probably correct. Nonetheless, his reluctance to affiliate himself with Nestorianism is still evident in his mention of *reprehensibilia*.

Kedar analyzes the debate thoroughly, devoting a great deal of time to ascertaining how truthful William’s report of it might be, and why he eventually fails. A moment Kedar passes over, however, is William’s initial written statement, in which he simply chooses to write down the Nicene Creed. Given the work he eventually puts into the debate itself, it is surprising that he seemingly devotes little effort to its written component. The way in which he has treated sacred languages, and particularly Latin, throughout his narrative, though, provides insight into this

⁷⁰ Rockhill 229. “Venit vigilia pentecostes. Nestorini scripserunt cronica a creatione mundi usque ad passionem Christi; et pertranseuntes passionem tetigerunt de ascensione et resurrectione mortuorum et adventu ad iudicium, in quibus aliqua fuerunt reprehensibilia, que docui eos. Nos autem simpliciter scripsimus symbolum misse: *Credo in unum Deum*. Tunc quesivi ab eis qualiter vellent procedere.” *Sinica franciscana*, 293.

⁷¹ Benjamin Z. Kedar, “The Multilateral Disputation at the Court of the Grand Qan Möngke, 1254,” in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, eds. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Mark R. Cohen, Sasson Somekh, and Sidney H. Griffin. Wiesbaden (Germany: Harrassowitz, 1999) 169.

otherwise odd choice. William's understanding of Latin prayers and Latinity sets him up to believe that the *Credo* will do much of his evangelizing work for him at this crucial juncture in his mission. Latin and Latinity confer prestige, command respect, and function to convey God's word to mankind. Small wonder, then, that William thinks the *Credo* will make an impression on Möngke Khan.

As William himself says at the end of the debate: "They all listened without making any contradiction, but no one said: 'I believe; I want to become a Christian.'" ⁷² While none of the debate itself would have occurred in Latin – the languages spoken would have been French, Mongol, and Chinese – the *Credo* ultimately does not do the work that William wants or expects. The very next day, the Khan calls William before him and, despite William's protestations, tells him to go home. William marks the day of the debate as the Eve of Pentecost; the Khan sends him home on Pentecost Day. Like the year before in the gorge, the significance of these events on a day marking a confusion of languages was likely not lost on William. The failure of translation on such a day perhaps meant that his loss in the debate was God's will.

After briefly describing his reluctant journey home, William ends his narrative with a series of recommendations to King Louis. He suggests that it would not be expedient to send another friar on a mission to the Tartars, but that perhaps a bishop "with proper state" ⁷³ should go instead. He furthermore says of the Tartars that "They listen to whatever an ambassador has to say, and always ask if he has more to say; but he must have a good interpreter – nay, several

⁷² Rockhill, 234. "Omnes audierunt absque ulla contradictione, nullus tamen dixit: 'Credo, volo fieri christianus.'" *Sinica franciscana* p. 297.

⁷³ Rockhill 282. "honorifice" *Sinica franciscana*, 331.

interpreters – abundant traveling funds, etc.”⁷⁴ Louis did not choose to do so. Igor Rachewitz posits instead that the failure of William’s mission was “largely due to his own uncompromising attitude, and his sincere but tactless criticism of the other doctrines. This attracted the enmity of the Moslems[sic] and Nestorians who, very friendly at first, later came to regard him as a trouble-maker”⁷⁵, and this seems accurate when looking at William’s last audience with Möngke Khan in which he is met with what Shirin Khanmohamadi calls “damning silence.”⁷⁶ As shown above, however, part and parcel of this uncompromising attitude is William’s insistence on his own superior status as a member of the Latinate clergy, and his assumption that, even in Asia, Latin will retain its position as a sacred language.

Beyond sending a priest instead of a friar, William makes another recommendation to Louis: he suggests a crusade. Few of the Turks living in the Holy Land are Saracens, he explains, and the current ruler is young and sickly with only a small army; it would be an easy task for soldiers of the Church to take back the Holy Land. This is indeed an odd response for a friar, who ostensibly should spread Christianity peacefully, but in its oddness we see William’s exasperation with how, outside Europe, his traditional linguistic markers of what is sacred and what confers social status become almost meaningless. Latin prayers are absorbed by Mongol shamanism and don’t carry with them the gravity William thinks they ought; the Latinity of

⁷⁴ Rockhill, 282. “[a]udiunt enim quecumque nuncius uult dicere et semper querunt si uult dicere plura, sed oporteret quod haberet bonum interpretem, immo plures interpretes et copiosas expensas” *Sinica franciscana*, 332.

⁷⁵ Igor de Rachewitz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971) 137.

⁷⁶ Khanmohamadi, 98.

Asians seems to him botched and superficial.⁷⁷ His attempt at theological debate becomes courtly entertainment among the Mongols, a ritual in which – especially since he and his retinue are part of the spectacle - he must always remain an outsider. Given what he’s realized is the inherent secularity of international exchange, he no longer sees the point of talking and suggests war as the best solution. The final section of his address to Louis explicitly references the belief that, one day, Christendom will expand to conquer the world:

The son of Vastacius is delicate, and is at war with the son of Assan, who likewise is a youth, and under the yoke of the Tartars; so if the army of the Church were to come to the Holy Land, it would be very easy to conquer or to pass through all these countries...In times past valiant men passed through these countries, and succeeded, though they had most powerful adversaries, whom God has since removed from the earth...I state it with confidence that if your peasants – I speak not of the princes and noblemen – would but travel like the Tartar princes, and be content with like provisions, they would conquer the whole world.⁷⁸

The apocalyptic vision of world history, in which Christendom will have spread throughout the world at the Day of Judgment, is still present, as is the idea that God’s hand is present in removing infidels from the earth. William says nothing, however, about preaching. The language he uses instead is military and acquisitive: *exercitus, subiugare, milites, acquirere*. In fact, the possibility of sending a bishop as an official ambassador seems almost an afterthought, a strategy for dealing with the Mongols that he does not truly believe will work. By the end of his narrative,

⁷⁷ William’s own Latin in his account is relatively simple, straightforward, and imperfect. His concern about bad Latin grammar might be an extension of this. To return to the example of the Cuman from the beginning of the chapter, the man’s greeting could be an encouraging suggestion that missionary efforts were working, but it could also be a threat. If a man met incidentally in Karakorum can be baptised and taught the sacred language with seeming ease, William’s superior status becomes all the more tenuous.

⁷⁸ Rockhill 282. “Filius Vastacii debilis est et bellum habet cum filio Assani, qui similiter est garcio et attritus servitute Tartarorum. Unde si exercitus Ecclesie deberet venire ad Terram Sanctam, facilimum esset omnes istas terras vel subiugare vel pertransire...Antiquitus transiverunt per istas regiones viri fortes, et prosperati sunt; habuerunt tamen fortissimos resistentes, quos Deus modo delevit de terra...Fidenter dico si vellent vestri rustici, non dicam Reges et milites, ire sicut vadunt Reges Tartarorum et talibus esse cibariis contenti, possent acquirere totum mundum.” *Sinica franciscana*, 331.

William seems have come to the belief that language and Latinity are strategies of interacting with moral, rationale people – but, he implies, the cultures of Western Asia do not fall under that category.

John of Plano Carpini: literal translation, and public ritual as language

Unlike William of Rubruck, John of Plano Carpini eventually found competent interpreters to aid him on his mission. Furthermore, in addition to better translators, John was himself more linguistically adept than William. Already in late middle age (around 65 years old) when he began his mission, John had spent much of his life traveling in Central and Eastern Europe, and likely had command of at least German and basic Russian. Moreover, he was accompanied by Friar Benedict the Pole, who - as his name implies - had a general facility with Slavic languages.

More modern scholars have written about William of Rubruck, likely because his text is longer, and because of the anecdotal style of the narrative; it reads like a story, and the reader comes to know the narrator well. In contrast, John devotes eight of his text's nine chapters to the Mongols' history and a description of their culture. In fact, the nickname often given to William's account is *Itinerarium*, whereas John's is titled *Ystoria Mongolorum quos nos Tartaros appellamus*. Only the last chapter describes his journey to Asia and his time at the Khan's court, and that in substantially less detail than William. During the medieval period, however, John's narrative was considerably better known. It circulated in multiple forms: an abbreviated version related by John's traveling companion, Brother Benedict the Pole (c.1200-1280); a version of Benedict's narrative copied by an anonymous Franciscan known only as C. de Bridia; and a

version of John's first eight chapters integrated by Vincent of Beauvais into his *Speculum Historiale*. Consequently, a text with substantial influence on medieval European views of Asia, and that represents important ways of thinking about Latinity and translation in the thirteenth century, has been understudied. John's narration of his time spent among the Mongols reveals that he felt confident that literal translation could accurately convey the Pope's message, even the complicated theological portions. He felt substantially less comfortable, however, participating in Mongol rituals since he was concerned that, through the sign language of ritual, he might inadvertently say something he did not understand. In other words, he worried that anything he said or wrote would be mediated through, and potentially undermined by, sign and ritual.

The reader can see this tension between the language of ritual and the language of words at the first major Mongol encampment John encounters, that of a chief he identifies as Corenza. This is the first point at which John wants to translate the Pope's letters out of Latin; however, he finds he must defer a little longer:

...we were instructed to genuflect three times on the left knee before the door of the dwelling and to pay great heed not to step on the threshold of the door; we were most careful about this for the sentence of death is on those who knowingly tread on the threshold of the dwelling of any chief. After we had entered [the tent] we had to repeat on bended knees, in the presence of the chief and all the other nobles who had been specially summoned for this purpose, the things we had previously said. We handed him the Lord Pope's letter, but since our paid interpreter whom we had brought from Kiev was not competent to translate the

letter, and there was no one else at hand capable of doing it, it could not be translated.⁷⁹

John mentions that his party had to repeat things he had said before, and presumably they said those things through the interpreter. This means that the interpreter felt competent to relate the narrative details of the friars' journey and the bare outlines of their reasons for making it, but did not feel competent to translate the contents of the Pope's letter, which contained more complicated theological material. This evidently annoys John: he mentions that the party of friars had brought the interpreter all the way from Kiev, that they had given him money, and he is still not sufficient (*non erat sufficiens*) to translate the letters. Looking at this incident in the broader context of John's discussions about translation, the implication here is that the translator *should* be competent for this task. In other words, translating theology is the same kind of work, requiring the same set of skills, as translating administrative matters. This will be shown more clearly further on in the narrative, when he does find interpreters capable of translating the letters.

Moreover, before he even begins to discuss translation, John discusses the physical performance of ritually entering the tent. As it is described here, meaning is created through bodies as opposed to words, the ceremony of entering the tent functioning as a kind of sign language. John, however, does not know the meaning of the ceremony's various pieces, and so is

⁷⁹ John of Plano Carpini, "History of the Mongols," in *The Mission to Asia: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, ed. Christopher Dawson (London: Sheed and Ward, 1980), 54-55 "...fuimus instructi ut inclinaremur ter cum genu sinistro ante hostium stationis, et caveremus attente ne pedem super limen hostii poneremus, quod fecimus diligenter, quia sententia mortis est super illos qui scienter limen stationis ducis alicuius conculea[n]t. Postquam intravimus, oportuit nos, coram duce et aliis maioribus omnibus qui specialiter erant ad hoc advocati, dicere flexis genibus ea que superius dixeramus. Obtulimus ei et litteras domini Pape. Sed quia noster interpretis quem de Kyovia, dato precio, duxeramus, non erat sufficiens ut per eum littere possent interpretari, nec ad hoc aliquis alius ydoneus habebatur, iccirco non potuerunt interpretari." *Sinica franciscana* 107.

essentially being asked to speak a language he does not understand. It seems as though he tries to provide as much rationale for the ceremony as he can, inasmuch as he explains that touching the threshold of the tent is so disrespectful as to merit the death penalty. He cannot explain the rest of the ritual, though, and thus it remains to him, as it does to a European reader, an object of untranslatable mystery.

It should be noted here, of course, that this kind of sign language is not culturally unique to the Mongols. Rituals performed by bodies and objects also play an important role in the Latin liturgy. Hand gestures and kneeling constitute parts of the Mass, and objects – wine, holy water, the Eucharist, incense – are integral as well. The gestures, objects, and *words* are all intimately connected, however: holy water is made holy by a prayer and the Eucharist is consecrated by a prayer. Likewise, as indicated elsewhere in the text (particularly the Khan's coronation ceremony) speech is integral to Mongol ritual. Nonetheless, if there are prayers or other words recited as the party enters the tent, John does not mention them. In this and other scenes, he emphasizes the Mongols' somatic communication methods. Even if verbal communication is important to them, John is not thinking about it.

He finally finds capable interpreters at the court of Bati, a lesser khan in the western part of the empire. After the friars perform a set of rituals that will allow them an audience with Bati, his representatives lead the friars into a dwelling (*orda*):

Entering we said what we had to say on our knees; that done we delivered the letter and asked to be given interpreters capable of translating it. We were given them on Good Friday, and carefully translated the letter with them into Ruthenian,

Saracenic, and Tartar characters. This translation was presented to Bati, who read it and noted it carefully.⁸⁰

The use of the word *littera*, translated in this edition of the text as “characters,” is telling. Were John to have used the term *lingua*, or “language,” that might have implied that the Pope’s letters were translated for sense more than literalness.⁸¹ Especially coupled with *diligenter*, John emphasizes that both parties were concerned with exactness.

On the reciprocal end, the Mongols were concerned as well that the Europeans not misunderstand them: in writing a response to the Pope, Güyük’s scribes wrote in their own language, and subsequently they

...came to us and translated the letter for us word by word. When we had written it in Latin, they had it translated so that they might hear a phrase at a time, for they wanted to know if we had made a mistake in any word. When both letters were written, they made us read it once and a second time in case we had left out anything, and they said to us: “See that you clearly understand everything, for it would be inconvenient if you did not understand everything, seeing you have to travel to such far-distant lands.” When we replied “We understand everything clearly” they wrote the letter once again in Saracenic, in case anyone should be found in those parts who could read it, if the Lord Pope so wished.⁸²

First of note in this passage is the Mongols’ emphasis on literal translation. Without access to sources, it is difficult to say precisely why the Mongols insisted on translating word for word, but

⁸⁰ Dawson, 56. “Intrantes autem, flexis genibus diximus verba nostra; dictis verbis, litteras obtulimus, et rogavimus ut darentur nobis interpretes, qui litteras valerent transferre; qui in die parasceve nobis dati fuerunt. Et diligenter transtulimus eas cum ipsis in littera ruthenica, sarrecenica, et in littera Tartarorum. Que interpretatio fuit Bati presentata, quam legit et notavit attente.” *Sinica franciscana*, 109-110.

⁸¹ Dawson notes in his edition: “‘Saracenic’ probably denotes ‘Persian’, and ‘Tartar’ means ‘Uighur’, since these were the languages used in the Mongol chancery.

⁸² Dawson, 67. “...nobis litteram de verbo ad verbum interpretati fuerant. Et cum scripsissemus in latino, faciebant sibi per singulas orationes interpretari, volentes scire si nos in verbo aliquo erraremus. Et cum ambe littere fuerunt scripte, fecerunt nos legere semel et secundo, ne forte minus aliquod haberemus, et dixerunt nobis: “Videte quod omnia bene intelligatis, quia non expediret quod non intelligeretis omnia, quoniam debetis ad tam remotas provincias proficisci.” Et cum respondiissemus: “Intelligimus omnia bene,” litteras in sarracencico rescripserunt ut possit aliquis inveniri in partibus istis qui legeret eas si dominus Papa vellet.” *Sinica franciscana*, 123-125.

we can, instead, evaluate how the Latin Christian John – and his medieval readers - may have understood literal translation. In analyses of medieval translation, Jerome’s formulation, “(except in the case of the holy scriptures where even the order of the words is a mystery) I render sense for sense and not word for word”⁸³ is often invoked to claim that medieval translators dismissed literal translations as inferior to those that focus on style and meaning. Rita Copeland, however, complicates this assumption by pointing out that literal translation could be formulated either as an impediment to understanding meaning – since it implies a limited grammatical competence – or as “recovering a kind of originary certitude which the human conventions of rhetoric have not vitiated or obscured.”⁸⁴ Moreover, she illustrates that the implications of *non verbum e verbo* shifted among time and place: Boethius and John Scotus Eriugena were happier to assume the role of the *fidus interpres* than were Jerome or Cicero.

Furthermore, Jerome’s exception to his *non verbum e verbo* formula for translation is the holy scriptures. The contents of Innocent IV’s longer letter, while not biblical quotations, are complicated and theological. Even the first sentence of *Dei patris immensa* includes a description of Christ’s position as the mediator between God and man, his simultaneous humanity and divinity, and his birth from a virgin. The “uncorrupted”⁸⁵ meaning of the Pope’s political and military demands, as well as his explanations of Christian theology, would be how John would interpret the very literal translations of the letters.

⁸³ St. Jerome, *Epistola LVII ad Pammachium* in *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 22, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris, 1859) “absque Scriptura sanctis, ubi et verborum ordo mysterium est, non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu.”

⁸⁴ Copeland, Rita. *Rhetoric, hermeneutics, and translation in the Middle Ages: academic traditions and vernacular texts*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 44.

⁸⁵ Copeland, *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics*, 53.

Even with competent interpreters, however, there are points at which language fails to convey its message. John's group is warned first by the Duke of Russia that, if they do not present the Mongols with gifts, their mission will not be taken seriously (*pro nichilo reputatur*⁸⁶). This warning bears itself out in subsequent interactions with almost all the Mongols they encounter. After two briefly described incidents in which small government officials and a group of soldiers refuse to allow the foreigners to continue their journey until they have handed over some of their provisions, John relates in detail what happens when they meet with delegates of the local chief. John explains that they are envoys of the Pope, that the Pope wishes the Mongols to convert to Christianity, and furthermore that the Pope wishes the Mongols to cease killings of Christians. The response of the delegates is the following: "Having heard our reasons and understood what we have noted above, they replied that on the strength of what we had said they were willing to provide us with pack-horses and an escort as far as Corenza, and immediately they asked for gifts, which they received from us, for we needs must comply with their wishes."⁸⁷ John does not mention whether the interpreter is translating Latin at this point (presumably the Christians could be speaking German or a Slavic language to each other); regardless, the Pope's letter they are carrying is in Latin and carries his seal. As such, in Western Christendom the letter carries administrative weight. However, these factors are only partially what allow John and his retinue access to the chief. John claims that it was on account of "these words" (*ista verba*) that the Mongols first say they will lead the Christians to Corenza, and it

⁸⁶ *Sinica franciscana*, 102.

⁸⁷ Dawson, 54. "Auditis causis et intellectis superius annotatis, dixerunt quod super ista verba vellent subducticios equos usque ad Corensam et ducatum prebere, et statim munera petiverunt et a nobis acceperunt." *Sinica franciscana*, 106.

must surely have been comforting to think that the word of the Pope held sway worldwide. Still, he follows with, “immediately they asked for gifts, which they received from us” (*statim munera petiverunt et a nobis acceperunt*). Given this, it becomes clear that the Mongols are ultimately convinced to help John less on account of his words than his gifts. Like William of Rubruck did, John finds he is working within the Mongols’ semantic system wherein objects establish trust and goodwill as much as – or more than – language.

Finally, at the court of Güyük Khan, the Mongol emperor, we see that John not only knows that part of his communication with the Mongols is in sign language, he also begins to worry that he may inadvertently say something he does not understand. He and his party are made to wait several days before they can meet with the Emperor, but he does, however, note that “The translation of the Lord Pope’s letter, however, and the things I had said had been sent to him by Bati.”⁸⁸ Choosing to note that at this particular point in his narrative causes the audience to read the time they were kept waiting as a snub, a rejection of the respect John must have believed was owed to them as envoys. While in this instance it seems that the Emperor is not so much specifically rejecting the authority of Latin as papal authority generally, communication problems come to the fore when John actually does meet with Güyük and observes his coronation:

“We were there until the feast of St. Bartholomew, on which day a vast crowd assembled. They stood facing south, so arranged that some of them were a stone’s throw away from the others, and they kept moving forward, going further and further away, saying prayers and genuflecting towards the south. We however, not

⁸⁸ Dawson, 61. “Interpretationem tamen litterarum domini Pape et verba que dixeramus a Bati predicto erant ei mandata.” *Sinica franciscana*, 116.

knowing whether they were uttering incantations or bending the knee to God or another, were unwilling to genuflect.”⁸⁹

John assumes that, even though he does not understand the meaning of the prayers, just reciting them may be enough to undermine his faith and allegiance to the Pope. Furthermore, he recognizes that participation in the ritual may signal to the Mongols an allegiance to the Khan. This provides a two-fold insight into the way John is thinking about language: first, that speaking – despite a lack of understanding – can still *mean* as a performance. Second, he has apparently decided that the semantic system used to indicate goodwill in the Mongol community is far more dependent on actions than words. To reiterate an earlier point, whether he has correctly interpreted the relative importance of bodily rituals as opposed to spoken rituals is irrelevant. John’s own religious order is one that believes spoken language – in the form of preaching – is the primary vehicle that encourages and provides access to the Christian community. Whether he has correctly interpreted the relative importance of somatic rituals as opposed to spoken rituals is irrelevant. John sees that his own language is less useful than his gestures. Among the Mongols, he comes to the conclusion that a sign language, in the form of public ritual and exchange of gifts, can buy one trust and civility. He refuses to participate because he cannot be certain of what he is saying.

To the Pope’s letter requesting that the Mongols convert to Christianity, the Khan’s answer is a definitive no, and instead demands that Innocent IV declare loyalty to him instead.

⁸⁹ Dawson, 63. “Ibi fuimus usque ad festum beati Bartholomei, in quo convenit maxima multitudo. Et contra meridiem versis vultibus stabant, [ita] quod quidam erant qui ad iactam lapidis longe erant ab aliis, et semper procedebant longius et longius, facientes orationes flectendo genua contra meridiem. Nos autem utrum facerent incantationes vel flecterent genua Deo vel alteri nescientes, genuflectiones facere volebamus.” *Sinica franciscana*, 119.

However, as the missionary party prepares to leave Güyük's camp and begin their journey home, John writes a surprisingly optimistic passage about his success among the Mongols.

The present Emperor may be forty or forty-five years old or more; he is of medium height, very intelligent and extremely shrewd, and most serious and grave in his manner. He is never seen to laugh for a slight cause nor to indulge in any frivolity, so we were told by the Christians who are constantly with him. The Christians of his household also told us that they firmly believed he was about to become a Christian, and they have clear evidence of this, for he maintains Christian clerics and provides them with supplies of Christian things; in addition he always has a chapel before his chief tent and they sing openly and in public and beat the board for services after the Greek fashion like other Christians, however big a crowd of Tartars or other men be there. The other chiefs do not behave like this.⁹⁰

Placing this passage toward the end of his report is a canny rhetorical move: finishing with a note of optimism would surely please the Pope. It also carves out a possible place for Güyük within Christendom on the slim chance he *does* convert: first, John establishes Güyük's merits as a ruler, establishing in particular that he is prudent and serious. *Astutus* may be a slightly more ambivalent term if it carries with it the same pejorative connotation that its translation "shrewd" does in English; regardless, establishing his intelligence just prior to describing the ways in which he is already favorable towards Christianity situates the Khan as a character that Innocent would *want* to have in his fold. Nonetheless, in his next breath, John ascribes to Güyük a false consciousness by negating the contents of his letter, saying Güyük does not understand how close to a Christian conversion he really is. Rhetorically, this is a particularly complicated

⁹⁰ Dawson, 68. "Iste autem Imperator potest esse XL vel XLV annorum aut plus, mediocris est stature, prudens est valde, et astutus nimium, et multum serius, et gravis in moribus. Nec unquam videt homo eum de facili ridere vel facere aliquam levitatem, sicut nobis christiani dicebant qui assidue morantur cum eo. Dicebant etiam nobis christiani qui erant de familia eius, quod credebant firmiter quod deberet fieri christianus, et de hoc habent signum apertum, quoniam ipse tenet clericos christianos, et dat eis expensas christianorum; etiam capellam semper habet ante maius tentorium eius, et cantant publice et aperte, et pulsan ad horas secundum morem Grecorum ut alii christiani, quantacumque sit ibi multitudo Tartarorum vel etiam hominum aliorum. Quod non faciunt alii duces." *Sinica franciscana*, 124-125.

paragraph: John subtly tries to institute a place for the Khan within Christendom by praising him and optimistically rationalizing an imminent conversion, despite the Khan's letter to the contrary. John has apparently learned his sign language too well. He manipulates a reading of Güyük's actions that indicate his Christian leanings when, in reality, Mongols rulers merely had a tendency to surround themselves with clerics of multiple religions in an attempt to protect themselves as thoroughly as possible (see William of Rubruck's experiences).

Moreover, John claims that he and his party were able to learn "omnia facta" about Güyük Khan's court through bilingual Hungarians and Russians (although the Russian goldsmith he mentions is actually the French Guillaume Boucher), because "they knew the language and had lived with them continually some twenty years, others ten, some more, some less."⁹¹ He further adds, "They told us everything willingly and sometimes without being asked, for they knew what we wanted."⁹² It is likely that this access to "private information"⁹³ allows John to claim that he knows the Emperor's mind better than the Emperor himself, especially when it comes from Christians that – presumably – know the signs of an imminent conversion. An issue John does not account for, however, is the possibility of a double meaning in *sciebant nostram voluntatem* ("they knew what we wanted"). Christians living in the East may have been similarly eager to see a converted Khan, and interpreted what they could to this effect. Similarly, they may have spoken optimistically to John and his party to encourage any efforts at evangelizing.

Whatever the rationale for the misinterpretation, however, the fact remains that Güyük Khan was

⁹¹ Dawson 66. "sciebant linguam et cum eis assidue morabantur, aliqui XX, aliqui X, aliqui plus, aliqui minus" *Sinica franciscana*, 123.

⁹² Dawson 66. "Et ipsi nobis voluntarie et aliquando sine interrogatione, quia sciebant nostram voluntatem, omnia referebant." *Sinica franciscana*, 123.

⁹³ Dawson 66. "multa secreta" *Sinica franciscana*, 122.

almost certainly never on the brink of conversion, and Innocent IV's letter had almost no chance of convincing him otherwise.

Despite the mission's ostensible failure, Innocent was reportedly "pleased" with John's report of his journey, and made John Archbishop of Antivari in Dalmatia.⁹⁴ We do not know his response to Güyük's letter specifically, but we do have his response to the Dominican mission of Ascelin of Lombardy, dispatched the same year as John. Ascelin returned in 1248 with a letter from Baycu Noyan, a Mongol commander in the Caucasus, a year after John. Baycu Noyan (often written as Baiju) echoed the sentiments of Güyük, claiming that the Pope should submit to the Mongols. Unlike John, Ascelin returned to the Pope with Mongol envoys, and Innocent was therefore able to send a reply back to Baiju. This letter, *Viam agnoscere veritatis*, is similar in tone and content to his first letter, *Cum non solum*, (which will be discussed in the next chapter). The most notable aspect of the letter, in fact, is that it does *not* do anything new; in the words of Igor Rachewiltz, "There is not even a hint at a renewal of the dialogue with the Tartars... Innocent, who had by now received all the reports from his envoys, recognized the impasse and rightly felt that at this stage there was no point in pushing the negotiations further."⁹⁵ Indeed, he may have thought that there had been no point in even initiating negotiations. The antagonistic rhetoric is present in Innocent's description of Mongols to Christians and in his letter addressed to the Mongols (again, see the next chapter).

Given the strong possibility that Innocent's letters to the Mongols were likely less about diplomacy and more concerned with his self-presentation in the midst of his feud with Frederick

⁹⁴ Rachewiltz, 111.

⁹⁵ Rachewiltz, 118.

II, John seems to be treating them as such. This could be part of the reason why he expects the letters to be minimally efficacious, and why he focuses instead on avoiding gestures that would inadvertently venerate the Khan. Diplomatic relations, friendly or no, were unlikely with the Mongol Empire, which both Innocent and John knew as John began his journey. Innocent did not send any more missionary parties to the East after this, and spent the remainder of his life primarily involved with matters regarding the Holy Roman Empire and Frederick II's successors. Official papal missions to the Mongols did not resume until the papacy of Nicholas IV (1227-1292).

Odoric of Pordenone: Speech Postmortem

Almost a century later, in 1318, Odoric of Pordenone set off on his own mission to Asia. Although it seems he was authorized to travel by his superior, Guidotto of Bassano, he likely took initiative for the journey himself.⁹⁶ Unlike the routes of William of Rubruck and John of Plano Carpini, much of his travel east was by sea, and while he did eventually reach the Mongol Empire he also made sojourns in India and Indonesia. Upon his return to Italy a little over a decade later, he dictated his report to his amanuensis, William of Solagna. As Paolo Chiesa puts it in his introduction to the most recent English printed edition of Odoric's *Relatio*, "This book speaks of...the stories that he told and had others write down."⁹⁷ Noting the divide between what is spoken and what is written in this context is especially telling, since, of all three authors discussed in this chapter, Odoric is the one who talks about language the least. In spite of this,

⁹⁶ Paolo Chiesa, "Introduction," in *The Travels of Friar Odoric*. Odoric of Pordenone, Tr. Sir Henry Yule, (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 14.

⁹⁷ Chiesa, 1-2.

language and speech are still central to the concerns of the text, but in its form as opposed to its content. Orality also plays a substantial part in how the text was received, and so the Latin of the *Relatio* continued to transform even long after it was written and Odoric passed away. In other words, Odoric's Latin takes on new social functions not while he is abroad, but after he returns home.⁹⁸

Indeed, with only a couple of exceptions, the *Relatio* elides the difficulty of multilingual communication. In describing a culture in India that cannibalizes their dead relatives, he says that he "rebuked these people sharply for so acting, saying to them, 'Why do ye act thus against all reason?'" and that, "let me say what I would, they would not believe otherwise nor quit that custom of theirs."⁹⁹ In contrast to William and John's narratives, this is one of the few points at which he directly relates a conversation. Also unlike William or John, he does not mention the need to mediate his rebukes or his protestations through an interpreter, and does not seem to doubt that both parties have understood the other's position on the matter. In fact, his certainty that he has understood everything he has been told becomes more apparent in the next section, wherein he asserts, "And as regards this India I have inquired from many who have knowledge of the matter, and they all assured me as with one voice that it includeth in its limits a good twenty-four thousand islands, in which there are sixty-four crowned kings."¹⁰⁰ The phrase that

⁹⁸ The most famous way in which the text transformed, of course, was in its adaptation in *The Book of John Mandeville*. This will be treated at length in Chapter 4.

⁹⁹ Chiesa; Yule, 118. "Hos tales multum reprehendebam dicens: 'Quare sic facitis vos, cum hoc quod facitis sit contra omenem rationem.'" And: "Et sic tantum dicere poteram quantum ego volebam quod nunquam aliud credere volebant, ne cab isto ritu discedere quem tenebat." *Sinica franciscana*, 456-457.

¹⁰⁰ Chiesa; Yule, 119. "De hac insula requisivi multos qui hoc sciunt, et omnes uno ore locuntur et dicunt, quod hec India bene viginti quatuor millia insularum continet sub se, in qua etiam bene sunt LXI.II Reges corone." *Sinica franciscana*, 457.

Yule translates as “one voice,” *uno ore*, collapses what was in all likelihood a multiplicity of languages into a singular one, easily comprehensible by Odoric.

With that said, he does not completely ignore language barriers and differences. At points he notes that certain countries have a language of their own, or he names foreign objects (he mentions, for example, that wine in one Chinese city is called *Bigni*, and that a man in the same city addressed him as “*Atha* (which is to say *Father*)”).¹⁰¹ While there are several examples similar to these throughout the text, he does not discuss them as a barrier to communication, unlike William and John. In fact, the one point in the text at which he does acknowledge language barriers as an impediment to understanding, *he* is the one who can understand. As he and others wait on a ship for a favorable wind to set sail, he reports a conversation with the captain in which the man “speak[s] in the Armenian tongue, that others might not understand.”¹⁰² The larger setting for the interaction, moreover, frames Odoric’s comprehension of Armenian as an extension of his other secret knowledge about the relics he carries with him. The “idolaters” and “Saracens” prayed for a good wind to no effect, as did Odoric eventually, but to no effect. The captain’s covert message was to suggest that one of the martyred friars’ bones be thrown into the sea, which, according to Odoric, eventually produced wind enough to sail. Access to the knowledge that produced the miracle is linked to special understanding of language.

Nonetheless, this story is Odoric’s only sustained treatment of language in his text. In fact, he tends to call attention to where he suspends his own language. Many descriptions of exotic lands and peoples end with phrases such as: “And there be many other marvelous and

¹⁰¹ *Sinica franciscana* has *bigin* for *bigni*, p. 465. “*Atha*, id est pater,” also p. 465.

¹⁰² Chiesa; Yule, 94. “Et ut alii intelligere non possent, ille rector navis armenice fuit locutus dicens.” *Sinica franciscana*, 437.

bestly customs which 'tis just as well not to write;"¹⁰³ "And there are many things else to be said of that city, but it would take too long to relate them"¹⁰⁴; or, "And there be many other strange things in those parts which I write not, for unless a man should see them he never could believe them."¹⁰⁵ Scholars have read these types of pronunciations in several ways; Jana Valtrová takes them at face value, claiming that Odoric was planning on filling in later the things he said it would take too long to write about at present.¹⁰⁶ Venceslas Bubenicek argues that Odoric does not want to frighten his audience by dwelling too much on descriptions of threatening Otherness.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, Dinu Luca views them as a strategic rhetorical device by which Odoric draws attention away from the less important part of his narrative (his journey to China) and towards the most important (China and the Khan).¹⁰⁸ My view is instead that these suspensions of voice signal the text's orality, for these are the kinds of repeated expressions used in storytelling, especially in the midst of an incredulous or impatient crowd of listeners. Moreover, given that we know he dictated his report to William of Solagna, these are the sorts of phrases that indicate the mental process of deciding what to dictate, what not. Paolo Chiesa describes the

¹⁰³ Chiesa; Yule, 100. "Et sic de multis aliis mirabilibus et bestialibus que illic fiunt, que scribere non expedit multum." *Sinica franciscana*, 441.

¹⁰⁴ Chiesa; Yule, 69. "Multa alia sunt in ista civitate que nimis foret longum enarrare." *Sinica franciscana*, 418.

¹⁰⁵ Chiesa; Yule, 118-119. "Multe alie novitates illic habentur quas non scribo, nam si homo eas non videret, credere non posset." *Sinica franciscana*, 457.

¹⁰⁶ Jana Valtrová, "Beyond the Horizons of Legends: Traditional Imagery and Direct Experience in Medieval Accounts of Asia." *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 57, no. 2 (February 2010): 154-85.

¹⁰⁷ Venceslas Bubenicek, "Figures de l'altérité chez Odoric de Pordenone (Itinéraire, 1351)" *Les grandes peurs* 2. *L'Autre*, ed. Madeleine Bertaud (Genève: Droz, 2004), 233-45.

¹⁰⁸ Dinu Luca, "China as the Other in Odoric's Itinerarium," *CLCWeb* 14, no. 5 (12, 2012).

work as having a “discursive and almost oral style” with a “rich use of Italian colloquialisms.”¹⁰⁹

That orality was a robust part of the text’s linguistic transformations in its afterlives is supported by manuscript evidence. Marianne O’Doherty has convincingly argued that, towards the end of the fourteenth and into the fifteenth centuries, the *Relatio* became a popular text among the Italian laity. Citing the relatively high number of translations into the *volgare*, as well as the relatively poor manuscript quality of those translations, she argues that the text’s primary readers in Italy were “vernacular-literate, administrative or mercantile laypeople.”¹¹⁰ This is supported by the ample miracles with which Odoric is credited. These are detailed especially in the *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals of the Order of Friars Minor*,¹¹¹ written some time around 1370. These miracles include healing townspeople of tumors, experiencing visions of the Virgin Mary, and surviving encounters with demons. In death, the *Chronicle* relates, encounters with his corpse – which apparently did not decay and emitted a sweet perfume – had curative powers. It took another four centuries, however, for his beatification that eventually occurred in 1755. In 1866, Henry Yule wrote that the mandatory objection to the beatification “almost sneers at the marvels of the Itinerary,” and that the popular acclaim that led to his beatification only gave official sanction to “the cult rendered to Odoric from time immemorial.”¹¹²

Whether sneering or not, the incredulity towards the *Relatio* coupled with what seems to

¹⁰⁹ Chiesa, 52.

¹¹⁰ Marianne O’Doherty, “The *Viaggio in Inghilterra* of a *Viaggio in Oriente*: Odorico da Pordenone *Itinerarium* from Italy to England,” *Italian Studies*. 64, no.2 (2013): 198-220. She notes that this is in contrast to its fortunes in England, where the copies remained in Latin and were found mostly in ecclesiastic or monastic settings.

¹¹¹ *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals of the Order of Friars Minor*; trans. Noel Muscat OFM (Malta: TAU Franciscan Communications, 2010), 673-681.

¹¹² Henry Yule, “The Travels of Friar Odoric of Pordenone,” in *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China*, tr. and ed. Henry Yule (London: Hakluyt Society, 1866), 12-13.

be veneration mostly by laity, indicate that his travel narrative transformed in surprising ways. Given that he was on a mission to evangelize, Odoric mentions preaching surprisingly little in his text; meanwhile, the *Chronicle* claims that he “baptized 20 thousand infidels.”¹¹³ This inconsistency sheds doubt on the results of his evangelizing effort and, coupled with manuscript evidence, indicates that medieval Italian readers did not view Odoric’s work as an object of scholarly consideration. The impact of the book in Italy seems to have been among lay people. Whichever local communities traditionally venerated him and advocated for his sainthood, they probably heard of his miracles and travels in the vernacular. When Odoric says that he went to Asia “to reap some crops of souls,”¹¹⁴ it would ironically seem that instead most of his religious work happened back in Europe, and without his knowledge.

The three friars discussed in this chapter all travel to the Mongol Empire to preach, but the preaching of all three comes to unexpected ends. Mediated through interpreters, Mongol culture, or the medieval Italian laity, Latin speech becomes fraught and messy. William of Rubruck realizes his preaching has been inadvertently absorbed into Mongol religious practices, while John of Plano Carpini - perhaps a more astute observer of foreign cultures than William – realizes the cultural and linguistic filters through which his speech will pass, and often relies on other modes of communication. Odoric’s spoken Latin, meanwhile, takes on new life through vernacular translation and oral tradition. Despite the various forms of mediation, however, we can see that, even outside Europe and even when it does not function as a *lingua franca*, spoken Latin is never socially neutral. An examination of Latin preaching abroad lends new nuances to

¹¹³ *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals of the Order of Friars Minor*, 499.

¹¹⁴ “ut fructus aliquos lucrificerem animarum.” Quoted in O’Doherty.

our understanding of how medieval Latin Christians saw themselves vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

Chapter 2: *Ars Dictaminis* and Latin Letters Across the Asian Continent

In the year 1165, a Latin letter appeared in Europe that was addressed to Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Comnenus, purportedly from a powerful Christian king in India, Prester John. It begins: “Prester John, lord of lords, by the power and virtue of God and our lord Jesus Christ, to Emanuel, Roman governor, let us rejoice in salvation and cross over to the end enriched by grace.”¹¹⁵ The letter then continues with a long description of Prester John’s kingdom: its power, its riches, and its marvels. While it is well established by now that both the letter and the man are fabrications, there are many reasons why Western Europeans would have believed in the existence of a real Prester John with all his fabulous accoutrements. Multiple sources for the Prester John legend aside from the letter reinforced each other, not to mention that the idea of a powerful Christian monarch with a large army in the middle of Asia was an appealing one to Latin Christendom. It became one of the most popular texts of the Middle Ages, with at least 469 manuscripts in multiple languages extant today. The *Letter* itself, however, seems to have been regarded even in the medieval period with a good deal of skepticism. The majority of these reasons have to do with the letter’s content.¹¹⁶ Some manuscript versions, however, have a detail that demonstrates one of these reasons was a matter of form: they have added a date and place

¹¹⁵ “Presbiter Iohannes, potentia et virtute Dei et domini nostri Iesu Christi dominus dominantium, Emanueli, Romeon gubernatori saluti gaudere et gratia ditandi ad ulteriora transire.” *Prester John: The Legend and its Sources*, compiled and trans. Keagan Brewer (Surrey, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2015). Translation p. 66, Latin p. 46.

¹¹⁶ For evidence of this skepticism, see Brewer’s introduction to *Prester John: The Legend and its Sources*.

where the letter was written “thus bringing it into line with proper epistolary norms.”¹¹⁷ That is, to be more believable as a letter, it needed to better conform to genre conventions.

The epistolary genre in the Middle Ages was a highly stylized one, taking its rules from *artes dictaminis* (sometimes called *dictamen*), or letter-writing manuals. The *ars dictaminis* first developed in Italy in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, then spreading to France, and then other areas of Continental Europe and England.¹¹⁸ Of these letter-writing manuals, Guido Faba’s *Summa dictaminis* (1228-29) was especially popular¹¹⁹. His *dictamen* is unusual in that it begins with a list of vices to *avoid* in a letter, and then, before moving on to what one *should* write, explains the reason why letters exist at all. They were invented, he claims, for two reasons: because messengers often have poor memories and could somehow mangle the message, and also to send secrets between friends (*secreta amicorum*). He writes: “And therefore not unjustly it (the *epistola*) is called a faithful messenger of secrets, in that it conceals the crime of a friend, covers embarrassment, and brings forth those who are absent to whatever degree remote just as if they were also present in body.”¹²⁰ The verb *tegit*, and its nominal counterpart *tegmen*, imply that letters can disclose, but they can also hide. I would like to be cautious here: Guido Faba’s treatise seems to be the only *dictamen* to explicitly treat letters as a method of communicating secrets, and I do not believe that the authors of the letters I will discuss in this chapter thought of

¹¹⁷ Brewer, 19.

¹¹⁸ Ronald G Witt, “The arts of letter writing,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Volume 2, The Middle Ages*, eds. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹¹⁹ Martin Camargo, *Medieval Rhetorics of Prose Composition: Five English Artes Dictandi and Their Tradition* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995), 16.

¹²⁰ Guidonis Fabe, “Summs dictaminis,” in *Il Propugnatore: Nuova Serie* (Bologna: Presso Romagnoli-dall’Acqua: 1890), 297. “Et ideo non immerito fidelis nuntia dicitur secretorum, que crimen amici celat, verecundiam tegit, et absentes quantumcumque remotos inducit tamquam simul essent presentia corporali.” Translation my own.

themselves as engaging in any nefarious subterfuge. I am, however, suggesting that looking at how authors manipulate the generic conventions of letter writing can reveal important facets of a letter's content, and these generic conventions can serve as a *tegmen* for other messages that are not explicitly stated. In particular, the idea of a *tegmen* can serve as a useful lens through which to analyze letters sent from Latin Christendom to the Mongol Empire, and from the Mongol Empire back to Europe.

This chapter will first discuss the historical background and content of Innocent IV's letters to the newly enthroned Güyük Khan, which he sent with John of Plano Carpini and Lawrence of Portugal. I argue that Innocent probably did not intend for his letters to move the Mongols to convert to Christianity, since the rhetorical structure of the letters does not do anything to establish real diplomatic relations. He hopes that the letters themselves, written in Latin and sealed with papal authority, will command respect, but beyond that anticipates that they will do barely any social work among the Mongols at all. Current scholarship on the letters works under the assumption that Innocent wrote them with the earnest intention of establishing diplomatic relations with the Khan, but the letters themselves do not bear this out. Instead, given the way in which Innocent employs epistolary conventions, their presumptive audience seems to be not just the Khan and his court, but European Christendom as well. Innocent is posturing, making a display of spiritual power and military resolve that would frighten the Mongols, but more importantly bolster his own credibility as the leader of Roman Christendom. He expects the social work of his Latin to happen primarily in Europe, and the Mongols' reaction is secondary.

The second half will discuss the letters of John of Montecorvino, Peregrine of Castello, and Andrew of Perugia, sent back to Europe from the Mongol Empire half a century later from

the bishopric of Khanbaliq in modern-day China. I argue that they also have implicit messages, ones that the friars sending them might prefer those in the Khan's employ not to understand. They subtly create a spiritual and intellectual hierarchy across cultures with European Christians on top and Mongols below them, and reaffirm their allegiance to Latin Christendom.

There are a few reasons for focusing on these cross-continental letters in particular. The letter of Prester John has been the subject of an extensive amount of scholarship, including in-depth rhetorical analyses. Moreover, the author, whoever that may be, is posing as an imaginary figure – an interesting variation on the idea of *tegmen* within a letter, but one that exceeds the scope of this chapter. As for letters sent by other, real, missionary friars from Asia back to Europe, those have been lost. Ascelin of Lombardy's account, for example, is only preserved in the writings of his companion Simon of St. Quentin, which is itself preserved in Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Historiale*. The results of Andrew of Longjumeau's mission are preserved in Jean de Joinville's account of the crusades, and in William of Rubruck's text. Riccoldo of Montecroce's letters, addressed to divine figures, are better suited to discussion in the next chapter.

Letters to the East: *Cum non solum* and *Dei patris immensa*

The incursion of the Mongols into Eastern Europe was one of the agenda items for the First Council of Lyons, the ecumenical council called by Pope Innocent IV in 1245. This was not the first European attempt to rally against the Khan's army: the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1194 – 1250) in 1241 wrote a letter to several European monarchs describing the Mongols' invasion of Hungary and Bohemia, ending with the request that “every noble and renowned

country lying under the royal star of the West, shall send forth their chosen ornaments preceded by the symbol of the life-giving cross, at which, not only rebellious subjects, but even opposing demons, are struck with dismay and awe.”¹²¹ The rhetoric in this passage positions Frederick as the commander conducting the armies of Europe; through this and other correspondence, Peter Jackson has shown that Frederick desired “to be seen as the champion of Latin Christendom.”¹²² Pope Gregory IX, with whom Frederick had a longstanding feud, recognized this and used the Mongols as a tool in thwarting this claim. When Gregory received a request for help against the Mongols from King Béla IV of Hungary, he said that he would do his best to provide aid -- but if Frederick had shown obedience to the Church, Béla could have had the support of the entire Christian community behind him.¹²³

Unfortunately for Frederick, this claim to supreme leadership and other politics led him to also feud with Pope Innocent IV, and by the time the ecumenical council convened in 1245, another item on the agenda was the deposition of Frederick. In the bull of deposition, Innocent accuses him of a number of crimes, among them breaking oaths, breaking the peace, sacrilege, and heresy. Innocent ends by “forbidding by our apostolic authority anyone in the future to obey or heed him as emperor or king, and decreeing that anyone who henceforth offers advice, help, or

¹²¹ Matthew Paris. *Matthew Paris's English History: Vol. I: From the Year 1235-1272*, trans. Rev. J.A. Giles (London: Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden, 1852), 347. “quaecunque jacet nobilis et famosa sub occiduo cardine regio, suam electam militiam, praevis vivificae crucis vexillo, quod non tantum homines rebelles, immo daemones adversantes reformidant, alacriter destinabunt.” Matthaei Parisiensis, *Chronica Majora*, Vol. 5, ed. Henry Richards Luard (London: Longman & Co, 1880) <https://archive.org/details/matthipariensis01luargoog/page/n8>, 118-119.

¹²² Peter Jackson, “The Crusade Against the Mongols (1241),” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 42, no. 1 (January 1991): 18.

¹²³ Huub Kurstjens, “The Invasion of the Christian West by the Tatars (Mongols). A Clash of Civilizations Between Frederick II, Gregory IX, and the Tatars,” *Golden Horde Review*. 5, no. 2 (2017): 258-275.

favour to him as to an emperor or king automatically incurs excommunication.”¹²⁴ This sentence in particular helps position Innocent as one of two possible – and mutually exclusive – loci of European power. It is not possible to support both Frederick and the Pope.

Unsurprisingly, Pope Innocent IV’s other council constitutions rhetorically place *him* at the center of defending the West. It was only a few months earlier that he had dispatched his four embassies to the Mongols, including the one led by John of Plano Carpini, and it would be two more years before any of his missionaries returned to make their reports. Accordingly, both the letters and the council constitutions represent Innocent’s thoughts on the Mongols before he had any direct knowledge of them, and – more importantly for this argument – how he wanted to project his own image vis-à-vis the Khan in front of Christendom.

One might expect a diplomatic tone in the letter Innocent wrote to the Khan, but, surprisingly, this is not the case. When he wrote his letters to the leader of the Mongol Empire, Innocent IV did not actually know whom to address, since the previous Great Khan, Ögedei, had died in 1241 and his widow ruled as regent for five years until Güyük’s coronation. Innocent, therefore, could only address the Great Khan in general terms, which is perhaps the reason why he dispenses with any names in his salutation. Nonetheless, whatever the reason may have been, this is only one of the ways in which they are startlingly tone-deaf, lacking awareness of cultural difference or even rhetorical occasion. Indeed, in his 1955 introduction to an English translation of the letters, Christopher Dawson writes, “[I]t is difficult to say whether his words are an

¹²⁴ First Council of Lyons. 1245. In *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils. Volume I*, ed. and trans. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990): 297-298. “auctoritate apostolica firmiter inhibendo, ne quisquam de cetero sibi tamquam imperatori vel regi pareat vel intendat, et decernendo quoslibet, qui deinceps ei velut imperatori aut regi consilium vel auxilium praestiterint seu favorem, ipso facto excommunicationis vinculo subiacere.” *Concilia oecumenica et generalia Ecclesiae catholicae – Concilium Lugdunense I a. 1245 bulla depositionis*, pag.: 283, linea: 16 Library of Latin Texts, Series A, Brepolis.net

expression of naïve simplicity or statesmanlike imagination.”¹²⁵ The first of these rhetorically inapropos moments occurs in the opening sentence of *Dei patris immensa*. The sentence is long and dense:

“To the king and people of the Tartars to recognize the way of truth: God the Father, of His graciousness regarding with unutterable loving-kindness the unhappy lot of the human race, brought low by the guilt of the first man, and desiring of His exceeding great charity mercifully to restore him whom the devil’s envy overthrew by a crafty suggestion, sent from the lofty throne of heaven down to the lowly region of the world His only-begotten Son, consubstantial with Himself, who was conceived by the operation of the Holy Ghost in the womb of a fore-chosen virgin and there clothed in the garb of human flesh, and afterwards proceeding thence by the closed door of His mother’s virginity, He showed Himself in a form visible to all men.”¹²⁶

This opening is unusual in its use of generic conventions. *Ars dictaminis* manuals called for a *salutatio* (greeting); *capitatio benevolentiae* (introduction); *narratio* (narration); *petitio* (request); and *conclusio* (conclusion). Innocent would have been well acquainted with these formulae; he had been educated in Bologna, where many *artes dictaminis* manuals were produced in the twelfth century. Besides Guido Faba’s *Summa dictaminis*, another commonly circulated manual was the anonymous *Rationes dictandi*, composed in Bologna c. 1135. Like Guido’s text, the *Rationes dictandi* influenced later medieval writers, and are characteristic of other *ars dictaminis*

¹²⁵ Dawson, xv.

¹²⁶ Dawson, 73. “regi et populo Tartarorum viam agnoscere veritatis. Dei patris immensa benignitas humani generis casum, quod primi hominis culpa corruebat, ineffabili respiciens pietate, ac illum, quem diabolica prostravit invidia suggestione dolosa, volens ex caritate nimia misericorditer reparare, filium suum unigenitum, consubstantialem sibi, de celi excelso solio misit ad infimum mundi solum, qui preelecte virginis utero sancti Spiritus operatione conceptus et ibi veste carnis indutus humane indeque postmodum clausa matris porte virginitatis egressus, cunctis visibilem se ostendit.” Innocent IV, “Dei patris immensa,” in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Brepols Publishers, Turnhout, 2016) <http://www.brepols.net>.

manuals of the time.¹²⁷ Particularly, these manuals provide extensive descriptions of how a writer should greet his letter's recipient. The *Rationes dictandi* states: "The Salutation is an expression of greeting conveying a friendly sentiment not inconsistent with the social rank of the persons involved...we must consider carefully how somewhere in the Salutation we want some additions to be made to the names of the recipients; above all, these additions should be selected so that they point to some aspect of the recipient's renown and good character."¹²⁸ Innocent's salutation, or lack thereof, accords instead with Guido Faba's instructions for when to *dispense* with one. Among those who should not be greeted, he advises, include the excommunicated, Saracens, Jews, Cathars, or other types of heretics. Innocent's salutation includes nothing that would point to any aspect of Güyük's "renown and good character;" indeed, in saying that the purpose of the letter is to cause him and his people to recognize the way of truth, is again consistent with Faba's instructions on how to address those who do not deserve a greeting¹²⁹. Although he does not say anything specifically about who should not be greeted, the anonymous *Rationes dictandi* author, in describing how a letter may be shortened, states that when the salutation is sometimes

¹²⁷ Other especially influential *ars dictaminis* texts include Bene da Firenze's *Candelabrum* (c.1225) and Boncampagno da Signa's *Boncampagnus* and *Rhetorica novissima* (c. 1215). These manuals also break down letters into their same component parts with instructions for securing the goodwill of the recipient. See also the chapter "Ars dictaminis: The Art of Letter-Writing" in James J. Murphy's study *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from St. Augustine to the Renaissance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974. Also see: Cornelius, Ian. "The Rhetoric of Advancement: *Ars dictaminis*, *Cursus*, and Clerical Careerism in Late Medieval England." *New Medieval Literatures* 12, no. 9 (2010), 289.

¹²⁸ Anonymous of Bologna, *Rationes dictandi* [*The Principles of Letter-Writing*], trans. James J. Murphy, in *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971): 3-25. "Salutatio est oratio salutis affectum indicans a personarum situ non discordans...Item diligenter considerandum est, cum in salutatione qualibet recipientium nominibus adiectiones aliquas fieri uolumus, tales profecto debere constitui que circa ipsos recipientes aliquid laudis uel honestatis ostendat." Rockinger, Ludwig, ed. *Breviarum de dictamine*, in *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Quellen und Erörterungen zur bayerischen und deutschen Geschichte 9 (Munich 1863): 10-11. (Reprinted in two volumes with continuous pagination, New York, 1961.) Rockinger attributes the treatise to Alberic of Monte Cassino; Murphy points out that this is incorrect.

¹²⁹ Guido Faba, 327.

removed, it declares “the scorn or anger or passion of an indignant mind,” and uses “the regular place of the Salutation to list the names involved – for example, ‘Petrus to Johannes.’”¹³⁰ In this way, the absence of praise conveys the presence of disdain. Moreover, Innocent’s other letters *do* show awareness of the conventions for salutations that seem intent on securing goodwill.¹³¹

The salutation ought to be followed by a more explicit securing of goodwill (the more literal translation for *capitatio benevolentiae*, although “introduction” is often the translation provided in English editions of *ars dictaminis*). The *Rationes dictandi* author explains that this “is a certain fit ordering of words effectively influencing the mind of the recipient,” and contains prescriptions for how to achieve this whether the letter’s recipient is friendly or unfriendly to the writer. The explanation of how to secure goodwill from an enemy is worth citing in full:

If however the situation arises for a combative letter to be written, that is, for enemies or opponents, the goodwill could in fact be sought in it according to the persons of the adversaries, namely in that fashion which Cicero introduces in his *Books of Rhetoric*, this method should be used, by all means, if we would lead our opponents into hatred, jealousy, or contention. If the matter at hand is honorable, or if the auditor is known to be friendly, we should seek goodwill immediately and clearly; if it is not honorable, we should use indirection and dissimulation. As a matter of fact, opponents are led into hatred if their disgraceful deeds are cited with cruel pride; into jealousy if their bearing is said to be insolent and insupportable; and into contention if their cowardice or debauchery is exposed. Besides, very often the largest part of the securing of goodwill is in the course of the salutation itself. For that reason we should devise our letters in such a way that whenever the humility of the sender or the merits of the recipient are advanced at large in the salutation, we should either begin the

¹³⁰ *Rationes dictandi*.

¹³¹ For example, a letter to King Henry III of England written by Innocent in 1246 begins, “To the illustrious king of England...” (“*Illustri regi Anglie...*”) In: Mooney, Canice. “Letters of Pope Innocent IV Relating to Ireland.” *Collectanea Hibernica*, Franciscan Province of Ireland. No. 2, 1959: 7-12.

rest of the letter immediately with the narration or with the petition, or we should point out our own goodwill rather briefly and modestly.¹³²

In the first letter, the one carried by Lawrence of Portugal – although Lawrence himself never made it to Karakorum and John of Plano Carpini eventually gave the letter to Güyük – there is no explicit sign that Innocent solicits the Khan’s goodwill. The theological material could suggest that the letter is homiletic in nature, but neither does it follow the structure laid out for sermons in twelfth-century *artes praedicandi* manuals.¹³³ In fact, in the second letter, *Cum non solum*, Innocent seems aggressive: he addresses the Mongols similarly to how he speaks *about* them in the constitutions of the ecumenical council. While Innocent could have dispensed with the pejorative language he uses in the council constitutions, he retains much of it in the letter:

Seeing that not only men but even irrational animals, nay, the very elements which go to make up the world machine, are united by a certain innate law after the manner of the celestial spirits, all of which God the Creator has divided into choirs in the enduring stability of peaceful order, it is not without cause that we are driven to express in strong terms our amazement that you, as we have heard, have invaded many countries belonging both to Christians and to others and are laying them waste in a horrible desolation, and with a fury still unabated you do not cease from stretching out your destroying hand to more distant lands, but, breaking the bond of natural ties, sparing neither sex nor age,

¹³² *Rationes dictandi*, 17. “Si tamen casus obtulerit ut fiat epistola proemialis, id est pro emulis uel aduersariis, poterit quidem in ea captari beniuolentia ab aduersariorum persona, eo uidelicet ordine quo Tullius in rethoricis insinuat, quod utique fiet si eos in odium in inuidiam in contentionem adducamus. Si est honestum negotium de quo agitur, uel auditor beniuolus cognoscitur, protinus et perspicue beniuolentiam captare debemus. si inhonestum, circuitione utimur et dissimulatione. In odium uero adducuntur, si eorum facta turpia superba crudelia proferentur. in inuidiam, si eorum usus arrogans et intolerabilis dicetur. in contentionem, si eorum ignauia et luxuria proferetur. Est item sepe numero maxima pars captandi beniuolentiam in ipsa salutationis serie. ideoque taliter moderari debemus epistolas, ut quotiens in salutatione uel mittentis humilitas uel recipientis laudes largius apponuntur, uel statim a narratione uel a petitione reliquum epistole incipiamus, uel satis exiliter et modeste beniuolentiam denotemus.” Anonymous of Bologna, *Breviarum de dictamine*, in *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jarhunderts*, ed. Ludwig Rockinger. Quellen und Erörterungen zur bayerischen und deutschen Geschichte 9: Munich, 1863: 19.

¹³³ For an overview of the usual structure of a scholastic sermon in the twelfth century, see: Wenzel, Siegfried. *Medieval “Artes Praedicandi”: A Synthesis of Scholastic Sermon Structure*. The Medieval Academy of America, University of Toronto Press. Toronto: 2015.

you rage against all indiscriminately with the sword of chastisement.¹³⁴

The salutation here (“regi et populo..”) is the same as in the previous letter, indicating that he is writing to people that should not be greeted. Moreover, the letter’s first phrase contains an insulting comparison to *animalia irrationalia*, and Innocent might have done well to remember the admonition, “opponents are led...into jealousy if their bearing is said to be insolent and insupportable.” The accusations continue with use of terms such as *horribili*, *desolatione*, and *depopulatrice*; in a similar vein as before, the Mongols’ “disgraceful deeds are cited with cruel pride,” precisely what a solicitous letter-writer ought not to do.

In the *narratio* and *petitio* portions of *Cum non solum*, Innocent beseeches that the Khan cease the persecution of Christians especially, and that he give the friar-envoys safe passage through his lands. His requests, however, are ill-suited to the commander-in-chief of a people with a proud and warlike reputation. Innocent may not have specifically known that Güyük believed the Mongol military successes were an indication he possessed the Mandate of Heaven to rule and expand his empire. Innocent did know, however, that the Mongols were sending their armies as far westward as possible and demanding submission from the peoples they conquered. Given this, his rationale for demanding that the Khan stop persecution of Christians seems misguided:

We, therefore, following the example of the King of Peace, and desiring that all men should live united in concord in the fear of God, do admonish, beg and earnestly beseech all of you that for the future you desist entirely from assaults of

¹³⁴ Dawson, 75. “Cum non solum homines verum etiam animalia irrationalia nec non ipsa mundialis elementa machine quadam nativi federis sint unione coniuncta, exemplo supernorum spirituum, quorum agmina universorum conditor Deus perpetua pacifici ordinis stabilitate distinxit, mirari non inmerito cogimur vehementer, quod vos, sicut audivimus, multas tam Christianorum quam aliorum regiones ingressi, horribili eas desolatione vastatis, et adhuc continuato furore depopulatrice manus ad ulteriores extendere non cessantes, soluto cognationis vinculo naturalis, nec sexui nec etati parcendo, in omnes indifferenter animadversionis gladio deservitis.” Innocent IV, “Cum non solum,” in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Brepols Publishers, Turnhout, 2016). <http://www.brepols.net>

this kind and especially from the persecution of Christians, and that after so many and such grievous offences you conciliate by a fitting penance the wrath of Divine Majesty, which without doubt you have seriously aroused by such provocation; nor should you be emboldened to commit further savagery by the fact that when the sword of your might has raged against other men Almighty God has up to the present allowed various nations to fall before your face; for sometimes He refrains from chastising the proud in this world for the moment, for this reason, that if they neglect to humble themselves of their own accord He may not only no longer put off punishment of their wickedness in this life but may also take greater vengeance in the world to come.¹³⁵

There is nothing in this excerpt that would convince Güyük to do as the Pope asks. Innocent invokes the fear of God and the threat of divine punishment for the Mongols' actions, but this threat would have carried little weight. The traditional Mongol religion is both mono- and polytheistic; it holds that there is an omnipotent and eternal sky-god, Tengri, but he exists in conjunction with other demigods and spirits.¹³⁶ As such, the anger of one god that governed a far-away people would have seemed insubstantial. Moreover, the notion that he had angered Heaven at all went fundamentally against Güyük's concept of the world order. The Chinese advisers of Ögödei and Chingis, Güyük's father and grandfather, had furnished them with the notion that each ruling dynasty possessed the Mandate of Heaven, as evidenced by the fact that they had overthrown the previous dynasty. The deference shown to the khans by representatives of Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, and Nestorian Christianity "must have also enhanced their feeling

¹³⁵ Dawson, 76. "Nos igitur, pacifici regis exemplo cunctos in unitate pacis sub Dei timore vivere cupientes, universitatem vestram monemus, rogamus et hortamur attente, quatinus ab impugnationibus huiusmodi et maxime Christianorum persecutionibus de cetero penitus desistentes, super tot et tantis offensis divine maiestatis iram, quam ipsarum exacerbatione vos non est dubium graviter provocasse, per condigne satisfactionem penitentiae complacitis; nec ex eo sumere debetis audaciam amplius serviendi, quod in alios potentie vestre furente mucrone omnipotens dominus diversas ante faciem vestram substerni permisit hactenus nationes, qui nonnunquam superbos in hoc seculo corripere ad tempus ideo pretermittit, ut si humiliari neglexerint per se ipsos, eorum nequitiam et punire temporaliter non postponat et nichilominus in futuro gravius ulciscatur." "Cum non solum."

¹³⁶ See the episode in William of Rubruck's narrative in which one of khan's concubines, Lady Kota, falls ill and the Khan enlists priests from multiple religions to cure her. They priests enter her tent in succession, each saying their own prayers and performing their own rituals. The Khan is trying to cover all his bases, a move that clearly annoys William.

of superiority and strengthened their belief in their divine mission. Gradually they came to conceive of the world as the Mongol empire-in-the-making, whose leaders by Heavenly appointment were Chingis[sic] Khan's successors."¹³⁷ Rachewiltz notes that this theme is present in the reply letter that Güyük sends to Innocent in the phrase: "The eternal God has slain and annihilated these lands and peoples, because they have neither adhered to Chingis[sic] Khan, not to the Khagan, both of whom have been sent to make known God's command, nor to the command of God."¹³⁸ Therefore, the insult in this portion of the letter was even more severe than Innocent's intended one: it challenged not just Güyük's own rule, but his family's place in the universe.

In the same vein, *Dei patris immensa* makes similarly misguided appeals to the Khan's and the Mongols' humility. After the odd, dense opening, Innocent explains that Christ "therefore offered Himself as a victim for the redemption of mankind" and that he had given to the office of Pope "the care of souls, that he should with watchfulness pay heed to and with heed watch over their salvation, for which He had humbled His high dignity."¹³⁹ Why Innocent would stress Christ's lowliness to a people intent on expanding their conquered territories is unclear. Furthermore, there is historical precedent for encouraging conversion through promises of military advantage: the phrase *in hoc signo vinces*,¹⁴⁰ under which the Emperor Constantine allegedly fought and subsequently became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire, is the most

¹³⁷ Rachewiltz, 104.

¹³⁸ Dawson, 85.

¹³⁹ Dawson, 74. "Pro humani ergo redemptione generis se hostiam exhibens" and "animarum curam, ut earum salutati, pro qua suam humiliaverat altitudinem, vigilanter intenderet et invigilaret attente" "Dei patris immensa."

¹⁴⁰ "Under this sign, you will conquer."

famous example.

After this portion of Innocent's *petitio* comes his second request, namely that the Khan treat John of Plano Carpini and his party kindly and honorably. From there, however, the letter ends abruptly. A formal *conclusio* is not present, at least not one that adheres to the precepts set forward by *artes dictaminis*. The last few lines read: "...when you have had profitable discussions with them concerning the aforesaid affairs, especially those pertaining to peace, make fully known to us through these same Friars what moved you to destroy other nations and what your intentions are for the future, furnishing them with a safe-conduct and other necessities on both their outward and return journey, so that they can safely make their way back to our presence when they wish."¹⁴¹ That Innocent ends with a command – and nothing else – contradicts the suggestion for a conclusion made by the manual. The author suggests that the conclusion "is customary to be used because it is offered to point out the usefulness or disadvantage possessed by the subjects treated in the letter."¹⁴² There is, however, nothing in the conclusion – nor in the remainder of the letter – that speaks to how Güyük would benefit from conceding to the Pope's demands. In fact, once it became clear that John and his party would not be able to furnish Güyük with gifts, as was customary for envoys to the Mongols, Güyük – according to John – almost starved the friars during their stay.¹⁴³ He eventually gave them permission to depart safely, but did not provide them with any gifts; instead, it was his mother

¹⁴¹ Dawson, 76. "...cum ipsis super predictis et specialiter de hiis que ad pacem pertinent tractatum fructuosum habentes, nobis quid vos ad gentium exterminium moverit aliarum et quid ulterius intendatis, per eosdem fratres plenarie intimetis, providendo ipsis in eundo et redeundo de securo conducto et aliis necessariis, ut ad presentiam nostram tute valeant remeare." "Cum non solum".

¹⁴² *Rationes dictandi*, 19. "Qua solemus semper uti, cum ponitur ostendere quid utilitatis uel incommodi negotia superius tractata denuntient." Rockinger, 21.

¹⁴³ Dawson, 66.

that gave them each a fox-skin cloak and some pieces of velvet.¹⁴⁴

Besides these small presents, the only thing John took to Innocent from the Mongols was Güyük's aggressive reply letter. In his account, John gives no indication that this surprises or upsets him. For the reasons explained above, he also probably knew that Innocent's letters would be minimally efficacious in persuading the Khan to convert. Güyük reply letter indicates that he felt insulted by Innocent, but it is doubtful that he understood how Innocent was specifically using rhetorical conventions to position himself as the leader of Christendom.

One person who surely would have understood Innocent's rhetorical tactics, however, would have been Peter de Vineia (c.1190-1249), a member of the chancery at the court of Frederick II and his closest adviser. A prolific letter writer, he was well versed in the *ars dictaminis* tradition, and his letters were collected and studied as a model for chancery style in the later Middle Ages.¹⁴⁵ At the Council of Lyons, he sent the jurist Thaddeus da Suessa as his ambassador to defend Frederick from excommunication, but Thaddeus was unsuccessful.

As mentioned above, it was at the same Council of Lyons that Innocent also condemned the "Tartars," and called upon the rest of Europe to defend against them. An excerpt from the portion of council proceedings that deals with this reads as follows:

Indeed the wicked race of the Tartars, seeking to subdue, or rather utterly destroy the christian[sic] people, having gathered for a long time past the strength of their tribes, have entered Poland, Russia, Hungary and other christian[sic] countries. So savage has been their devastation that their sword spared neither sex nor age, but raged with fearful brutality upon all alike. It caused unparalleled havoc and destruction in these countries in its unbroken advance; for their sword, not knowing how to rest in the sheath, made other kingdoms subject to it by a

¹⁴⁴ Dawson, 69.

¹⁴⁵ Terence O. Tunberg, "Prose Styles and *Cursus*," in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, eds. F.A.C. Mantello and A.G. Rigg (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 113.

ceaseless persecution.¹⁴⁶

Innocent ends this section of the council proceedings by saying that he will send similar letters to all other Christian countries into which the Mongols might advance. The other letter to which this sounds similar, however, is *Cum non solum*. Much of the phrasing is similar; compare *Cum non solum*'s "Christianorum quam aliorum regiones ingressi" to the council's "christianorum regiones ingressa"; and, respectively "nec sexui nec etati parcendo, in omnes indifferenter" to "nec aetati parcenti nec sexui, sed in omnes indifferenter." In places where the syntax is substantially different, much of the wording is still the same: compare *Cum non solum*'s *horribili, depopultrices, and vastatis* to the council's *horribili, depopulatrix, and devastarit*. To be clear, Innocent's own hand was almost certainly not the scribe for either of these documents, and the grammar and wording of both are likely filtered through his chancery. Nonetheless, the similarity between the two strongly suggests that Innocent had in mind the letter he had written in the spring of 1245 when he condemned the Mongols in front of Europe later that summer.

We know of two copies of the letters John of Plano Carpini carried with him: one that John took on his journey, and the other in Innocent IV's papal register.¹⁴⁷ It is impossible to say with any certainty whether Thaddeus da Suessa, Peter de Vineia, or Frederick II would or could have read *Cum non solum*. John's journey began in Lyons, with stops in Bohemia, Krakow and Kiev; even if Frederick or his two ambassadors did not read the letters, Wenceslaus I of

¹⁴⁶ First Council of Lyons. "Sane Tartarorum gens impia christianum populum subiugare sibi vel potius perimere appetens, collectis iam dudum suarum viribus nationum, Poloniam, Rusciam, Ungariam aliasque christianorum regiones ingressa, sic in eas depopulatrix insaeuit, ut gladio eius nec aetati parcente nec sexui, sed in omnes indifferenter crudelitate horribili debacchante, inaudito ipsas exterminio devastarit, ac aliorum regna continuato progressu illa sibi, eodem in vagina otiari gladio nesciente, incessabili persecutione substernit."

¹⁴⁷ Gregory Guzman, "Simon of Saint-Quentin and the Dominican Mission to the Mongol Baiju: A Reappraisal," in *The Spiritual Expansion of Medieval Latin Christendom: The Asian Missions*, ed. James D. Ryan (Farnham, UK; Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 85-102.

Bohemia, Duke Boleslaw II Rogatka of Silesia, and Duke Konrad I of Masovia (present-day Poland) almost certainly did. All three governed territories that were in imminent danger of being, or had been, invaded by the Mongols. John, along with his companion Benedict the Pole, stayed weeks (and in the case of Krakow, several months) in each of these places, consulting with them as well as other Eastern Europeans nobles.¹⁴⁸

What Frederick, Peter, and Thaddeus certainly read were the sentence of deposition that condemned Frederick. Thaddeus was present when the sentence was read loud at the council's last session. After the council ended, the sentence of deposition spread quickly.¹⁴⁹ While they certainly would have been most concerned with Frederick's deposition, a Mongol invasion was a substantial threat that they would not have ignored. Even without seeing *Cum non solum*'s salutation, and especially in the larger context of the feud between emperor and pope, Peter and Thaddeus would have understood how Innocent was positioning himself vis-à-vis the Mongols. While the Mongols were a real threat, Innocent's letter to the Khan was as much a letter to Frederick II and the other leaders of Latin Christendom.

Letters From the East: The Episcopate of Khanbaliq

After Innocent IV's reluctance to send further papal legates to the Khans, and William of Rubruck's recommendation that Europe would have better success at converting the Mongols with a crusade instead of missionary work, contact between the two lessened for approximately thirty years. During this time, however, the Holy Roman Empire's House of Hohenstaufen, the

¹⁴⁸ Rachewiltz, 90-92.

¹⁴⁹ Brett Edward Whalen, *The Two Powers: The Papacy, The Empire, and the Struggle for Sovereignty in the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 172-174.

dynasty that included Frederick II, came to an end when the Angevins executed Frederick's son, Conrad, in Naples in 1268. This effectively ended the standoff between the Vatican and the Holy Roman Empire, permitting both greater freedom for attending to matters outside Europe.

Military matters outside Europe were indeed concerning: Muslim caliphates in northern Africa and western Asia were growing in power, especially the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt. Meanwhile, after a clash with the Mamluks in Cairo and Möngke Khan's death, the Mongol Empire fell into decline. The empire fractured into the Ilkhanate (present day Iran and eastern Turkey), Golden Horde (parts of Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Caucasus Mountains), Chagatai Khanate (Central Asia), and Yuan Dynasty (most of China and Mongolia). After civil war, the four khanates found only an uneasy peace with one another. In 1274, threatened on all sides by the Mamluks, Chagatai Khanate, and the Golden Horde, Abaqa Khan, the second ruler of the Ilkhanate, sent envoys to Gregory X to propose a military alliance. At the Second Council of Lyons, three of the envoys underwent baptism at the council as a gesture of friendship.¹⁵⁰

On the part of the Church, interest in Mongol conversion had never entirely disappeared, only waned. In the 1270s, the Polo family returned from their merchant voyages with reports that Möngke's younger brother, Kublai, felt favorably toward Christians. This and the situation with Abaqa, combined with Pope Nicholas IV's interest in evangelism, resulted in the resumption of missions to China.

John of Montecorvino had already spent time as a missionary in Armenia and Persia, and came to Nicholas IV as a legate of King Hethum II of Armenia.¹⁵¹ Before arriving in China, he

¹⁵⁰ Unfortunately, an account of this event, by the Dominican David of Ashby, was destroyed by a fire in Turin in 1904.

¹⁵¹ Rachewiltz, 160.

and his companions spent time in Persia and India (thirteen months in India, claims John in one of his letters). By the time he arrived at Khanbaliq, however, Kublai Khan had died, and John delivered his letters from Nicholas to Kublai's grandson, Temür Öljeitü. Nonetheless, given the congenial relations between the Yuan Dynasty and Europe, John "enjoyed considerable status"¹⁵² at court. He wasted no time in getting to work evangelizing. His letters and those of his fellow friars in China, Andrew of Perugia (d. 1332) and Peregrine of Castello (d. 1322), are the inverse of Innocent's, sent from the East to the West, and with a substantially better grasp of Mongol culture and interests. This is not to say that the Franciscans were successful where Innocent was not – the bishopric only lasted until the fall of the Mongol Empire in 1368 – but they were allowed to preach and establish churches until the advent of the Ming Dynasty.

Writing back to their superiors in Europe, all three friars formulated their letters in accordance with the basic structure of *salutatio*, *capitatio*, etc. put forth by *artes dictaminis*. More importantly here, however, is the *style* they used. Originated by Peter de Vineia himself, the *stilus obscurus*, adapted from the plainer *stilus rhetoricus*, was marked by the use of rhetorical embellishments and allusiveness. Word play, allegory, assonance, and alliteration were common.¹⁵³ As its name implies, "this style had a complexity in its expression of ideas that often demanded a hermeneutical analysis of the contents in order to determine the intent of the author."¹⁵⁴ While in Europe this grandiloquence might prove frustrating to a reader, John,

¹⁵² Rachewiltz, 164.

¹⁵³ One example from Andrew of Perugia's letter reads, "...et singulis vivere secundam septam suam." Or Peregrine of Castello's "propter potentiam nestorianorum prohibentium."

¹⁵⁴ Ronald G. Witt, *The Two Latin Cultures and the Foundation of Renaissance Humanism in Medieval Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 416. See also: Witt, Ronald G. *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni*. Boston; Leiden: Brill Academic Publisher, Inc., 2003, 135n.

Andrew, and Peregrine could use this complexity to their advantage. In their letters are implications about the status of the Christian mission in China that it might be better to not explicitly state while writing within the Mongol Empire.

Unlike either Rubruck or Plano Carpini, Montecorvino makes an effort to learn the Mongol language to further his missionary efforts. However, he does not appear to have much regard for whether or not they understand Christian theology, or whether he understands the religion from which he is converting them. Instead, he boasts about the sheer number he has baptized:

I have built a church in the city of Cambaliech [Khanbaliq or Peking] where the chief residence of the king is, and this I completed six years ago and I also made a tower and put three bells in it. Moreover I have baptized about 6,000 persons there up to the present, according to my reckoning. And if it had not been for the aforesaid slanders I might have baptized 30,000 more, for I am constantly baptizing.¹⁵⁵

Christopher Dawson even goes so far as to translate the last phrase as “I am *constantly* baptizing” (emphasis mine). John’s point, therefore, is that he has succeeded in his mission because he convinced a large number of people to undergo the ritual. It is unlikely that the participants underwent the kind of theological education that individuals who chose conversion themselves would have had prior to baptism. He doesn’t report on whether those he baptized subsequently maintained their faith, or even understood what baptism implied in the first place. From Andrew of Perugia, we learn that the behavior of the newly baptized does seem to be a problem, as he reports in a letter of his own: “Of the idolators, exceedingly many are baptized:

¹⁵⁵ Dawson 225. “Unam ecclesiam edificavi in civitate Cambaliech, ubi est precipua residentia Regis, quam ante sex annos complevi, ubi etiam feci campanile et ibi tres campanas posui. Battizavi etiam ibidem, ut existimo, usque hodie, circa sex millia personarum. Et nisi fuissent supradicte infamationes, battizassem ultra xxx milia, et sum frequenter in battizando” *Sinica franciscana*, 347.

but when they are baptized they do not adhere strictly to Christian ways.”¹⁵⁶ Montecorvino’s silence on this matter in his own letter does not necessarily indicate that he was *unconcerned* about this problem; he may have simply been trying to make his mission look as successful as possible. In the composition of his letter, however, it is clear that he wants his audience to think that the establishment of churches - no word on whether they are attended - and the baptismal rituals have done their work. He has created 6,000 new Latin Christians where there were none before: don’t question the rest.

He does, however, take a more sustained interest in a smaller group of his protégés, specifically a group of forty young boys to whom he taught Latin and the liturgy:

Also I have purchased by degrees forty boys of the sons of the pagans, between seven and eleven years old, who as yet knew no religion. Here I baptized them and taught them Latin and our rite, and I wrote for them about thirty psalters and hymnaries and two breviaries by which eleven boys now know the office. And they keep choir and say office as in a convent whether I am there or not. And several of them write psalters and other suitable things. And the Lord Emperor takes much delight in their singing. And I ring the bells for all the Hours and sing the divine office with a choir of “sucklings and infants”. But we sing by rote because we have no books with the notes.¹⁵⁷

This description of his protégés’ abilities emphasizes *form* and *performance* over understanding.

Montecorvino glosses over in this passage the implication of what it means to have taught the boys “Latin and our rite.” What it meant to “know” Latin in the Middle Ages varied widely, and,

¹⁵⁶ Dawson, 237. “de ydolatriis battizantur quam plurimi, sed battizati non recte incedunt per viam christianitatis.” *Sinica franciscana*, 376.

¹⁵⁷ Dawson, 225. “Item emi successive xl pueros, filios paganorum etatis infra vii et xi annorum, qui nullam adhuc cognoscebant legem, et battizavi eos, et informavi eos litteris latinis et ritu nostro, et scripsi pro eis psalteria cum ymnariis xxx et duo breviaria ex quibus xi pueri iam sciunt officium nostrum. Et tenent chorum et ebdomadas sicut in conventu, sive sim presens sive non. Et plures ex eis scribunt psalteria et alia opportuna. et dominus Imperator delectatur multum in cantu eorum. Campanas ad omnes horas pulso et cum conventu *infantium et lactentium* divinum officium facio. Tamen secundum usum cantamus, quia notatum officium non habemus.” *Sinica franciscana*, 347-348.

depending on time, place, and the individual, might not even imply the ability to read and write.¹⁵⁸ Because of this, it seems clear that the boys can at least copy letters and phonate syllables, but, beyond that, their comprehension abilities are questionable.

The effect of John's pedagogical method, however, whether intentional or not, is to establish a hierarchical social stratification, with John at the top and his less literate or illiterate students below him. For the unlearned, too much beauty can distract from the message of a sermon. Even Augustine, in his same discussion of rhetoric, urges preachers to only use it where appropriate, stating "no pleasure is derived from that species of eloquence which indeed says nothing that is false, but which buries small and unimportant truths under a frothy mass of ornamental words, such as would not be graceful or dignified even if used to adorn great and fundamental truths."¹⁵⁹ In her discussion of the political implications of medieval pedagogy, Rita Copeland describes in detail the way degrees of literacy come to discriminate between the stages of "hermeneutical adulthood" and "pedagogical infancy."¹⁶⁰ There existed "those who (supposedly) cannot advance beyond intellectual infancy (women, *rustici*, *vulgari*) and those assumed to be endowed with reason and hermeneutical perspicacity (men, clergy, *litterati*)" have, respectively, "intellectual and political agency," or are dependent and insufficient.¹⁶¹ More specifically, as Alain of Lille (1128-1202/3) claims in his *Anticlaudianus*, those whose minds

¹⁵⁸ Michael Clanchy, "Literate and Illiterate," in *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307*, 2nd edition. (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, US: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 224-252.

¹⁵⁹ Augustine of Hippo. *De doctrina christiana*. Trans. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. NPNF¹ (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995) Book IV, 14.31. "nec illa suavitas delectabilis est qua non quidem iniqua dicuntur, sed exigua et fragilia bona spumoso verborum ambitu ornantur, quali nec magna atque stabilia decenter et graviter ornarentur."

¹⁶⁰ Rita Copeland, "Childhood, Pedagogy, and the Literal Sense," *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997):138.

¹⁶¹ "Childhood, Pedagogy, and the Literal Sense," 138.

cannot progress to philosophical capability are soothed by the “sweetness of the literal sense” and “pursue only-sense images and do not reach out for the truth that comes from reason.”¹⁶²

Echoes of this language describing infancy and soothing sweetness exist in John of Montecorvino’s letters, most explicitly in his phrase, “sucklings and infants.” It also reverberates in the statement that the Emperor takes much delight in the boys’ singing. John does not go as far as Alan of Lille does in his snobbery, worrying that “what is holy, being set before dogs, be soiled, lest the pearl, trampled under the feet of the swine be lost, lest the esoteric be impaired if its grandeur is revealed to the unworthy.”¹⁶³ However, he has established at the beginning of his second letter that the Emperor is “too far gone in idolatry” to be converted, so this delight does not appear to be a preamble to any profound spiritual change, and instead is a reflection on the liturgy’s inherent attractiveness and – perhaps – the Emperor’s predisposition to be enticed by superficial beauty. In fact, while the Emperor’s enjoyment of the boys’ music could be proof of the liturgy’s affective powers, it simultaneously carries with it possible misunderstanding of the liturgy’s content. If the Emperor cannot understand the words of the song, he can only appreciate it for its music, and this misplaced appreciation verges on idolatry. Augustine of Hippo expresses as much in his *Confessions* when he describes listening to the Psalms: “Yet when it happens that I am more moved by the singing than by what is sung, I confess myself to have sinned wickedly, and then I would rather not have heard the singing.”¹⁶⁴ This reading of the Khan’s aesthetic enjoyment squares with John’s earlier statement about the Emperor being too far gone in idolatry

¹⁶² Alain of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, *Patrologia Latina*, 210, cols. 487-8; following trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto, 1973), 40-1; qtd. in Copeland, 134.

¹⁶³ Alain of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, qtd. in Copeland 134-5.

¹⁶⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. Albert C. Outler (1955), X.xxxiii.

to be converted. To underscore this point, he notes that the Emperor remains unmoved to conversion, even in the face of the miraculous. In describing how he and the boys sing in their chapel, he writes, “The Lord Chaan [sic] can hear our voices in his chamber, and this is told as a wonder far and wide among the nations, and will count for much according to the disposition and the fulfilment [sic] of God’s mercy.”¹⁶⁵ In other words, the Khan can hear and take pleasure in the liturgy, but is either unwilling or cannot advance beyond that to conversion to Christianity.

As for the boys themselves, even though they have converted, it seems as though there is a level of spiritual sophistication they have not reached. To clarify: John never says this explicitly, nor does he at any point disparage his protégés. What he does instead is to beg his brothers in Europe for help: were more friars to come assist him, he explains, he could vastly increase his number of converts locally, and then even expand to other areas. Specifically, he uses the words, *fratres* and *predicadores*. Fair enough: why, however, ask for friars, and not for bishops, especially because he seems to want to create a diocese in Khanbaliq?

Asking for bishops would solve a number of John’s problems. In his third letter, he laments that in the two churches he has built in the city, he celebrates mass “in each in alternate weeks as the chaplain, for the boys are not priests.”¹⁶⁶ The boys are probably too young to be priests – the minimum age for ordination in the Middle Ages was first 30, then in the twelfth

¹⁶⁵ Dawson, 229. “Dominus Chaam in camera sua potest audire voces nostras, et hoc mirabile factum longe lateque divulgatum est inter gentes, et pro magno erit sicut disponet et adimplebit divina elementia.” *Sinica franciscana*, 353.

¹⁶⁶ Dawson, 229. The complete Latin sentence reads, “Sed ego sicut cappellanus per ebdomadas celebros in utraque, quia pueri non sunt sacerdotes.” *Sinica franciscana*, 353.

century lowered to 25¹⁶⁷ – but John’s statement seems to anticipate being asked by his fellow friars whether the boys *are* priests. Bishops can ordain priests, and if the boys were to become priests when they were old enough, they themselves could take charge of the local churches, leaving John to focus his efforts on new converts. Furthermore, using the boys in this capacity would help bypass the language barriers that were a perpetual impediment to the friars abroad. Moreover, upon receiving John’s letter, Pope Clement V took it upon himself to send bishops to the Mongol Empire. They eventually ordained John as the archbishop of Khanbaliq, and the mission continued many years after his death. Clearly, asking for bishops would not have been an unreasonable request. Whether conscious or not, John’s rhetoric in the letter suggests a lack of confidence in his protégés and in the people he has converted. (Another possibility as well is that John may have been hinting that he himself wanted to become a bishop of his own diocese in the Mongol Empire. While it would be impossible to ascertain whether this is the case, this desire would square with the rest of the way he presents himself in the letters, as well as the fact that he did eventually become archbishop of Khanbaliq.)

To return specifically to Latin pedagogy as opposed to pedagogy in general: as discussed above, besides sending more friars, John requests that he be sent more books. The progression of the boys’ prowess in Latin appears to be a major part of their continuing education. Perhaps increasing their Latinity will be the key to eventually moving the boys up the clerical hierarchy and eventually ordaining them. Whether this is the case or not, more books will help continue the conversion and duplication process. Having books made in Europe, too, will help John control

¹⁶⁷ Robert N. Swanson, “Apostolic Successors: Priests and Priesthood, Bishops and Episcopacy in Medieval Western Europe,” in *A Companion to Priesthood and Holy Orders in the Middle Ages*, eds. Greg Peters and C. Colt Anderson (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), 15-16.

this process; with books made by Western Christians, the boys will theoretically have better exemplars to work from.

Moreover, it is worth noting that John of Montecorvino writes his letters *in Latin*. As the *lingua franca* of medieval Western Europe, this might seem the obvious choice, but in this transcontinental context Latin has the ability to activate cultural schema that might go unnoticed by non-Christians. In particular, the phrase *infantium et lactentium*, or “sucklings and infants,” recalls the third verse of Psalm 8: “From the mouth of sucklings and infants you have brought about glory on account your enemies, so that you may destroy the enemy and the avenger.”¹⁶⁸ The remainder of the psalm describes God’s position in the universe in relation to man and beasts. God’s name, “so excellent...in all the earth,” is set above that of humanity, which is set above animals: “You have diminished him a little from the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor; and you have placed him above the works of your hands.”¹⁶⁹ In other words, *infantium et lactentium* evokes and reestablishes that God is the supreme ruler of all.

This message, however, contrasts with what John writes in the last paragraph of his 1305 letter: “Now from what I have seen and heard, I believe that there is no king or prince in the world who can equal the Lord Chan in the extent of his land, and the greatness of the population and wealth.”¹⁷⁰ For John’s own sake, this is a wise inclusion. As demonstrated by Güyük Khan’s letter of 1246 to Pope Innocent IV in response to *Cum non solum*, Mongol leaders viewed the

¹⁶⁸ “Ex ore infantium et lactentium perfecisti laudem propter inimicos tuos, ut destruas inimicum et ultorem.” Psalm 8:3 (Vulgate).

¹⁶⁹ “quam admirabile...in universa terra” and “Minuisti eum paulominus ab angelis; gloria et honore coronasti eum; et constitui eum super opera manuum tuarum.” Psalms 8:1 and 5 (Vulgate).

¹⁷⁰ Dawson, 227. “Secundum vero audita et visa, credo quod nullus Rex aut princeps in mundo possidequari domino Chaam in latitudine terre, in multitudine populi, et magnitudine divitiarum.” *Sinica franciscana*, 350-351.

Christian god as subordinate to both the Great Khan and their own primary deity, Tengri. As another case in point, one redaction of Marco Polo's voyages describes their feelings on the intersection of religion and politics thus: "These Tartars do not care what God is worshipped in their lands. If only all are faithful to the lord Kan[sic] and quite obedient and give therefore the appointed tribute, and justice is well kept, thou mayest do what pleaseth thee with the soul."¹⁷¹ For John to express in his letters home anything but reverence for the Khan's power could jeopardize his position at court and possibly his entire mission. The reference, then, to Psalm 8 is a way of surreptitiously reaffirming his faith in and allegiance to Christianity.

This clandestine manner of inviting his audience to read between the lines also assumes a hermeneutical ability on the part of the letter's intended recipients. John's declarations of loyalty to the Roman Church can only be understood if their readers can think beyond the literal. This assumption, that his fellow friars will be able to interpret while Mongols will not, constellates with the other indications that he does not believe even Latinate people in the Mongol Empire have the "hermeneutical perspicacity" to reach spiritual sophistication just yet. It is worth noting here that including references to biblical passages, especially the Psalms, was an established part of the *ars dictaminis* tradition.¹⁷² It is consonant with *stilus obscurus*, though, which is in itself an invitation to read a letter beyond the literal.

In his letter of 1306, however, we can see John doubting the effectiveness of his message from two years earlier. He writes,

¹⁷¹ Marco Polo. *Marco Polo: The description of the world*, vol. I, ed., trans., and intr. A.C. Moule and Paul Pelliot. (London: Routledge, 1938), 21.

¹⁷² Witt, 76-77.

The order of charity demands that those far away and above all those who travel for the law of Christ should at least be consoled by words and letters, when they cannot see one another face to face. I have thought that you may well wonder why you have never received letters from me who have dwelt so long in such a distant land. But I have wondered no less that never until this year have I received letters or good wishes from any Brother or friend, so that it seemed to me that no one remembered me, especially as I heard that rumours of my death had reached you.¹⁷³

His reaction to not having received any letters from Europe or any of the books he has asked for goes beyond one-dimensional frustration. He also worries that his letters have not performed their intended social work of reaffirming his bond with the Church and his brothers back home. Letters and words are not just an exchange of information, but also of *consolatio* and *salutatio*. The corollary to this is that the *rumor* of his death, also fueled by letters and words, has cut off the possibility of that *consolatio*. Like the “slander” of the Nestorians, free-floating, unregulated language interrupts John’s mission.

Despite his doubts, John did, eventually, receive some of the manpower he requested. Peregrine of Castello’s letter of 1318, besides Andrew of Perugia, mentions several other friars in the bishopric of Zayton (now Quanzhou) with them. But Peregrine, too, requests that the mission be sent more friars, citing the death of one Brother Gerard and the advancing age of the others. Like John’s letters, Peregrine’s strikes a careful balance between optimism and anxiety: optimism that more people will be converted based on their previous successes, and anxiety that the mission will fall apart without more help. He writes:

¹⁷³ Dawson, 228. “Ordo exigit caritatis ut longe lateque distantes et maxime qui peregrinantur pro lege Christi, cum revelata facie se invicem videre non possunt, saltem verbis et licteris consolentur. Cogitavi vos non sine causa mirari, quod tot annis in provincia tam longinqua consistens nunquam meas licteras recepistis, sed miratus sum non minus quod nunquam, nisi anno isto, recepi ab aliquo fratre vel amico licteram vel salutationem, nec videtur quod aliquis recordatus fuerit mei, et maxime quia audivi quod rumore ad vos pervenissent quod ego mortuus essem.” *Sinica franciscana*, 351.

And now it is begun, we have good hopes, seeing the crowds eager to hear and running to where we preach. Truly we believe that if only we possessed their languages, God would show forth His wonders. Truly the harvest is great and the labourers few and they have no sickle. For we brethren are few and quite aged and unskilled in the learning of languages. May God forgive those who hinder the brethren from coming.¹⁷⁴

As in John's letters, Peregrine's stance in this passage does not show any interest in creating a native clergy. He does not mention the boys that John taught to read Latin, although he relates John's other missionary activities in Khanbaliq. He even states that, when the current elderly brothers pass away and if no others come, the "church will be left without baptism and without inhabitants."¹⁷⁵

Unlike John, however, Peregrine doubts his and the other elderly friars' ability to learn the local language, leaving them without a tool to "harvest" souls. As in John's use of the phrase *infantium et lactentium* above, the reference to a biblical passage – in this case both Matthew 9:37 and Luke 10:2 – says more to a Christian reader than it would a Mongol reader. Both biblical passages concern Christ himself preaching or sending his disciples to preach; in particular, Luke 10:2, comes with an added sense of danger for the disciples as they are sent out like "lambs among wolves." That the tool he references is a sickle also carries with it implied danger; a sickle can reap, and its blade can also protect. Peregrine ends his letter with a paragraph complimentary to the Khan's empire, marveling at its size, power, wealth, and armies.

¹⁷⁴ Dawson, 233. "Et quia nunc inceptum est, spem bonam habemus videntes populos intentos ad audiendum et currendum ubi nos predicamus. Vere credimus quod si linguas eorum haberemus, mirabilia Dei apparerent. Messis multa valde sed operarii pauci et sine falce. Nam pauci fratres sumus et senes admodum et inabiles ad discendas linguas. Parcat Deus illis qui fratres impediunt ne veniant." *Sinica franciscana*, 367.

¹⁷⁵ Dawson, 234. "Remanebit ecclesia sine baptismo et sine habitatoribus." *Sinica franciscana*, 368.

This shows an understanding of his own position within the empire: still loyal to the Pope, but subject to the Khan and conscious of the need to defer power to him.

Andrew of Perugia's letter from about eight years later, in 1326, is much more dispirited, speaking primarily of his own condition, which is "healthy in body and vigorous and active, so far as my age allows: in fact I have none of the natural defects and characteristics of old age except my white hairs."¹⁷⁶ More than Peregrine or John, Andrew praises the Mongol Emperor, taking the time to describe the *alafa*, or grants, provided to him and Peregrine, which "exceeds the income and expenditure of many Western kings."¹⁷⁷ He continues the praise through apophasis, claiming that he will "forbear to speak of the wealth and magnificence and glory of this great Emperor,"¹⁷⁸ and then doing so at length. He notes that no Jews or Muslims have been converted, and that (as mentioned above) many of those who have been baptized to do not follow Christian law. He speaks of the miraculous martyrdom of the four friars at Tana, India, in 1321, but that no one "was converted from his unbelief by such a stupendous miracle."¹⁷⁹

In fact, the letter's unstated message seems to be that of discouragement. Unlike John or Peregrine, he does not request that more friars be sent to China, and he seems almost resigned to the idea that the mission as a whole will ultimately fail. One of the biblical references here is II Corinthians 11:26, in which Paul describes how he has always been traveling and always been in

¹⁷⁶ Dawson, 236-7. "Et sum sano corpore, et quantum longevitas vite patitur vigorosus et agilis, nichil quidem preter canitiem habens de defectibus naturalibus et proprietatibus senectutis." *Sinica franciscana*, 376.

¹⁷⁷ Dawson, 235. "...plurimum latinorum Regum introitus expensasque transcendent." *Sinica franciscana*, 374.

¹⁷⁸ Dawson, 235. "De divitiis, magnificentia et gloria huius magni Imperatoris...transeo..." *Sinica franciscana*, 374.

¹⁷⁹ Dawson, 237. "Et tamen ad tam stupendum miraculum nullus est a sua perfidia permutatus." *Sinica franciscana*, 376.

danger, and Andrew echoes this in his phrase “danger in land and by sea.”¹⁸⁰ The other reference, which comes at the end of the letter, is to Luke 14:19, the parable in which men invited to a banquet – the metaphor, of course, being God’s grace - excuse themselves from coming.¹⁸¹ The placement of this reference comes just after Andrew’s statement that no one was converted by the friars’ martyrdom at Tana, with the implication that the people who refuse to convert are refusing a seat at God’s banquet. Many of his fellow friars are dead; danger surrounds him; and the pagans around him refuse to convert.

As stated above, 1368 was the end of the Catholic missions in China until the seventeenth century. In the 1340s, a new group of friars led by John of Marignolli spent time in both Khanbaliq and Quanzhou, but after several years they returned to Europe. Andrew died in 1326; his tombstone is one of several medieval Catholic ones in Quanzhou. On the tombstone is visible a faded Latin inscription that reads, “Here is buried Andrew of Perugia devoted bishop of Quanzhou...Order of Friars Minor...Apostle...of Jesus Christ in...month...M (cccxx)xii +1332.”¹⁸² The images are that of a lotus and a cross, both Buddhist and Christian iconography. As Jennifer Purtle notes, all of this taken together maximizes intelligibility to the greatest number of religious groups, and “it attempts to communicate in the local visual *patois* of Andrew’s see.”¹⁸³ This, though, is still a kind of *tegmen*, using local imagery to advance a

¹⁸⁰ Dawson, 235. “...pericula in terra pariter et in mari.” *Sinica franciscana*, 373. Compare II Corinthians 11:26: “periculis in civitate, periculis in solitudine, periculis in mari, periculis in falsis fratribus.”

¹⁸¹ Compare Andrew’s “Unde rogo quod me habeant excusatum” with Luke 14:19 “rogo te, habe me excusatum.”

¹⁸² “Hic...sepultus est Andreas Perusinus (devotus ep. Cayton...ordinis (fratrum min.)...Jesus Christi Apostolus... (in mense)...M (cccxx)xii + 1332.” See: Lieu, Samuel N.C., Lance Eccles, Majella Franzmann, Iain Gardner, and Ken Parry. *Medieval Christian and Manichaeian Remains from Quanzhou (Zayton)*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2012.

¹⁸³ Jennifer Purtle, “The Far Side: Expatriate Medieval Art and Its Language in Sino-Mongol China,” in *Confronting the Borders of Medieval Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

Christian message. Even in death, the Latin Christians in the Mongol Empire still manipulated genre conventions to make their point.

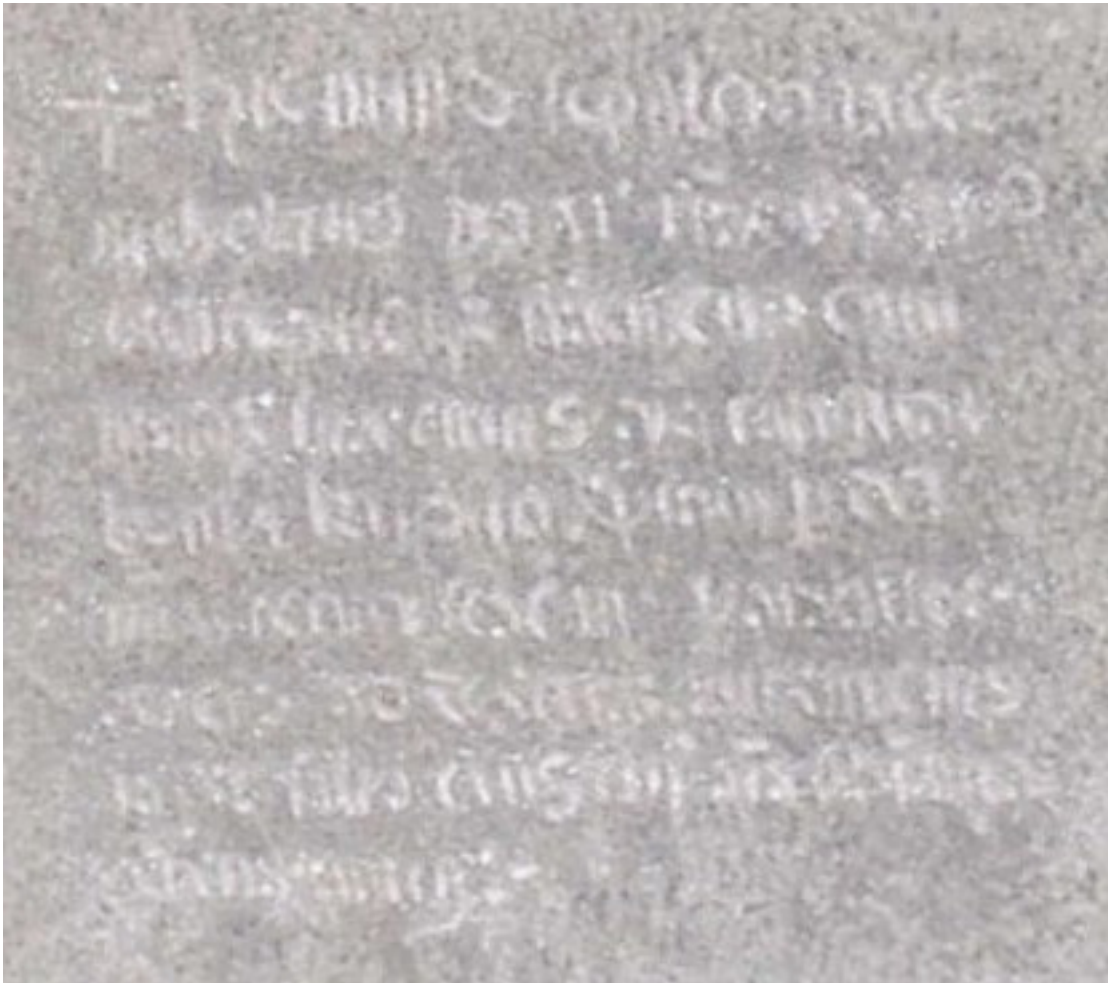


Figure 2.1. Tombstone of Andrew of Perugia, c. 1330. Photograph in Lieu et al., 129.

Chapter 3: Books Abroad: Creation and Destruction

As mentioned briefly above, in 1308 John of Montecorvino received all of his requested books and manpower; eventually, the letters did their intended work. The same cannot be said for Riccoldo of Montecroce, however, who wrote Latin letters from abroad asking for aid and consolation with a much more disappointing response. While in Baghdad – in his day a Mongol stronghold and part of the Ilkhanate - meditating on the 1291 fall of Acre to the Mamluks, Riccoldo “was stupefied” in thinking about why “such slaughter and degradation [had] befallen the Christian people, and such temporal prosperity been granted to the perfidious race of the Saracens.”¹⁸⁴ To resolve this stupefaction, his unusual tactic was to write five letters to, respectively, God, the Virgin Mary, the Church Fathers (including Saints Dominic and Francis), friars killed at Acre, and God again, petitioning for an explanation. Specifically, in the first letter he begs God to “confirm me in my faith and to rescue the Christian people quickly from the hands of the wicked!”¹⁸⁵ Like other Latin Christian writers of Crusader narratives, Riccoldo decries the Mamluk destruction of Christian churches, houses, art, and – most especially – life. He is unusual, however, in the attention he gives to the destruction of Christian books; while

¹⁸⁴ Riccoldo da Montecroce, *Epistolae ad ecclesiam triumphantem*, trans. Rita George-Tvrtković, in *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq: Riccoldo da Montecroce's Encounter with Islam* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2012), 138. “stupens... tanta strages et deiectione populi christiani et tanta prosperitas temporalis in gente perfida Sarracenorum.” *Archives de l'Orient latin*, 2, ed. Reinhold Röhricht (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1884), 264.

¹⁸⁵ George-Tvrtković, 145. “... me in tua sancta fide confirmes et populum christianum cito eripias de manibus impiorum!” *Archives de l'Orient latin*, 271.

other chroniclers discuss stolen and broken relics, he is the only one to discuss the fate of the gospels and other Christian holy texts.

Using Riccoldo as a touchstone, this chapter will discuss the role that books as material objects played in mendicant missions to the East. The first section will focus on the material evidence for the argument: which books did friars take abroad and why? What was the status of Latin book production outside Europe? The second section will turn to an examination of friars' interpretations of the Islamic Qur'an as a material object.¹⁸⁶ Finally, the third section will look at the destruction of books. How did friars think about the destruction of the holy books of other religions, and how did they think about the destruction of their own by non-Christians?

Riccoldo's letters will provide the bulk of material for my discussion of him, because these are the works in which this theme is most evident, but these are not his only extant writings, nor the only ones in which he discusses topics relevant to the one at hand. Two of these works, *Contra legem Sarracenorum* (c.1300) and *Ad nationes orientales* (c.1300), are polemical; the other, *Liber peregrinationis* (1299-1300), somewhat less so since it primarily recounts his own mission.

Focusing on the materiality of books in these cross-cultural contact zones can provide new dimensions and a more complete picture of inter-religious conflict, specifically between Christians and Muslims, during this time period.

¹⁸⁶ The other foreign holy books Riccoldo would have encountered were the Jewish Torah and the gospels of Eastern Christian sects (particularly Nestorians, and Jacobites). While his and other Latin Christians' interpretations of these texts are fascinating in their own right, he does not discuss them in the same terms of materiality as he does the Qur'an, probably because he did not have the same kind of violent encounters with Jews and Eastern Christians as he did with Muslims. Although Baghdad in the late thirteenth-century was part of the Mongol Ilkhanate, he would not have encountered Mongol sacred texts: Mongol shamanism was an orally transmitted tradition, and the first extant piece of Mongol literature, *The Secret History*, dates from the first quarter of the thirteenth-century. See: *The Secret History of the Mongols: The Life and Times of Chinggis Khan*. Trans. and ed. Urgunge Onon. Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 2001.

The Place of Books in the Missions

The status of Latin Christian book production outside Western Europe has been relatively limited, as Anthony Bale demonstrates in the anthology *The Literature of the Crusades*.¹⁸⁷ Nonetheless, a lively culture of book production existed, at least in the Outremer. The scriptoria of Jerusalem, Acre, and Rhodes in the Crusader States of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are three well-known examples that produced numerous works, only some of which are extant today.¹⁸⁸ The Melisende Psalter, commissioned around 1135 in the scriptorium of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, is an example of one of the more lavish books made by the scriptoria. Adrian Boas, citing Hugo Buchthal, claims that most of the books produced there would have been in a different style, but this is book production nonetheless.¹⁸⁹ Anthony Bale has shown that the books produced in the Outremer were many and varied, including not just sacred texts but poetry and chronicles as well. Moreover, that these books were sometimes exported to Europe, and vice versa. William of Rubruck himself wrote his *Itinerarium* while in Acre.¹⁹⁰

Latin language books were transported to Asia as well as produced there. Unsurprisingly, the missionaries made sure to bring bibles and liturgical books with them abroad; William of Rubruck mentions that he has a psalter, a breviary, and some others that he does not name. John

¹⁸⁷ Anthony Bale, ed, *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the Crusades*. Cambridge Companions to Literature, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹⁸⁸ Adrian Boas, *Crusader Archaeology: The Material Culture of the Latin East*, Second edition (Routledge: Oxford, 2017), 215.

¹⁸⁹ Buchthal calls them “inferior pieces in a debased style,” (Boas, 216) which is questionable. A more likely assessment is that it is a style with which he is unfamiliar.

¹⁹⁰ Anthony Bale, “Reading and Writing in Outremer,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature of the Crusades*, ed. Anthony Bale (Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 85-101.



Figure 3.1. London: British Library: Egerton MS 1139 (The Melisende Psalter).
f. 11r.

of Montecorvino says that he has translated the whole of the New Testament into the Mongol language, which implies that he was in possession of a New Testament to translate. Riccoldo says that after the fall of Acre he was “greatly astonished to find many vestments, tunics, books, and breviaries, but no friars. For I knew that it is not our custom for friars to go without their tunics and breviaries.”¹⁹¹ Staying in Baghdad, Riccoldo had both a Bible and a Qur’an. Thomas Burman has argued that Paris: BNF Arabe 384 - an Arabic Qur’an produced in Syria or Egypt in the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries with marginal Latin annotations- was Riccoldo’s own copy of the Qur’an (other contenders for the author of the Latin annotations include Ramón Martí, William of Tripoli, and Ramón Llull). He also demonstrates that he read it alongside Mark of Toledo’s Latin translation of the Qur’an as well as other Arabic texts. In addition, he seems to have read it beside *Liber denudationis siue ostensionis aut patefaciens* (bn. 1050-1132; “The Book of Denuding or Exposing, The Discloser”) a Christian polemic against Islam. Burman points out that this all indicates that Riccoldo, even while he could read Arabic, still found it necessary to engage with Latin books about Islam. ¹⁹²

How did the friars use their books abroad? In some cases, sacred texts could function as symbols of their faith while separated from their Christian community at home. After William of Rubruck performed a partial Mass at the court of Sartaq Khan while wearing “the most costly of the vestments” he had taken with him, members of the court abstract his vestments and books as gifts for themselves, despite William’s protests. Of all the objects taken, William is most keen to

¹⁹¹ George-Tvrtković, 166. “mirabar quam plurimum, quia inveniebam paramenta, tunicas, libros et breviaria et non inveniebam fratres. Sciebam enim nostri moris non esse, quod fratres vadant absque tunicis et breviariis.” *Archives de l’Orient latin* 2, 289.

¹⁹² Thomas E. Burman, “How an Italian Friar Read His Arabic Qur’an,” in *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 125 Dante and Islam (2007): 93-109.

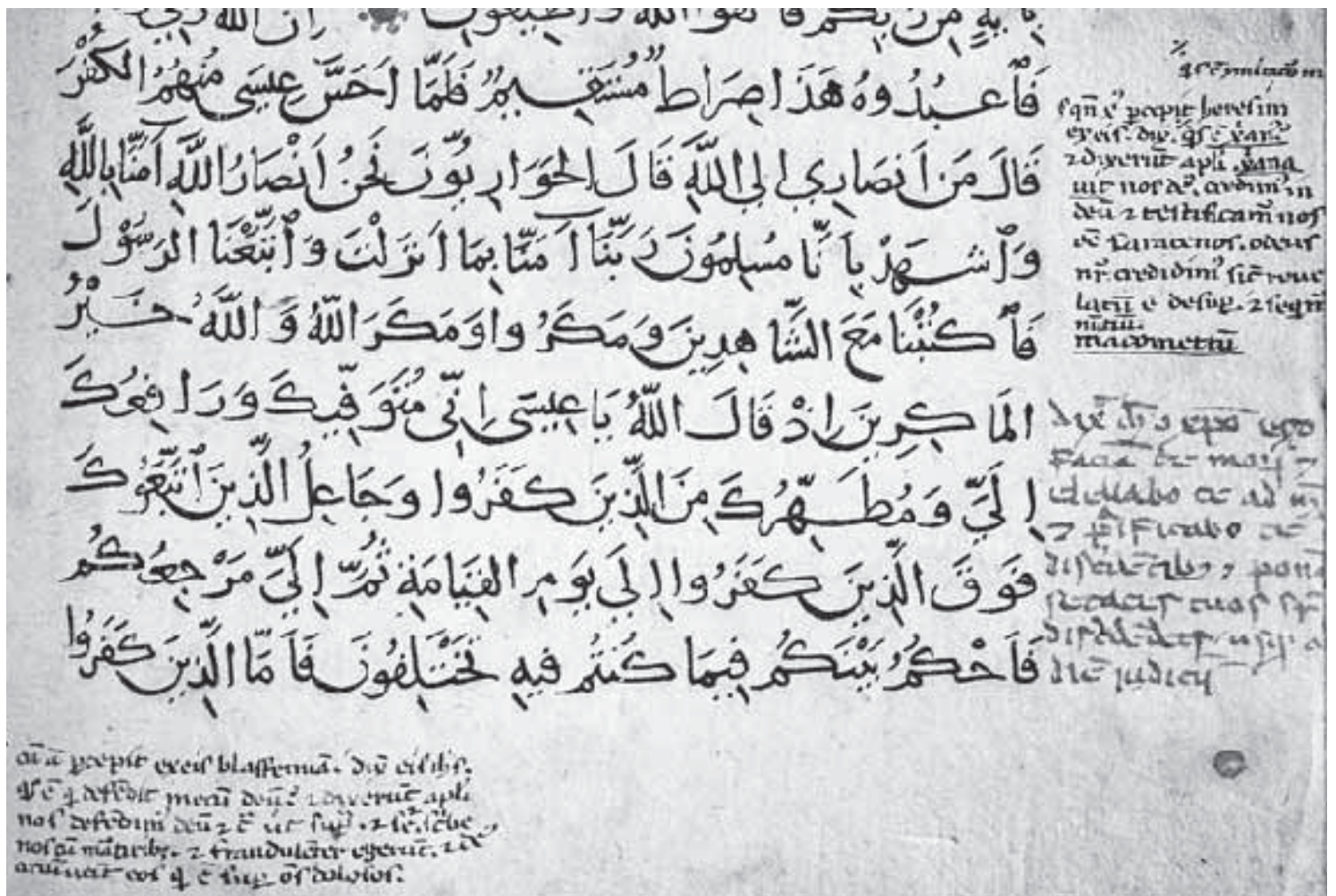


Figure 3.2. Paris: BNF Arabe 384, f. 24 v°. Coran 3 : 55.

rescue his Bible: “I had one comfort; as soon as I discerned their greed, I abstracted the Bible from among the books, also the sentences and the other books of which I was especially fond. I did not dare abstract the Psalter of my lady the Queen, for it had been too much noticed on account of the gilded pictures in it.”¹⁹³ Both the vestments and the books are symbolic of his faith, but the vestments seem less important than the primacy of the Word. Mentioning that

¹⁹³ Rockhill, 106-107. “Unum erat michi solatium, quod quando presensi cupiditatem eorum, ego subtraxi de libris bibliam et sententias et alios libros quos magis diligebam. Psalterium domine Regine non fui ausus subtrahere, quia illud fuerat nimis notatum propter aureas picturas que erant in eo.” *Sinica franciscana*, 204.

Sartaq took special notice of the decorated psalter once again highlights the Mongols' alleged greed, but it also further highlights their misunderstanding of the Christian religion. For the friars, the heart of their faith is in their theology, and this is better represented by words than by objects: in the beginning there was the Word, the Word was God, and the friars know the Word through knowing Latin. But the Word depends on material objects, such as books, for its survival — thus William's dilemma.

Having kept his bible, William says mass while abroad, and reads from the Gospel of John over the sickbed of Lady Kota (see Chapter 1). These is an example of book use abroad that goes beyond theological to practical use: especially in parts of the world where Christian churches/monasteries do not ring the canonical hours, or organize processions that correspond to the festal calendar, religious texts becomes important in their ritual, time-keeping function.

In addition to just hearing John read aloud, Lady Kota takes it upon herself to worship a Christian cross first in a manner that, according to William, is seemingly appropriate (*adoravit crucem*) and then in her own fashion: “She caused to be brought four *iascot* of silver, which she first put at the foot of the Cross, and then gave one to the [Armenian] monk, and she held one out to me, which I would not receive.”¹⁹⁴ William's refusal of the silver indicates that he was not pleased with her reaction to his reading. It seems inevitable, though, that she would misunderstand it, given that William was the only one with the book and he had not tried to teach her any Latin.

The question of how to teach Latin without texts is a problem that faces John of Montecorvino. John engages in a different way of thinking about books in that they seem to be

¹⁹⁴ Rockhill, 194. “fecit afferri quatuor iascot argenti, quos primo posuit ad pedes crucis et postea dedit unum monacho et michi porrexit unum, quod nolui recipere.” *Sinica franciscana*, 266.

integral to his conversion efforts. In his account of teaching the liturgy to the forty boys he has purchased as slaves, John emphasizes that they must sing the liturgy by rote, since they don't have books with notes. His sentence, "But we sing by rote because we have no books with the notes,"¹⁹⁵ begins with the word *tamen*, conveying disapproval and that there is something lesser about having to work with music that isn't attached to a concrete, written page. Indeed, later on in the same epistle, he asks the brothers who receive his letter ~~try~~ to send him some books, including an antiphonary, explaining that if the boys had such texts, they could make copies (*predicti*).¹⁹⁶

I ask the brethren who shall receive this letter that they shall do their best to bring its contents to the notice of the Lord Pope and Cardinals and the Procurator of our Order in the Curia. I beg the Minister General of our Order for an antiphonary, and the legends of the saints, a gradual and a noted psalter as an exemplar, for I have nothing but a small breviary with shortened lessons and a small missal. If only I had an exemplar, the aforesaid boys could make copies from it.¹⁹⁷

Presumably, his desire for the boys to make copies of a breviary stems from John's attempt to equip his new churches with books, and the boys will make for good copyists. The other liturgical texts he asks for would be part of the basic library for reading the office and training sermon-writers. Their boys' age, however, as well as their probably only elementary command of Latin, might make them particularly prone to errors in their copying, which suggests that John

¹⁹⁵ Dawson, 225. "Tamen secundum usum cantamus, quia notatum officium non habemus." *Sinica franciscana*, 348.

¹⁹⁶ *Sinica franciscana*, 350.

¹⁹⁷ Dawson, 227. "Rogo fratres ad quos hec littera pervenerit, ut ita studeant quod eius continentia possid pervenire ad notitiam domini Pape et Cardinalium et Procuratoris Ordinis nostri in Curia romana. Ministro generali Ordinis nostri supplico pro antiphonario et legendis sanctorum, graduali et psalterio cum nota pro exemplari, quia non habeo nisi brevarium portatile cum lectionibus brevibus et parvum missale. Si habuero exemplar, pueri predicti scribent." *Sinica franciscana*, 350.

knows their grammatical skills might not yet be up to par; this is probably one of the reasons he asks to be sent more friars as well as more books.

John's other concern, in this passage and the previous one, seems to be what happens when copying is unregulated. In teaching the boys how to sing the liturgy without a written page, human bodies function as a stand-in for books. Conversely, in requesting more books from Europe, books can function as a stand-in for human bodies that could keep teaching the boys and evangelizing to others in the Mongol Empire. Reduplication is an implied goal: more boys create more books create more Christians. This is a process that must be contained, however. When John claims that he would have baptized 30,000 more people "if it had not been for the aforesaid slanders," he is referring to the Nestorians, who "did not allow any Christian of another rite to have any place of worship, however small, nor to preach any doctrine but their own,"¹⁹⁸ and who spread the rumor that he was not sent by the Pope, but "was a spy, a magician and a deceiver of men."¹⁹⁹ John emphasizes how rumor outstrips the book-based discourse of the friar, which depends on the far slower dissemination of Latinate texts, which can only be copied and understood through long labor and study. Unregulated language can interrupt duplication, and slander floats, proliferating without proper copying.²⁰⁰

In John's plea, one discerns an increasingly common cultural sentiment: investment in book production can be an expression of virtue. Geoffrey of Beaulieu (d. 1274), in his biography

¹⁹⁸ Dawson, 223. "non permiserunt quempiam christianum alterius ritus habere quantu[m]libet parvum oratorium, nec aliam quam nestorianam publicare doctrinam." *Sinica franciscana*, 346.

¹⁹⁹ Dawson, 224. "explorator, magus, et dementator hominum." *Sinica franciscana*, 347.

²⁰⁰ For a full discussion of the power of gossip and slander in the medieval period, see Susan Phillips' *Transforming Talk: The Problem With Gossip in Late Medieval England* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

of the French king Louis IX, described the saint's commissioning of books as one of his holy attributes. Particularly, he notes, Louis commissioned the production of books after he heard that a sultan had had books produced for "Saracen philosophers," and considered "that the children of darkness seemed to be more prudent than the children of light and more zealous in their error than the children of the true Church were in the Christian faith." With that in mind, Geoffrey recalls, Louis created his own "book cupboard" in Paris where he collected "all the useful and authentic books of sacred Scripture." Moreover, Geoffrey writes, "In general he wanted to have new copies made rather than purchase books that were already copied, saying that this way the total number of holy books was increased and so their utility was more abundantly augmented."

²⁰¹ This desire to create more books, as well as Geoffrey's manner of describing it, accords with Louis' other deeds during his rule, namely his crusading impulses. In Louis' context, both crusades and book production are attempts to convert infidels and spread Christianity. Both are representative of Louis' piety and his worthiness for hagiography. In fact, the Bible attributed to St. Louis circulated in Asia, and he is also the person who donated books to William of Rubruck.

Ultimately, the functions of book ownership and creation outside of Europe could vary widely. In the several diverse cases examined here, however, the common factor between them is that books can be an important symbolic anchor to Latin Christianity outside its Western European stronghold. Even as Riccoldo mourns the death of the other friars at Acre, he writes, "And I am not surprised that you [the friars] have abandoned your breviaries, books, and tunics, for you no longer need them, because in Him you are rich in all things, in all words, and in all

²⁰¹ Geoffrey of Beaulieu, *Life and Saintly Comportment of Louis, Former King of the Franks, of Pious Memory*, in *The Sanctity of Louis IX: Early Lives of Saint Louis by Geoffrey of Beaulieu and William of Chartres*, eds. Larry Field, Sean Field, and M. Cecilia Gaposchkin (Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London, 2013), 99-100.

knowledge, just as the witness of Christ has been confirmed in you.”²⁰² Now that the friars have been martyred, Riccoldo believes, they do not need books as symbols of their faith any more, because in death they theoretically have unmediated access to God in heaven.

How Christians Interpreted the Qur'an

Regarding how Latin Christians thought about the materiality of sacred books of other religions, the most relevant line of inquiry for this discussion of missionaries stationed in Asia is the question of how they thought about the Qur'an. On the one hand, Islam was the most formidable competitor to Latin Christianity in the Asian locales taken up by missionary friars. On the other, the sacred texts of Islam were widely viewed as more distant from Christian orthodoxy than other competing religious texts. To most medieval Christian theologians, Jewish Torahs were not categorically false, just incomplete; the texts of “heretical” Christian sects such as Nestorians and Jacobites were not categorically false, just misinterpreted and garbled.²⁰³ Given these factors and the relative scarcity of clerics educated in the Arabic language, the Qur'an was the most problematic sacred text *qua* object. The question of how Western Christian thinkers in the Middle Ages thought about the Qur'an's contents has been written about extensively, and a

²⁰² George- Tvrtković, 166. “non mirror, si breviaria et libros et tunicas dimisistis. Non enim amplius indigetis, quia in omnibus divites facti estis in illo, in omni verbo et in omni scientia, sicut testimonium Christi confirmatum est in vobis.” *Archives de l'Orient latin* 2, 290.

²⁰³ According to Riccoldo specifically, they were poorly translated. See: Rouxpetel, Camille. “Riccoldo da Monte Croce's Mission towards the Nestorians and the Jacobites (1288-c.1300).” *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue*. 21:2-3 (2015). 250-268. William of Rubruck disparages their language skills even more explicitly. An Eastern Orthodox monk tries to help him cure the khan's concubine Kota, and at first William tells him that if he is indeed a priest, his prayers will be effective. However, William claims scornfully in the next sentence that he lied (*mentitus est*) because he did not know a single letter (*nec aliquam sciebat litteram*). Rockhill 193; *Sinica franciscana* 266.

full accounting of this scholarship is beyond the scope of this chapter.²⁰⁴ Moreover, the attitudes of the writers under consideration are largely predictable, and do not demand a digression into the more subtle byways of minority theological opinion. As Rita George- Tvrtković has shown, Riccoldo's view of the Qur'an vis-à-vis its theology is largely consonant with medieval Latin Christian views of the Qur'an in general; that is, he describes it as evil and mendacious, even if he lavishes some surprising praise that occasionally includes about its usefulness and style.²⁰⁵ To avoid merely repeating the findings of her meticulous analysis, I will forego Christian interpretations of Muslim theology generally, and instead focus closely on the two aspects of Christian Quranic interpretation that most closely speak to its status as an object: how it came into being, and its language and style. After providing context for how those who came before him thought about it as an object, I will then turn to Riccoldo's thoughts on the matter.

Generally speaking, Latin Christian thinkers believed that the Qur'an was a fraudulent book, masquerading as a divine text, while purveying false doctrine. Peter the Venerable (1092-1156), commissioner of the first Latin translation of the Qur'an, gives us the clearest sense of where the book's composition fits into the Muslim "history of error."²⁰⁶ It was not revealed to Mohammed by Gabriel, as Muslims claim, but Mohammed instead created it himself, and "having confected it from both Jewish fables and the foolish nonsense of heretics, he wove

²⁰⁴ The scholarly literature on this topic is vast. For the Qur'an specifically, a good starting point is Thomas E. Burman's *Reading The Qur'an In Medieval Latin Christendom, 1140-1560* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

²⁰⁵ See Chapter 4 of George- Tvrtković's *A Christian Pilgrim in Medieval Iraq*, "I Read It In Arabic!" pp. 73-88. In particular, he has much to say about the beauty of its style. He uses the phrase "licet in ea multa contineantur utilia" in *Ad nationes orientales*, but he stops short of describing how or for whom it is useful.

²⁰⁶ John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 157.

together that wicked scripture in his own barbarous fashion.”²⁰⁷ He then lied in saying that the book had been divinely inspired. This squares with other medieval polemics against Islam that call Mohammed a liar (*mendax*) for this reason, including the Spanish Petrus Alfonsi (fl.1106) and Riccoldo himself.

Peter also claims that the Qur’an stole from and corrupted the Christian tradition. Discussing Islam’s belief in the prophets of the Christian Old and New Testaments, he asks, “Why do you accept anything taken from my books, which are much older than yours, when I am a Christian and you are, as I said, a heretic or a heathen? What belongs to me and what belongs to you? I take nothing from your books; why do you steal something from my books? Are you jealous of mine? Do you want to become, perchance, a Christian?”²⁰⁸ Guibert of Nogent (1055-1124) expands on these themes, claiming that Mohammed used the material Qur’an to falsify miracles. Guibert explains that Mohammed had trained a cow to come to the sound of his voice, and writes:

He tied the book he had written to the horns of the animal, and hid her in the tent in which he himself lived. On the third day he climbed a high platform above all the people he had called together, and began to declaim to the people in a booming voice. When, as I just said, the sound of his words reached the cow's ears, she immediately ran from the tent, which was nearby, and, with the book fastened on her horns, made her way eagerly through the middle of the assembled people to the feet of the speaker, as though to congratulate him. Everyone was

²⁰⁷ Peter the Venerable, *Writings against the Saracens*, trans. Irven M. Resneck, (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016) 40.

²⁰⁸ Peter the Venerable, 156.

amazed, and the book was quickly removed and read to the breathless people, who happily accepted the licence permitted by its foul law.”²⁰⁹

In this story, the book becomes a kind of false relic, symbolic of its maker’s evil nature and misleading to innocents. It should be noted that Guibert had a more general preoccupation with false relics. In his treatise *On Saints and Their Relics*, he attempted to analyze logically and theologically how to tell false relics from true, and how to discourage the creation of more false relics. Laura Cleaver has pointed out that, regardless of whether he believed a relic to be authentic or false, Guibert had sympathy for those offering devotion to it; if the peoples’ prayers were fixed on God, he argued, the choice of intercessor did not matter.²¹⁰ For Guibert, this could only augment Mohammed’s evildoing in that his first followers wanted to worship rightly – i.e. become Christians - but he led them astray.

Petrus Alfonsi and William of Tripoli, in *De statu Sarracenorum* (1273),²¹¹ do not even attribute the supposed mendaciousness of the Qur’an to Mohammed himself, but instead to some of his early followers. Petrus says that each one of Mohammed’s followers created his own version of the book some time after Mohammed’s death.²¹² William is slightly more specific in

²⁰⁹ Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God Through the Franks*, trans. Robert Levine, 1.4 (Woodbridge, UK; Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1997) 34. “Factum igitur libellum cornibus animalis circumligat et in tentorio quo versabatur illud occultat. Tercio denique die super omnem qui convenerat populum eminens tribunal ascendit et declamare productis vocibus ad populum cepit. Quae cum, ut ita dixerim, summa aure verborum sonitum attigisset, e tentorio subteriacenti confestim egreditur et per medias coadunatarum gentium turmas, volumine cornibus imposito, ad pedes loquentis quasi congratulatura vacca contendit. Mirantur omnes, raptim volumen evolvitur, anhelanti turbae exponitur, petulantia turpi lege permissa gaudenter excipitur.” Guibert of Nogent, *Historia quae inscribitur ‘Dei gesta per Francos,’* lib. : 1, cap. : 4. Library of Latin Texts - Series A, (2019) brepolis.net.

²¹⁰ Laura Cleaver, “ ‘Almost Every Miracle is Open to Carping’: Doubts, Relics, Reliquaries, and Images of Saints in the Long 12th Century,” *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*. 167, no.1 (2014): 51. Quoting Guibert of Nogent’s ‘On Saints’ (as n. 34), 422.

²¹¹ There is speculation that William may not, in fact, be the author of this text; some scholars refer to the author of *De statu Sarracenorum* as pseudo-William of Tripoli.

²¹² Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogue Against the Jews*, Fifth Titulus (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011) 160.

that he claims that the book was composed some forty years after Mohammed's death, and was aided by unfortunate (*miseris*) Christians and Jews who had been forced to convert to Islam. When they could find nothing worth relating or praising (*dignum narratione ac laude*) either in Mohammad's life or teachings, they borrowed from the Bible instead.²¹³

Besides drawing on the ideas above, as a Dominican he already would have been immersed in a particular tradition of anti-Islamic theology. Thomas Aquinas' *On The Unity of Intellect, Against the Averroists* (1270) for example, argued specifically against the Muslim Andalusian philosopher Averroës (1126-1198). Riccoldo's thoughts on the Qur'an's composition have similarities with all the ideas described above, with the added notion that the devil took the form of Mohammed to thwart the spread of Christianity. While his followers composed the Qur'an during Mohammed's lifetime, Riccoldo writes in *Contra legem*, Mohammed never read it himself. After his death, Riccoldo alleges, one of Mohammed's followers by the name of Merebam burned the other copies that didn't agree with his own.²¹⁴ In this way, Riccoldo builds on the ideas about the Qur'an that came before his, and uses it as part of his overall proof that the Qur'an is false.

²¹³ William of Tripoli. *Notitia de Machometo ; De statu Sarracenorum / Wilhelm von Tripolis ; kommentierte lateinisch-deutsche Textausgabe von Peter Engels*. (Wurzburg : Echter ; Altenberge : Oros, 1992) 335-336.

²¹⁴ Riccoldo of Montecroce, *Contra legem sarracenorum*, Chapter 13, ed. Emilio Panella, <http://www.e-theca.net/emiliopanella/riccoldo2/cls.htm>.



Figure 3.3. Giovanni di Paolo. *St. Thomas Aquinas Confounding Averroës*. Tempera and gold leaf on panel. 1445-50. Saint Louis Art Museum. <https://www.slam.org/collection/objects/35447/>. (Note here Averroës' book on the floor, while Aquinas' is on the pulpit, as well as the triangular composition that allows Aquinas to adopt an authoritative stance.)



Figure 3.4. Andrea da Firenze. *The Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas (detail)*. Fresco. 1366-67. Cappellone degli Spagnoli, Santa Maria Novella, Florence. https://www.wga.hu/html_m/a/andrea/firenze/spanish/index.html. (Note the size of Dominic's book, which is almost the size of Averroës himself.)

Beyond its composition, Riccoldo believes that the Qur'an is "confused" and "obscure,"²¹⁵ in contrast to the clarity and openness that are the hallmarks of the Christian gospels. Moreover, Riccoldo claims that Muslims do not understand the inherent rationality of Christian theology, but, ironically, this cannot be explained through reason: "We do not have arguments for proving the Trinity and the other things of our faith, for if we did faith would not be faith, and it would not be meritorious. But we have the authority of the Gospel, as even the Koran[sic] testifies, and we have miracles."²¹⁶ Trying to explicate Christian scripture to non-believers should not be done, "so as not to throw pearls before swine."²¹⁷ This is an odd position to take as one ostensibly seeking to convert others to Christianity, perhaps indicating that he was more interested in refutation of doctrine than preaching.

Language plays a large part in the rationale behind these opinions. One aspect of the Bible that makes it superior to the Qur'an is that it is accessible in multiple languages:

So that the world would not perish from ignorance, God foresaw and arranged that that singular law, namely the law of grace, the law of the gospel, which is necessary and for everyone generally, not in one place but in all places, was written originally not in a single language but in different and general languages, namely Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and after this which was faithfully translated into all languages. And at the end of the gospels, Christ commanded his disciples that they should preach this same gospel efficaciously through the whole world, and so that they would prevail in completing this, he gave to them the gift of languages and the virtue of miracles.

Also, the Qur'an says that it was given by God only in Arabic, and the Saracens maintain with certainty that no one can understand it if he does not know the

²¹⁵ Riccoldo of Montecroce. *Liber peregrinationis*, chap. 24. "confusa" and "oculta." <http://www.e-theca.net/emiliopanella/riccoldo/liber.htm>.

²¹⁶ Tolan, 251-2. "Et licet non habeamus rationes ad probandam trinitatem et alia que sunt fidei, quia tunc fides non esset fides nec meritoria, habemus tamen auctoritatem euangelii, cui et alchoranus dat testimonium, et habemus miracula." *Libellus contra legem Sarracenorum*. Electronic edition of Latin text edited by J. Mérigoux. *Memorie domenicane*, n.s. 17 (1986): 1-144. At <http://www.e-theca.net/emiliopanella/riccoldo2/cls000.htm>

²¹⁷ "ne spargantur margarite ante porcos." <http://www.e-theca.net/emiliopanella/riccoldo2/cls000.htm>

Arabic language; and it is well known that not all know the Arabic language, nor can learn it. And it is written in the Qur'an as is shown above, that no one can be saved if not by Saracen law. And why would God want that only Arabs are saved, or those who know the Arabic language?²¹⁸

This is a remarkable passage because it argues that Christian languages are superior to Arabic precisely because they are *not* special. He calls them *generalibus linguis*, not sacred languages, and the fact that he then names Hebrew, Greek, and Latin suggests that he is emphasizing these general languages are available to those living in both the East and the West. It is the message, rather than the vehicle, that is sacred, so the vehicle should be accessible to everyone. The best language is the one that is most utilitarian, and the most open. The language of the Qur'an, in contrast, is closed and accessible to only a few, which constellates with Riccoldo's description of it as confused and obscure in *Liber peregrinationis*. This view of translation of sacred books accords with Peter the Venerable's in his *Summa*, in which he says that the Bible ought to be translated into Arabic so as to aid in conversion efforts: "Thus the Latin work, when translated into a foreign language, may possibly profit some others whom grace, which leads to life, wills to win over to God." He continues, claiming nothing is untranslatable: "Nor, among the many other languages of the world unknown to us, has there been lacking this reciprocal transfer of words one to another."²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Translation my own. "prouidit et dispensauit Deus ne mundus ex ignorantia periret, ut lex illa que generaliter omnibus et sola necessaria erat, scilicet lex gratie, lex euangelii, non uno loco sed in diuersis prouinciis, non uno idiomate sed diuersis et generalibus linguis originaliter scriberetur, scilicet hebrayce, grece et latine, et post hec quod fideliter transferretur in omnes linguas. Et in fine euangelii mandauit Christus discipulis quod ipsum euangelium per uniuersum mundum efficaciter predicarent, quod utique ut perficere preualerent dedit eis donum linguarum et uirtutem miraculorum. Alchoranum autem dicit se esse datum a Deo solum arabice, et saraceni tenent certissime quod nullus potest ipsum intelligere nisi sciat linguam arabicam; et constat quod non omnes sciunt linguam arabicam nec discere possunt. Et in alchorano scriptum est, ut superius est ostensum, quod nullus potest saluari nisi in lege sarracenorum. Et quare uellet Deus quod soli arabes saluarentur uel scientes linguam arabicam." *Contra legem*, chap. 16.

²¹⁹ Peter the Venerable, *Writings Against the Saracens*, 73.

Beyond his argument about Muslims' refusal to translate Qur'anic Arabic, Riccoldo worries about what he believes to be the Qur'an's over-aestheticized language. This fear of empty aesthetics presents itself in the chapter of *Contra legem* wherein he refutes the Qur'an because its style is not consonant with that of Christian scripture. The Qur'an, he explains, is in verse, whereas the Bible is in prose. He seems to acknowledge the beauty of its language, calling it "metered and rhythmic in style, flattering in its words, and fabulous in its statements."²²⁰ He is not alone among Christians in noticing Arabic's aesthetic value; Ramón Llull tacitly acknowledges it in his *Liber de gentili et tribus sapientibus* (c.1274), wherein a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim in turn expound on why his faith is the true one. Part of the Muslim's argument for the Qur'an's divine origins is its beauty: were it not for heavenly inspiration, the illiterate Mohammed would not have been able to compose such "beautiful sayings" (*pulchrum dictamen*), such "graceful song" (*decorum carmen*), and such "lovely parables" (*pulchras parabolas*).²²¹ William of Tripoli, in *Notitia de Machometo* (c.1271), says that Muslim religious leaders recite prayers in a clear voice with the most elegant verses, using words that flow like honey (*mellifluis*)²²²-- although, one should note that, dating at least as far back as Classical Antiquity, the image of honeyed words carries with it the implication of hidden intent.²²³ Riccoldo also notes that Muslims are very proud that their law is in verse, which acknowledges that verse is

²²⁰ Translation my own. "metrica uel rithmica in stilo, blanditoria in uerbis et fabulosa in sententiis." *Contra legem*, chap. 4.

²²¹ Ramón Llull, *Liber de gentili et tribus sapientibus*, *Raimundi Lulli Opera Latina*, 10-11. In *Corpus Christianorum*, ed. Óscar de la Cruz Palma, (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2015).

²²² William of Tripoli, 258.

²²³ In *De Rerum Natura*, for example, Lucretius (1st c. BCE) likens writing his Epicurean philosophy in poetic form to putting honey around the rim of a child's cup of unpleasant medicine.

something one might be proud of. *Blanditoria*, however, is a word he returns to in a subsequent passage, saying “Moreover, it is a law written in a flattering style, more than you would believe. Sometimes an entire chapter says nothing relevant; only that God is great, exalted, wise, and beautiful... And every word repeats, ‘Praise him!’ and vainly repeats it more than a hundred times.”²²⁴ In this passage, beauty hides a lack of substance. In contrast, further on in Chapter 16, he writes that the sober style of the gospels help to make them superior:²²⁵ “They [Muslims] will find in the gospels not a rhythmic or metrical style, but a simple and ordinary one, certainly not because of the ignorance of the writers, but for the advantage of the readers so that it can be understood easily by whoever is uneducated or simple. It also does not have the style of flatterers, nor unusual or dirty words, but ordinary and respectable ones.”²²⁶ Verse may be pretty, but prose is truthful and the word of God. Its clarity also helps to give it a broader sphere of influence. This is generally in accordance with other thirteenth-century Latin treatises on evangelizing. Humbert of Romans, for example, says that preachers should avoid ornament and empty rhetoric: “Leave the ingenious style to art; here it is a question of souls.”²²⁷

Considered together, Riccoldo’s discussions about the Qur’an’s language and style indicate that he fears in language what is hidden. Muslims’ refusal to translate Arabic hides the

²²⁴ Translation my own. “Vltius etiam est lex blanditoria in uerbis ultra quam dici uel credi posset. Nam aliquando totum unum capitulum textus, in quo nichil omnino notabile dicit nisi quod Deus est magnus et excelsus et sapiens et speciosus... Et ad omne uerbum repetit ‘Laudetur ipse,’ et hoc omnino sine cause repetit centum uicibus et amplius.” *Contra legem*, Chapter 4.

²²⁵ Reminiscent of Augustine’s *Confessions*, in which he shamefacedly admits preferring the eloquence of Virgil in his youth to the simple style of the gospels.

²²⁶ Translation my own. “Inuenient etiam in euangelio stilum non rithmicum siue metricum sed simplicem et comunem, non quidem pro simplicitate scribentium sed pro utilitate legentium ut a quolibet idiota et simplici conuenienter possit intelligi. Modum etiam habet non blanditorium nec inconsueta verba uel turpia sed comunia et honestissima.” *Contra legem*, Chapter 16.

²²⁷ Humbert of Romans, *Treatise on Preaching*, Section 2.3, ed. Walter M. Conlon (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1951) 33.

Qur'an's contents from the world, and why would they want to hide them if they were not somehow evil? Similarly, its style hides its contents, distracting from what Riccoldo believes are its lies and theological emptiness.

The Destruction of Books, and Books as Bodies

Riccoldo was certainly not the only Latin Christian outside Europe who was concerned with the destruction of Latin Christian books; that said, he is the author who engages with this topic in the most sustained way. While still putting him in context with other thinkers and chroniclers who wrote about destruction of books, I will argue that Riccoldo's take on book destruction is a unique one that both draws on and expands on the theological polemics discussed above.

The relative value of the Christian scriptures in comparison to the Christian body goes back at least as far as the Donatist controversy of the 4th century CE, when the Donatist sect repudiated Christians who, under the Diocletian persecution, had surrendered their books to the Romans instead of their lives. Calling them *traditores*, Donatists believed that the sacraments administered by priests and bishops who had given up their books were invalid; the rest of the Church, however, was more forgiving and eventually declared Donatism a heresy. But the tension concerning the status of Christian books in times of persecution remained, and Riccoldo fretted deeply about it as he wrote his letters to the court of heaven.

Even prior to the formation of the mendicant orders, questions about the *intactness* of the gospels played a role in evangelizing to the East. In his *Contra sectam saracenorum*, Peter the Venerable (c.1092-1156) incorrectly argued for the truth of the Old Testament on the basis that

the text itself remained intact from its first iteration; there was no possible way for it to have been corrupted or lost during the Jewish exile from Jerusalem, and its incorruptibility contributes to its truth-value. His corollary to this, however, is that a single volume of the bible becomes less important than the uncorrupted tradition as a whole; that is, a single volume can be destroyed, and, as long as others remain, the tradition will still be accessible and transferable to future generations. This is, of course, in contrast to his belief that the Qur'an was corrupted even in its first iteration (see above).

On the other hand, for an individual Christian on an individual mission, a single volume could be more important. Jacques de Vitry (c1160-1240), on his way to the Holy Land to become bishop of Acre, thought about his books as both weapons and symbols:

It happened that when I entered Lombardy, the Devil upset and threw overboard my weapons, that is, my books, with which I was resolved to subdue the Devil himself, with the other things necessary for my expenses, into a violently rushing and terrifyingly bottomless river, which from the melting of the snow forcefully grew beyond bounds and was carrying with it bridges and boulders. One of my baskets full of books was carried off among the flood's surges, another, in which I had placed the finger of my [spiritual] mother, Mary of Oignies, sustained my mule so that it was not entirely overwhelmed. However, when [it seemed] that scarcely one out of a thousand would be able to escape [Eccl 6:6], my mule came safely to the riverbank with the basket, while another basket was later miraculously recovered after snagging in some trees. What is more miraculous yet, although my books were a trifle blurred, I am still able to read them all.²²⁸

Much of his purpose at Acre was to preach the Fifth Crusade,²²⁹ so the possibility that his books would be destroyed seems equivalent to a crusader's losing his sword. Moreover, calling it “miraculous” that the content of his books remained legible implies the truth-value of their

²²⁸ Jacques de Vitry, “Letters” *Crusade and Christendom: Annotated Documents in Translation from Innocent III to the Fall of Acre, 1187-1291*, eds. Jessalynn Bird, Edward Peters, and James M. Powells (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia. 2013) 435-436.

²²⁹ Bird, et al., 435.

content, in that God wants him to still be able to read and preach them. In this way, Jacques retains Peter the Venerable's ideas about the incorruptibility of a text proving its truth, while according value to the books he had with him.

In the context of a different element, fire, Jacques' story recalls that of the Albigensians "debating" St. Dominic by throwing the "authorities" he had written on paper into a fire. According to the version of the story by Peter of les-Vaux-de-Cernay in his *Hystoria Albigensis* (c. 1212), the "heretics" threw the paper into the flames three times, but each time it refused to burn and "jumped from the fire entire and unharmed;"²³⁰ the Albigensians remained unmoved and tried to keep the miracle a secret. Jordan of Saxony tells the same story, with the added detail that the Albigensians also threw their own book into the fire, and, "The book of the heretics was immediately destroyed."²³¹ Michael Barbezat suggests that this story is more for the benefit of the orthodox than the heretics, in that it demonstrates to the orthodox that they are part of an ongoing struggle between truth and intractable lies, but that truth will eventually prevail.²³² Nonetheless, even if the story is more for the benefit of the orthodox, it still fits into the evangelical narrative above wherein books that are true are indestructible, and false books not so.

The problem with this narrative, however, is that it relies upon stories of books that survive in spite of attempts to destroy them. Stories that mourn the loss of books that do *not*

²³⁰ Peter of les Vaux-de-Cernay, *The History of the Albigensian Crusade*. Section 54, tr. W.A. and M.D. Sibley (Boydell Press: Woodbridge, Eng. and Rochester, NY, 1998) 29-30. "sed integra ab igne resiliit et illaesa." *Patrologia Latina* 213:555

²³¹ Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus de initio Ordinis fratrum Praedicatorum*, ed. Panagiōtēs Ar. Yphantēs (Athens : Ekdoseis Harmos, 2016) 124. "Liber hereticorum confestim exurit." "

²³² Michael D. Barbezat, *Burning Bodies: Communities, Eschatology, and the Punishment of Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018) 167-168.

survive seem to be rare, even while stories that lament destroyed churches or stolen relics are relatively common in Crusader narratives. One has to assume that a destroyed church that had had its relics stolen would have its books destroyed too, but either chroniclers take this for granted and do not find it worth mentioning, or they would prefer not to mention it. William of Tyre (1130-1186), in *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum*, comes close to talking about it: he writes that the destruction of saints' images in churches on the part of the Muslims when they had taken Antioch was equivalent to the destruction of books. In addition to driving out ministers and turning the buildings into stables, "the pictures of the revered saints had been erased from the very walls – symbols which supplied the place of books and reading to the humble worshippers of God and aroused devotion in the minds of the simple people, so praiseworthy for their devout piety."²³³ Even with this, he does not discuss actual books.

Moreover, there is not much talk in Crusader literature about the destruction of other religions' books, although Crusaders themselves had few qualms about destroying the books of Jews and Muslims. On their way to the Holy Land during the People's Crusade of 1096, for example, the soldiers of the Rhenish Count Emicho massacred Jewish communities in the Rhineland, objects as well as people. One Jewish chronicler relates that the destruction of a Torah in Mainz was the impetus for some Jews to kill one of the Crusaders, after a group of Jewish women informed the men that it had been torn to shreds:

When the men heard the words of the saintly women, they became exceedingly zealous for the Lord our God and for the holy and beloved Torah. There was a

²³³ William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, trans. Emily A. Babcock and A.C. Krey, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 296. "Venerabiles quoque sanctorum imagines (quibus simplex populus, et *plebs Dei* cultrix pia ruditate commendabilis, quasi pro libris utitur, quae vice lectionis simpliciores ad devotionem excitant), ex ipsis corraserant parietibus." William of Tyre, *Historia Rerum in Partibus Transmarinis Gestarum*, in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades*, 1, no. 1 (Paris: L'académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 1844), 6.23.

young man named R. David ben Rabbi Menahem. He said to them: “My brethren, rend your garments over the honor of the Torah.” They rent their garments as our teacher commanded. They then found a crusader in a chamber and they all – both men and women – rose up and stoned him.”²³⁴

Subsequently, this caused the Crusaders to become even more violent toward the Mainz Jews.

That a Jewish chronicler would have regarded the deliberate destruction of a Torah as worthy of extended commentary is not surprising. According to the Talmud (Shabbat 115a), Torahs (as well as other sacred writings or anything containing the name of God) must be disposed of properly by first shrouding and then burying them. It is unclear whether Count Emicho’s men would have known this. Regardless, they surely would have viewed destroying the Jewish sacred text as symbolic of the destruction of their faith in general. Albert of Aachen, a Christian chronicler who wrote about the Rhineland Massacres in his *Historia Hierosolymitanae Expeditionis*, described the cruelty of Emicho’s soldiers as they murdered men, women, and children, but he does not mention books.²³⁵

Similarly, the Egyptian historian Ibn al-Furât (1334-1405) wrote about the destruction of the library of Dar-em-Ilm at the siege of Tripoli in 1109:

When the Franks came into Tripoli and conquered it, they burned the Academy. The cause of the burning was that a priest (God on high curse him!) when he saw those books became shocked. Then it happened that he came into the library of sacred Qur’ans and that he put his hand upon a volume; and here it was a Qur’an, then upon another and he saw that it was like the first, then upon still another and realized again it was a Qur’an, and thus he went through 20 volumes. Finally he

²³⁴ Anonymous of Mainz, “Gezerot Tatnu 4856/1096,” in *The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Material*, 2^d ed, ed. Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 124.

²³⁵ See: Albert of Aachen, *Historia Hierosolymitanae Expeditionis*, 1.28, <http://thelatinlibrary.com/albertofaix/hist1.shtml>

exclaimed, ‘All one finds in this library are Qur’ans of Muslims!’ For this they burned it.²³⁶

Olga Pinto notes that this incident goes unmentioned by medieval Christian chroniclers, which led early 20th-century historians to doubt its authenticity, or at least its scale. More thoughtfully, she interprets this as evidence that the Crusaders, viewing Islam as ignorant and hateful, and since this was just one Muslim building among many they destroyed, did not see the destruction of the library as worthy of any special mention.

Besides Crusaders, the other medieval group with a penchant for book-burning, and a key part of the context Riccoldo’s ideas on the matter, was the Dominican Order. Pope Gregory IX (r. 1227-1241) formally called on Dominicans in Regensburg, Germany, and Languedoc, France to help extirpate heretics in 1231 and 1233.²³⁷ While these first inquisitors were charged specifically to deal with the Cathar heresy (see above) medieval inquisitorial tribunals tended to pull from the Dominican Order. By the time a formalized Holy Office was established by Rome in 1478, its first Grand Inquisitor, Tomás de Torquemada, was a Dominican. The burning of heretical books - like the burning of heretics themselves - became associated with the order, and book-burning became part of St. Dominic’s iconography.

²³⁶ Ibn al-Furât, quoted and translated into Italian in Olga Pinto’s “Le biblioteche degli Arabi nell’età degli Abbassidi,” in *La Bibliofilia*. Vol. 30 No 3/5 (Marzo – Maggio 1928), pp. 139-165. In her footnotes, Pinto says she translated al-Furât’s Arabic into Italian from his manuscript, fol. 38 r. and v. The manuscript is *Ta’rikh al-duwal*. Ms. Vienna. Anno 503 H.; Athîr, X, 334. Translation from Italian to English my own.

²³⁷ James B. Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018) 15.



Figure 3.5. After: Domenico Beccafumi (Domenico di Giacomo di Pace). *Saint Dominic and the Burning of the Heretical Books*. Oil on canvas. First half 16th c. Museum of Fine Arts Boston. <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/33403/saint-dominic-and-the-burning-of-the-heretical-books>.

Although not through destruction at the hands of Christians, Ilkhanid Baghdad, where Riccoldo wrote his letters to the heavenly *curia*, was a city with a complicated relationship to books in the late thirteenth century. The Mongol siege of Baghdad in 1258 is infamous for the harm it caused to the libraries there. Michal Biran explains that beyond direct destruction caused

by fires, floods, and “general chaos,” there was indirect damage caused by Baghdadis who sold their books for food, and Mongols that confiscated books to bring to the Ilkhanate capital. Biran demonstrates, however, that even after the sack Islamic libraries continued to function and an intellectual community continued to exist and even thrive.²³⁸ Riccoldo would have surely been aware of the events of 1258, but does not mention them; in fact, in his *Liber peregrinationis* he praises Baghdad as a center of learning that draws Muslims “to study from diverse provinces.”²³⁹ Biran notes that the largest library in Baghdad had regained the reputation it had once had for its huge numbers of books by the end of the thirteenth century, and Riccoldo likely saw this as yet more evidence of Islam’s – to him – frightening power.

On the other hand, as a member of the Order of Preachers, it is not surprising that Riccoldo seemed to believe that Christian prayer, preaching, and scripture could have tangible effects. In *Contra legem*, he explicitly writes about the power of Scripture in preaching, especially as it relates to Christian mysteries. Indeed, as John Tolan notes, Riccoldo believes Christian scripture can in fact be levied to prove the falseness of the Qur’an: “[O]ne must concentrate on the refutation of such a perfidious law and show that it is not a law of God, and that the Saracens ought to accept the authority of the Gospels and the Old Testaments. We can prove this using the Koran[sic] itself just as Goliath was killed with his own sword.”²⁴⁰ Then,

²³⁸ Michal, Biran, “Libraries, Bookes, and Transmission of Knowledge in Iklhanid Baghdad.” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 62, 2-3: 464-502, doi: <https://doi.org/101163/15685209-12341485>. Biran also addresses the legend that, during the siege of Baghdad, so many books were destroyed that the rivers ran black with ink. She explains that the first images of wanton violence toward books occur well into the fourteenth century, and then only rarely; the story of the black rivers appears in the 16th. From this she argues that it was likely a literary trope to demonstrate Mongol barbarity.

²³⁹ George-Tvrtković, 211. “ad studium de diversis provintiis.” *Liber peregrinationis*, chap. 23.

²⁴⁰ Tolan, 252. “insistendum est ad confutationem tam perfide legis, et ostendendum quod non sit lex Dei, et quod saraceni tenentur recipere auctoritatem euangelii et ueteris testamenti. Hoc autem ostendere possumus per ipsum alchoranum, ut Goliath proprio gladio iuguletur.” *Contra legem*, chap. 2.

once the Qur'an has been proved false, the Bible can prove the truth of Christianity. Like Jacques de Vitry, the implication here is that books are just as powerful as a – perhaps even a type of – weapon.

However, Riccoldo wrote *Contra legem Sarracenorum* after his return to Florence from the Holy Land. His comfort in once again being safely ensconced in a Western Christian city-state seems reflected in his confidence in the inevitable triumph of Christianity over Islam, a confidence that is lacking in his *Epistolae*. He expresses his fears in his second letter to the Virgin Mary, describing the growth in the number of Muslim children and converts: “O Lady, see how it now seems to be fulfilled, that which the greatest liar Mahomet himself said: that he was sent by God with the aid of arms to bear many children so that the population of Saracens would increase.”²⁴¹ In the next paragraph, he links this population increase to the Qur'an: “If only the Saracens knew God, then they would be grateful to him who has given them such victory! But in fact they are grateful to Mahomet; they say that all these things have been procured for them by the merit of the Qur'an.”²⁴² At other points, this “merit” takes on a corporeal metaphor, for instance in describing the Qur'an's power with a reference to the beast of blasphemy in Revelation 13.1: “And you have given horns to such a beast, so that he may conquer the world,

²⁴¹ George-Tvrtković, 148. “O Domina, ecce iam compleri videtur, quod ipse Machometus mendacissimus dixit, se missum esse a Deo in virtute armorum, ut multos filios generet, ut Sarracenorum populus augetur.” *Archives de l'Orient latin* 2, 272.

²⁴² George-Tvrtković, 148. “Et utinam Sarraceni Deum cognoscerent et ei grati essent, qui eis dedit tantam victoriam! Ipsi vero de hijs omnibus grati sunt Machometo dicentes, quod hec omnia procuret eis pro merito Alcorani.” *Archives de l'Orient latin* 2, 273.

kill your saints, and force them under torture to deny the faith!”²⁴³ This metaphor of the Qur’an as a horned beast continues for several sentences. The link between the Qur’an and “Saracen” babies, as well as the image of the Qur’an as beast constellates with other images Riccoldo uses of books and language as incarnate *bodies*.

Bodies, particularly bodies that can copulate and generate, are a special concern of Riccoldo’s. As mentioned above, he despairs over just how quickly “Saracens” reproduce themselves in multiple ways. He frets about conversion, both of people – other Christians, Jews, and “Tartars” – and of churches into mosques. He also fears co-option, in this case of people and books or language. As regards people, he is, unsurprisingly, mostly concerned with women and childbearing. He writes in his second letter, “What is most wretched of all is that they have chosen the most beautiful from among the holy nuns and virgins betrothed to your most holy son to be sent as presents to the kings and tyrants of the Saracens, so that they may bear the children of Saracens.”²⁴⁴ This fear of Christian women being co-opted to reproduce Muslim bodies is remarkably similar to the fear of the Christian gospel being co-opted to reproduce Muslim theology. This is most evident in Riccoldo’s third letter wherein he recalls St. Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians to avoid fornication and remain a virgin if possible.

And Mahomet in his Qur’an permits fornication. You, O Saint Paul, said, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman” [1 Corinthians 7.1]. Yet not only does his permit this, but it seems that he has commanded men to fornicate with numerous

²⁴³ George-Tvrtković, 141. “Et tu tali bestie dedisti cornua, ut ventilaret orbem, ut occideret fratres tuos et cogeret eos tormentis negare fidem.” *Archives de l’Orient latin* 2, 267. Compare Revelation 13:1: “Et vidi de mari bestiam ascendentem habentem capita septem, et cornua decem, et super cornua ejus decem diademata, et super capita ejus nomina blasphemiae.”

²⁴⁴ George-Tvrtković, 147. “...et quod omnibus alijs miserabilius est, sanctimoniales et virgines tuo sanctissimo filio desponsate pulciores eliguntur ex eis et ensenia mittuntur Sarracenorum regibus et eorum tyrannis, ut ex eis generent filios Sarracenorum.” *Archives de l’Orient latin* 2, 272.

women, so that many Saracens will be born. Mahomet uses such a tasteless and impudent word in his Qur'an that everyone clearly understands him to be saying something obscene and entirely carnal. For I have read this tasteless word in the Qur'an not only in one place but in many.²⁴⁵

Quantity upsets Riccoldo in this passage: "Saracens" will fornicate not just with women but numerous women; not just some but many Saracens will be born; the Qur'an does not use just an obscene word in one place, but many places. The word *fatigate* ("copulate") reproduces itself figuratively in language, and literally in Muslim babies.

While Riccoldo is concerned about obscenities in the Qur'an made manifest, he is even more concerned about its supposed blasphemies. As implied in the passage above, he has studied the Qur'an, and studied it *in Arabic*, as he points out numerous times in his letters. He frequently quotes suras²⁴⁶ and points out all the ways in which they supposedly blaspheme Christ and the Christian gospels. In his third letter, he writes:

But behold, O sorrow! For the Saracens say that the name of Mahomet is written in the gospel and that Christ prophesied about him. I read in the Qur'an in Chapter 61 that Jesus son of Mary said, "I am the messenger of God, O sons of Israel, and I am a truthful messenger; I announce to you that an ambassador will come after me and his name is Mahomet"[Sura 61.6]. But truly, I have not found this in the gospel, neither in Latin, nor Chaldean, nor Arabic, yet I have most diligently searched the entire East for it.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ George-Tvrtković, 158-9. "Et Machometus in suo alchorano permittit fornicacionem. Tu, sancte Paule, dixisti (1 Cor., VII, I): 'Bonum est homini mulierem non tangere.' Et ipse non solum permittit, set mandare videtur hominibus, quod fornicentur cum multis mulieribus, ut multi Sarraceni nascentur. Quo verbo ita infruite et invereconde utitur Machometus in suo alchorano, ut omnes manifeste intelligent, quod dicit obscenus et carnalissimus ille. Nam in alchorano non iam uno loco, set in pluribus legi, quod dicit infrunitum verbum." *Archives del'Orient latin* 2, 282-3.

²⁴⁶ As George-Tvrtković and Röhrich have noted, Riccoldo's quotations from the Qur'an are mostly, if not entirely accurate. However, he misreads suras in several places; attributes quotations to the Qur'an that are actually in the *hadith*; and has several other errors that are unaccounted for.

²⁴⁷ George-Tvrtković, 158. "Set ecce, pro dolor! quia dicunt Sarraceni, quod nomen Machometi scriptum est in evangelio et quod Christus prophetavit de ipso. Ita enim legi in alchorani capitulo lxi dicit Iesus, filius Marie: 'Ego sum nuncius Dei, o filii Israel, et sum nuncius verax, ego evangelizo vobis, quod legatus veniet post me et nomen eius Machometus.' Ego vere ista non invenio in evangelio, nec in latino, nec in caldeo, nec in arabico, quod quidem diligentissime in oriente perlegi." *Archives de l'Orient latin* 2, 282.

We find in this passage the reverse of what Riccoldo describes in his later *Contra legem*: that is, the fear that, in its destruction, the Bible will be levied like a weapon against itself. As in the passage about obscenities, language is reified and reproduces itself in the form of converts to Islam. Moreover, and even more sinisterly for Riccoldo, this reification emerges ironically from *emptiness*. He says that he has searched the entire East for the source of the blasphemy that is doing such harm to Christianity, but it does not exist. This fear of the replication of empty blasphemy as something tangible presents itself in a particularly striking image from earlier in this same letter:

For in the great city of Nineveh I found a missal taken as if it were a slave along with Christian booty from Acre; it contained the gospels and epistles. The Saracens have forbidden this book, they wish to destroy it, and have scraped the letters from its pages in order to make the drums and tambourines of which Easterners make great use. How, therefore, can you sleep? Can it be that the gospel is better off with the Saracens and Tartars than with the Christians? Can it be that a drum will resound better than the gospel? What purpose have the books of your gospel and epistles served? Christ said, “Do not throw pearls before swine” [Matthew 7.6], yet he himself is throwing pearls before swine and rabid dogs! Behold, the books of the Christians are being scattered throughout the world like captives and slaves of the Saracens and Tartars.²⁴⁸

In this passage, the gospel, like captive Christian women, is a slave awaiting a nefarious co-option that will turn it into a new object and further the aims of Muslims. Again, part of the image here is of books as bodies. Furthermore, we see here too more similarities to John of Montecorvino’s ideas about human bodies as stand-ins for books, and the consequences of

²⁴⁸ George-Tvrtković, 157. “Ego autem librum missale inveni quasi sciauum portatum de spoliis christianorum de Accon in Nynive, civitate grandi, ubi erant epistole et evangelia. Quem librum interdicebant Sarraceni, volebant destruere et cartas eius radere ad faciendum cartas pro tympanis et tamburis quibus orientales multum utuntur. Vos igitur quomodo dormire potestis? Numquid evangelium melius stat inter Sarracenos et Tartaros quam inter christianos? Numquid melius sonabit tympanum, quam evangelium? Quid juvere libri evangeliorum et epistolarum vestrarum? Set et Christus dixit: *Nolite spargere margaritas ante porcos* (Matth., VII, 6), et ipse spargit margaritas ante porcos et canes rabidos! Ecce libri christianorum disperguntur per mundum quasi captivi et sclavi Sarracenorum et Tartarorum.” *Archives de l’Orient latin* 2, 281.

unregulated copying. Like the Nestorians in John's letter who will not hear any other version of Christianity preached besides their own, the Saracens "have forbidden this book" and destroyed it. This interrupts the copying process in the way that slander interrupted John's preaching efforts.

It is especially telling that Riccoldo mentions that the letters are scraped from books and turned into drums. Drums are necessarily hollow, and furthermore, they can produce no melody. What is – literally - legible is removed and the resulting object is one that merely makes noise. Reason becomes unreason; logic, illogic. This also squares with Riccoldo's ideas about the Bible as rational, and the Qur'an as irrational. The phrase "of which Easterners make great use" also implies that Westerners do *not* make great use of these instruments, and thus they become suspiciously foreign and frightening. Thadeus of Naples (fl.1291), writing about Acre's fall himself, notes the sounds of the approaching Mamluks: "And behold at the rising of the sun the air is shaken by the most penetrating lash of the trumpets of the sultan, the terrible beat of the cymbals and drums and by the horrible emitting of voices resembling the brutal mob of the faithless proceeding toward assaulting Acre."²⁴⁹ Here, the sound of the Mamluk drums correlates with the impending violence of the siege; a gospel repurposed for a drum could be used for violent, frightening ends.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Translation my own. "Et ecce in solis ortu concutitur aer verberare penetrantissimo tubicinarum soldani, cymbalorum et tympanorum terribili percussione ac vocum emissione brutalibus similium horribili multitudinis perfidorum procedentis adversus Aconem expugnandem." In: Magister Thadeus Civis Neapolitanus, *Excidium Aconis (II)*, in *Excidii Aconis gestorum collectio; Ystoria de desolatione et conculcatione civitatis Acconensis et tocus terre sancte*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens, CCCM 202 (Turnhout, 2004), 63-96: 81.

²⁵⁰ An analogue to this exists in Mandeville's Valley Perilous, where drums assume a demonic air.

However, even as he believes that the Qur'an is full of empty flatteries, while in Baghdad he seems to want to test the kind of power it has. In his third letter, in what seems an act of desperation, he takes the Qur'an and places it on a Christian altar:

But I beg you, read what he says about you, your mother, and your apostles. As you know, frequently when reading the Qur'an in Arabic with a heart full of utter grief and impatience, I have placed the book open on your altar before your image and that of your most holy mother and said, "read, read what Mahomet says!" And it seems to me that you do not want to read. I ask, therefore, that you not disdain to hear a little of what I recount to you.²⁵¹

As George-Tvrtković points out, both Christians and Muslims would find this passage shockingly blasphemous, since Christians would be scandalized to find a Qur'an on Christ's altar, while Muslims would be scandalized to see a Qur'an in front of "idoltrous icons."²⁵² While she posits that Riccoldo "appears to treat the book itself with respect even as he admits to being horrified by its contents,"²⁵³ my interpretation of this scene is somewhat different. Riccoldo is horrified by the Qur'an's contents, and placing it on a church altar in front of images of Christ and Mary seems both desperate and even a challenge to God. Such a blasphemous act should be cause for God to strike him down, but "it seems to me that you do not want to read," Riccoldo says, because *nothing happens*. Given the kinds of legends circulating about the destruction of Christian books – or rather, their attempted destruction and miraculous survival as described in the stories above – this could have been the kind of occasion in which Riccoldo

²⁵¹ George-Tvrtković, 163. "Sed oro te, legas, quod de te dicit et de tua matre et de tuis apostolis. Ego autem pre maximo dolore cordis et impatientia, ut nosti, frequenter cum legerem alchoranum arabice, ipsum librum apertum posui super altare tuum coram ymagine tua et tue sanctissime matris et dixi: 'legatis, legatis, quod dicit Machometus!' Et videtur michi, quod non vultis legere. Rogo igitur, quod non dedigneris audire pauca, que referam," *Archives de l'Orient latin* 2, 286.

²⁵² George-Tvrtković, 87.

²⁵³ George-Tvrtković, 87.

expected a miracle. That he is challenging God is also supported by his request “that you not disdain to hear a little of what I recount to you,” because an omniscient god theoretically already knows the Qur’an’s contents. In a similar manner, he writes accusatorily, “We Christians are shouting and crying out, and there is no one to help!”²⁵⁴ In John 1:23, the *vox clamantis* announces the coming of Christ, but in this case *clamamus et vociferamus* have no effect.

Furthermore, Iris Shagrir notes that this scene in which Riccoldo instructs God to read is an inverted image of St. Augustine’s conversion.²⁵⁵ This is an image he takes up again in his fifth and last letter, the one in which he tentatively resolves some of his confusion and despair. He begins by, once again, expressing his consternation that his letters have received no response, “either through a messenger, a letter, or a clear dream that I could understand.”²⁵⁶ He is adamant that he wants an answer that is concrete: “I firmly believe that they will send me a practical response and not just a theoretical one. And that is what I asked for: a practical response of deeds, not words.”²⁵⁷ What he gets instead is, as he places St. Gregory’s *Moralia* in front of him and prays for a response through the book, is the injunction, “*Tolle, lege, tolle, lege.*” When he opens the book, his finger lights on the passage from Job 33:13-14 that reads, “Why do you complain against him for not responding to all your words? For God speaks once or twice to him but does not repeat.” Riccoldo takes this to mean that all the answers to his questions are already

²⁵⁴ George-Tvrtković 158. “Et nos christiani clamamus et vociferamus, et non est qui adiuvet!” *Archives de l’Orient latin* 2, 282.

²⁵⁵ Iris Shagrir, “The Fall of Acre as a Spiritual Crisis: The Letters of Riccoldo of Monte Croce,” *Revue belge de Philologie et d’Histoire* 90, no.4 (2012): 1114.

²⁵⁶ George-Tvrtković, 171. “neque per nunciam, neque per scripturam, neque per sompnium apertum, quod ego intelligerem.” *Archives de l’Orient latin* 2, 294.

²⁵⁷ George-Tvrtković, 171. “sed firmiter credo, quod responsionem practicam mihi mittent et non theoricam solum. Et hanc, sed practicam responsionem facti non verbi petii.” *Archives de l’Orient latin* 2, 294-5.

present in scripture, and God does not repeat himself. In connecting his own experience to the story of St. Augustine, the *Moralia* is less a body than a symbolic anchor to Christianity.

Even so, Riccoldo is unsatisfied. At the close of his last letter, still despairing, he writes, “I give thanks for your theoretical response, but nevertheless I am still waiting affectionately and ceaselessly for your practical response.”²⁵⁸ Words might be briefly comforting, but will not cause “the persecution of the Saracens” (*persecutione Sarracenorum*) to cease. As he worried that the words of the Qur’an are becoming reified in his earlier letters, here he worries that the words of the Bible will *not* be. A book as a symbol is well and good, but a book as weapon would be better.

As discussed above, Riccoldo seems to have regained some confidence in his mission after returning home to Florence; after all, it is doubtful he would have written a conversion manual for his fellow friars otherwise. Books and language remain a concern in this text. In the eighth and last chapter of *Libellus ad nationes orientales*, after separately detailing how to preach to individual religious groups, he lays out five general rules for preaching in the East. The very first instructs friars to eschew the use of interpreters since, while they might be able to effectively translate business transactions, they cannot accurately translate Christian theology. He goes on: “And they are embarrassed to say, ‘I do not understand,’ or ‘I do not know how to say that’; and therefore they twist the words and say one thing for another.”²⁵⁹ He ends his

²⁵⁸ George-Tvrtković, 173. “Pro responsione denique theorica gratias ago, practicam vero nichilominus affectuose atque indesinenter expeto.” *Archives de l’Orient latin* 2, 296.

²⁵⁹ Riccoldo of Montecroce, *Libellus ad nationes orientales*, ed. Emilio Panella, chap. 8, <http://www.e-theca.net/emiliopanella/riccoldo2/adno.htm>. Translation my own. “Et verecundantur dicere ‘Ego non intelligo’ vel ‘Nescio dicere’; et ideo pervertunt verba et dicunt alia pro aliis.”

explanation of this rule by saying that the friars themselves must rigorously learn the Arabic language and Arabic methods of argumentation.

This is eminently practical, of course, and accords with the recommendation of other Dominicans that friars learn the language of the people to whom they preach. Moreover, it is also ideologically consistent with his discussions of the Qur'an and destroyed bibles. So much of the Qur'an is hollow rhetoric, Riccoldo believes, and Muslims have destroyed bibles to turn them into hollow instruments. Friars can learn Arabic to co-opt these empty spaces and fill them with Christian theology. His thinking about books and languages, as symbols and objects, thus come full circle.

Chapter 4: Foreign Words Become Flesh: John Mandeville and Appropriation of Travel Literature

The authors of the texts examined by the previous chapters had clearly stated reasons to write. William of Rubruck, John of Plano Carpini, and Odoric of Pordenone all wrote reports at the requests of their superiors. John of Montecorvino and the other friars who settled in China had specific requests from the West. Riccoldo of Montecroce felt distress over the Muslim possession of the Holy Land. All of these friars had, at least nominally, missionary intentions. But the intentions with which texts were written do not necessarily correspond to their use. This chapter posits, that using *The Book of John Mandeville* (c. 1357) (hereafter abbreviated *TBJM*) as a case study, texts written outside Europe by friars with explicitly missionary intentions can be appropriated to meet the desires of the courtly and emerging mercantile classes inside Europe. Moreover, I argue that one of the primary ways that is done is through language, and language can function *qua* object. In this case, it functions as an exotic curiosity, an artifact brought back from an Eastern voyage.

TBJM relates a supposed journey to the Middle East, Central and East Asia, and islands in the Indian Ocean, but its author likely never traveled. Instead, he pulled material/information from various other travel narratives and chronicles, among them several mentioned in previous chapters. The writer claims to be English, and a knight of St. Albans. Current scholarship strongly suggests he was indeed English, even if the text itself could have been produced in

England or France²⁶⁰. Although it was translated into ten other languages in the Middle Ages, the earliest surviving versions of the text are in Anglo-French. These French texts are divided into three subgroups: the Continental, the Insular, and the Liège. Scholars have ruled out the possibility that the Liège version could be the earliest, but beyond this it is difficult to say whether the Continental or Insular was first.²⁶¹ There are sixty-two French manuscripts in total: 25 of the Insular version, 30 of the Continental, and 7 of the Liège. The earliest of these found so far, Bibliothèque Nationale de France NAF 4515, is dated 1371 and was presented to Charles V by his court physician, Gervaise Chrétien. Among other nobles and royals who owned French copies of *TBJM* in the late fourteenth century were Valentina Visconti, daughter of the Duke of Milan; her son, Charles d'Orléans; Juan I of Aragon; and Thomas, Duke of Gloucester. One thing these nobles all had in common was that they were all book collectors and part of the network of literary exchange that existed in the late fourteenth-century between Italy, France, and England²⁶² (although Iberian, Juan I was a Francophile).

This chapter will analyze the language of these likely earliest Anglo-French versions, and the way in which Mandeville's fourteenth-century audience might have understood the non-European words in the work. There are three reasons for narrowing the focus to the French versions: first is that French seems to be the language in which the Mandeville author²⁶³ first

²⁶⁰ Mark W. Ormrod, "John Mandeville, Edward III, and the King of Inde." *The Chaucer Review* 46, No. 3 (2012): 314-339.

²⁶¹ See: Iain Higgins, "Introduction." *The Book of John Mandeville With Related Texts*, particularly pages xv-xvi.

²⁶² See: Michael Hanly, "Courtiers and Poets: An International Network of Literary Exchange in Late Fourteenth-Century Italy, France, and England." *Viator* 28 (1997): 305.

²⁶³ The original author of *TBJM* remains unknown. Several theories have been put forth, but for conciseness' sake, I will refer to the author here as Mandeville.

wrote his text, likely closest to the autograph. This claim can only ever be speculative, however. Therefore another, more substantial, reason is that, despite the multilingual nature of the text, scholars have paid little attention to how a multilingual audience in fourteenth-century England might have received it. Among the many ways that the text is a hybrid – of sources, of genre, of geography – language is one of the most important. As Simon Gaunt argues eloquently in his discussion of both *TBJM* and Marco Polo's *Devisament dou Monde*, these are “texts that not only contain and describe the foreign, but also embody foreignness through their form.”²⁶⁴ How would an English person, likely bilingual in French and English, and possibly trilingual in Latin, read a text that appeals to Francophone sensibilities? How would they interpret a writer who claims to be English writing in French? The last reason is a matter of practicality. I do not doubt that looking at how non-European words function against an otherwise English, or German, or Italian text would be fascinating and informative. For the time being, however, I need to limit my archive; it remains a rich area for further research.

This chapter is divided into three ways that I see Mandeville appropriating the language of missionary texts. The first is his circumvention of Latin as the language of clerical authority and a *lingua franca*. The second is, despite this seeming suspicion of Latin, his use of Latin liturgical quotations in order to bring the exotic marvels he describes into the purview of Latin Christendom. The last is his use of non-European words against this background that serve as valuable, exotic artifacts brought back from abroad.

²⁶⁴ Simon Gaunt, “Translating the Diversity of the Middle Ages: Marco Polo and John Mandeville as “French” writers,” *Australian Journal of French Studies* 46, no. 3 (2009): 235-248.

Latin Under Suspicion

Mandeville's sources were primarily in French. Source studies on *TBJM* are extensive, and have found that the author pulled, almost word for word, from numerous Classical and medieval texts, particularly William of Boldensele (1285-1338/9), (pseudo-)William of Tripoli, Hayton of Armenia (1213-1270), and Odoric of Pordenone (1286-1331). Of these, he pulled most extensively from William of Boldensele and Odoric of Pordenone (discussed in Chapter 1), both of whom were friars who actually traveled to Asia. Neither of the reports they wrote about their travels was intended to be particularly marvelous or entertaining, in that both purport to be straightforward accounts of what they did and saw abroad, and William's at least was written at the command of Cardinal de Talleyrand-Périgord, Bishop of Auxerre (1301-1364). Both wrote in Latin but had their works translated into French by the Benedictine monk Jean le Long d'Ypres (1315-1383). Any other choice than Latin would have been odd, as both Odoric and William were themselves friars and writing for a clerical audience. However, despite having access to both the Latin and French versions, the ones that Mandeville used for his own text were Jean le Long's translations. Besides Odoric and William's accounts, Jean le Long also translated several other works dealing with travel to Asia and Asian history, including Hayton, Riccoldo of Montecroce, and letters from the Khan to Pope Benedict XII. While this naturally speaks to Jean's personal interests in the exotic, six manuscript copies of his translation of Odoric exist, the

latest of which is dated 1485. Six copies of his translation of William exist from the same period.

Besides these, Mandeville had many other sources, both French and Latin.²⁶⁵

In an oft-cited passage from *TBJM*'s Prologue, Mandeville tells us:

Know that I should have put this writing into Latin so as to explain things more briefly, but because more [people] understand French better than Latin, I have put it into French so that everyone can understand it, and the knights and the lords and other noble men who know no Latin, or a little, and who have been beyond the sea know and understand whether I speak the truth or not. And if I err in describing through not remembering or otherwise, they can amend and correct it, for things long since passed out of view get forgotten and human memory cannot retain or contain everything.²⁶⁶

In particular, much has been made of the Mandeville's announcement here that he will write in French, or *romancz*, as opposed to Latin. Higgins explains that the way Mandeville discusses language in this passage does three things: first, it signals that the content of the book is "worthy of Latin, the international language of scripture, theology, and learning;" second, that it singles out for its audience the courtly estate; third, that it brings together "the concerns of the international clerical world with those of the international courtly world, but on the latter's territory."²⁶⁷ Shayne Legassie has furthered this formulation, showing that by appealing to a courtly audience, the Mandeville author is making French a rival to Latin.²⁶⁸ Moreover, by

²⁶⁵ For a full discussion of these sources, see: Christiane Deluz, "La 'Librairie' de Mandeville," in *Le Livre de Jehan de Mandeville: Une "Géographie" au XIV^e s* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Publications de l'Institut d'Études Médiévales, 1988).

²⁶⁶ All English translations of *TBJM* are from *The Book of John Mandeville With Related Texts*, ed and trans. Iain Higgins (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011). All French quotations of *TBJM* are from *Le Livre des Merveilles du Monde*, ed. Christiane Deluz (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2000). "Et sachez qe jeo eusse cest escrit mis en latin pur plus brifment deviser, mes pur ceo qe plusours entendent mieux romancz qe latin jeo l'ai mis en romancz pur ceo qe chescun l'entende, et luy chivaler et ly seignurs et ly autre noble homes qe ne scievent point de latin ou poi et qe ount esté outre mer sachent et entendent si jeo die voir ou noun. Et si jeo erre en divisant par noun sovenance ou autrement qe ils le puissant adresser et amender, qar choses de long temps passes par le veue tournent en obly et memorie de homme ne puet mie tut retiner ne comprende." Higgins, 5-6; Deluz, 93.

²⁶⁷ Higgins, *TBJM*, xvii. .

²⁶⁸ Shayne Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017) 82.

positioning himself as bilingual, saying that he first wrote his book in Latin and that now he will translate it so it can have a wider audience, he implies that he has access to both the concerns of the clerical world and the secular world and can act as intermediary between the two.

It is not just that Mandeville establishes a rivalry between French and Latin, however, as his text also demonstrates suspicion of Latin's status as a sacred language and a *lingua franca*. One way in which he does this is by working primarily from French translations of Latin sources, as discussed above. In addition, aspects of *TBJM*'s content indicate a disregard for Latin's *auctoritas*. When Mandeville says he will translate his book into *romancz* so that everyone can understand it, he gives the status of a *lingua franca* to French instead of Latin. In the supposed encounter between Mandeville and the Sultan in Egypt, once the two of them are behind closed doors, the Sultan reveals that he can speak, not Latin, but French. In fact, he speaks it "very well" in the description of their encounter, at which Mandeville "marveled greatly."²⁶⁹

At one point, Mandeville leaves out Latin where his source material included it. William of Boldensele describes the pyramids of Egypt as tombs and memorials for the dead, and writes out a Latin inscription that he sees cut into one of them. He also uses this inscription, an epitaph mourning the loss of one Decimus Gentianus, as an attempt to correct the widespread myth that the pyramids are not tombs but barns and granaries. Meanwhile, Mandeville leaves out the

²⁶⁹ Higgins, 87. "...parloient moult bien francois, et ly Soudan auxint don't jeo me merveillay moult." Deluz 280. Other scholarship on this interesting moment includes a discussion by Suzanne Conklin Akbari in *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 110-1450* (Ithaca: London: Cornell University Press, 2009); and a discussion by Karma Lochrie in "Provincializing Medieval Europe: Mandeville's Cosmopolitan Utopia," in *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (2009): 592-599. Akbari argues that the Sultan's abilities in French are part of Mandeville's larger demonstration of the "porousness" between Christianity and Islam, and of how Muslims will eventually be converted. Lochrie argues that it is part of the way that the Sultan "shames" Mandeville and other Christians in this scene, pointing out their wickedness and impiety.

epitaph in his own text, admitting only that on the pyramids are “many writings in different languages,”²⁷⁰ and insists the structures are granaries. He protests: “Some say that they are tombs of the great lords of antiquity, but that is not true, for the common word through the whole country near and far is that they are Josephs’s Granaries, and they have it written thus in their chronicles.”²⁷¹ The Latin text would have proven that the pyramids are, in fact, tombs, and Mandeville leaves it out. Here I must caution that, as stated above, there were at least six different copies of Jean le Long’s French translation of William of Boldensele, and the Latin inscription could well not be in one or more of them. Nonetheless, it would seem as though in this example Mandeville circumvents *auctoritas*; that of Latin itself and that of William of Boldensele. In a subtler way, he does the same to Odoric of Pordenone. In his description of the journey through the Perilous Valley, Odoric says that although he thought he would “die of fear,” he “said these words: *Verbum caro factum est*” and came through unscathed, for which the Saracens “greatly revered me.”²⁷² *TBJM* instead claims that Christians who “are in good standing”²⁷³ can confess and make the sign of the cross over themselves so that the devils will not have power over them. About the experience of his own traveling party, Mandeville relates:

There were with us there two worthy Friars Minor, who were from Lombardy, who said that if there were any of us who wanted to enter, they would put us in good standing [with God] and go in with us. When these worthy men told us this, trusting in God and in them, we had mass sung and were confessed and took

²⁷⁰ Higgins, 32. “mointes escriptures de diverses langages” Deluz 155.

²⁷¹ Higgins, 32. “Et dient ascuns qe ces sont sepultures des grantz seigneurs de jadis, mes ceo n’est mie voirs qar la comune renomee est par toute le país près et loinz qe ces sont les garniers Joseph et ensy l’ont ils escript en lour cronikles.” Deluz, 156.

²⁷² Higgins, 254. “mourir de paour” and “disoie ces mos: *Verbum caro factum est*,” and “me firent moult grant reverence.” Odorico de Pordenone. *Le Voyage en Asie d’Odoric de Pordenone: iteneraire de la Peregrinacion et du voyaige, 1351*. Traduit par Jean Le Long, ed. Alvisé Andreose and Philippe Ménard (Genève: Droz, 2010) 62.

²⁷³ Higgins, 166. “qe sont en bon estat” Deluz, 446.

communion and entered, [all] fourteen of us. But on coming out there were only nine of us, and we did not know whether our companions had been lost, or whether they had returned and come out ahead [of us]. But nevertheless we have not seen them since, and they were two Greeks and three Spaniards.”²⁷⁴

Odoric puts the emphasis on what he *said*; Mandeville puts the emphasis on what he *did*. He posits the *doing* as what allowed him to survive the demons in the valley. Moreover, not everyone in Mandeville’s story survives the Perilous Valley. The Lombardian friars, presumably conducting the mass and confession in Latin, do not have the power to get the entire group safely through. It is telling, too, that the friars are from Lombardy, since this is probably a nod to Odoric, whose hometown was close by. Higgins says that this may be “a veiled thank-you” to Odoric, although it could also be a slight; Mandeville adjusts the tale so that a Latin mass in a Latin text cannot protect everyone from demons in a foreign land.

At a point when a character does speak Latin, that Latin is ineffectual. In his discussion of Constantinople and the ways in which Greek Christians “vary greatly from our right belief,” he describes a letter sent to them by Pope John XXII. The Pope urges them to unite with Latin Christendom and “obey a pope who is God’s true vicar and to whom God gave full power to bind and loose, for which reasons they ought to obey him.”²⁷⁵ Part of the Greeks’ response, however, reads: “We firmly believe in your supreme power over your subjects. We cannot tolerate your supreme pride. We do not intend to satisfy your supreme avarice. My God be with you because

²⁷⁴ Higgins, 167. “Si avoit la ovesqez nous II prudhommes freres menours qe estoient de Lombardie qe disoient qe s’il y avoit nul de nous qe vousisse entrer q’il se meissent en bon estat et il entroient ovesqez ly. Et quant ly prudhommes nous disoient ceo, sur l’affiaunce de Dieu et et eaux, nous fesoimes chaunter messe et feusmes confessez et acomuniez et entrames XIII. Mes a l’issir nous n’estoions qe IX. Et si ne saveoms si nostre compaignouns estoient perduz, ou s’ils estoient retornez et issiz arriere fors. Mais toutefoiz nous ne les veismes puis, et estoient II Gregeois et III Espaignels. Deluz, 447.

²⁷⁵ Higgins, 14. “ilz varient moult de notre droite creaunce” and “q’ils devoient obeier a une pape q’est droit vicaires de Dieu et a qy Dieu [dona] plein poar de lier et assoudre pur quoi ils deveroient obeier a luy.” Deluz, 110.

God is with us.’ And the Pope could get no other answer from them.”²⁷⁶ In a note to the translation, Higgins calls attention to the use of the Latin pronoun *tu* in the Greeks’ response, an insult to someone whom the Greeks should have addressed as *vos*. Mandeville’s own rhetorical move here is to leave the story hanging after telling it; there is a sense of resignation to the Pope’s inability to extract any kind of deference from the Byzantines.

This kind of roundabout skepticism of Latin’s authority carries over to Mandeville’s discussion of other types of Christians besides the Greeks. In writing about Galilee, he says that living there are “many Christians of various kinds and different names, and all are baptized and have different laws and different customs, but all believe in God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. But they always lack some articles of our faith.”²⁷⁷ He spends time elaborating how the Jacobites believe that one should confess directly to God, sans clerical intermediary, but surprisingly lays out for his audience a series of biblical and liturgical quotations – in Latin - that support this practice. He continues his explanation, noting, “For they know the whole Bible and the Psalter, and therefore they cite the letter like this. But they do not cite the authorities in Latin as well, but very openly in their own language.”²⁷⁸ Mandeville then cites Saints Augustine, Gregory, and Hilarius to support unmediated confession. While he eventually says that subsequent authorities insisted on confessing to man “with good reason,”²⁷⁹ there is no

²⁷⁶ Higgins, 14. “Potenciam tuam summam circa tuos subjectos firmiter credimus. Superbiam tuam summam ctollerare non possumus. Avarciam tuam summam satiare non intendimus. Dominus tecum quia Dominus nobiscum est.” Latin provided in n.28, p. 14.

²⁷⁷ Higgins, 73. “demoerent moutz des christiens de plusours maneres et de divers nouns et toutz sount baptizez et ount diverses lois et diverses custumes. Mes toutdis faillent ils en ascun article de nostre foy.” Deluz, 247.

²⁷⁸ Higgins 73. “Qar ils scevent toute la Bible et le sautier et pur ceo ils allegent ensy la letter. Mes ils n’allegent pas les auctorités auxi en latin, mes en lour langage mout apertement.” Deluz, 248.

²⁷⁹ Higgins 74. “...par bon reson” Deluz, 249.

reprimand, only explanation. Unlike William of Rubruck, who was barely willing to call Nestorians and Jacobites Christians at all, Mandeville ends his list of eastern Christian sects by announcing, “They all have many articles of our faith, and they vary in others, and it would take too long to recount the variety so I will stop and say no more.”²⁸⁰ While Iain Higgins cautions in regards to this passage, “A list of quotations hardly amounts to an argument,”²⁸¹ this reads as a defense, or at least a tonally neutral cataloging, of theological diversity. Flanked on either side by insinuations that they are like Latin Christians in many ways, Mandeville suggests that they are members of the broader Christian community, despite their apparent misuse or mistranslation of Latin Church Fathers. That said, as part of his defense of Jacobite confession practices, Mandeville invokes Latin quotations. We can view this seemingly paradoxical move as part of the larger and still more complicated way Latinity functions in *TBJM*.

Out of Latin, into French -- and back to Latin

Given this circumvention of Latin’s authority, as well as his rationale for translation and the stated audience - “the knights and the lords and other noble men who know no Latin, or a little, and who have been beyond the sea” - it may at first seem odd that *TBJM* does, in fact, include a good deal of Latin. Why add Latin to a text that is purportedly to be read by those who don’t know Latin?

However, the particular Latin Mandeville chose might not be completely unfamiliar to his audience, since it comes in the form of liturgical quotations. Multilingual texts including English,

²⁸⁰ Higgins, 75. “Et touz cils ount plusorz articles de notre foy et as autres ils sont variantz, et de la variance seroit trop longe chose a compter si me lesseray atant sanz plus parler.” Deluz, 250.

²⁸¹ Higgins, 74n.

French, and Latin existed in medieval England. Moreover, using Latin liturgical quotations in vernacular texts was a practice that can be found across many works. William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, written probably within twenty years of *TBJM* does this, as do many Middle English lyric poems and morality plays.²⁸² Beyond this, medieval English sermons, even some of those directed at lay audiences, could include elements of Latin, whether those were words, phrases, or full sentences.²⁸³ In particular the Psalms, which are Mandeville's favorite form of liturgical quotation, would have been familiar to lay audiences. Clerics recited and cycled through these at Mass weekly. Furthermore, medieval literacy education relied heavily on liturgy. Both clerics and laity were taught basic literacy through Latin, particularly psalters and books of hours, which were often used as primers.²⁸⁴ Even if their abilities in Latin were less than that of a cleric, a literate layperson would have been familiar with liturgical quotations. Although they would not have been able to parse the Latin grammatically, it is reasonable that they would have had a grasp of many psalms' basic content. The illiterate, perhaps hearing Mandeville's book read aloud, would have regularly heard psalms recited in church. In this way, the Latin quotations in *TBJM* play with this pre-existing convention of Latin's existence in a vernacular mode.

Scholars have certainly discussed Mandeville's references to liturgical content: the discussion tends to focus on how Mandeville compares Christianity to other religions to highlight differences and similarities between cultures. Within this conversation, there are two major threads, the first claiming that Mandeville's comparisons of religions show his open-

²⁸² Siegfried Wenzel, *Macaronic Sermons: Bilingualism and Preaching in Late Medieval England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) 2.

²⁸³ Wenzel, 37-38.

²⁸⁴ For a fuller discussion of this, see Nicholas Orme, "The Tower of Learning," in *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006): 53-85.

mindedness and tolerance, the other claiming the very opposite, that they instead show his xenophobia and prejudice against people outside Europe.²⁸⁵ While I do not believe that Mandeville was engaging in any sort of programmatic imperialism, the Latin quotations in his text do suggest an urge to try to bring the wonders that he describes into the purview of Christendom. That is, biblical Latin within the French version of the text works to help create what Charles Moseley calls “moral geographies”²⁸⁶ for readers and to do this, the form – in this case, the language – is as important to this interpretation as content.

We can most clearly see the creation of this moral geography in the conjunction of a biblical quotation and a foreign word that helps to figuratively bring that word into Christian possession. In describing the chapel of Elijah in the Holy Land, Mandeville writes, “this place is called Horeb, of which Holy Scripture speaks: ‘*Et ambulavit in fortitudine cibi illius usque ad montem Dei Oreb.*’ And beside there is the vine that Saint John the Evangelist planted and the grapes are called *Scaphis*.”²⁸⁷ The close juxtaposition of the quotation from 1 Kings 19, which describes how food was miraculously provided for Elijah as he worked to prevent idol-worship among the Israelites, and the mention of St. John’s grapes, positions the grapes as a divine gift.

²⁸⁵ For examples of the first view, see Chapter 2 in Stephen Greenblatt’s *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Karma Lochrie’s article “Provincializing Medieval Europe: Mandeville’s Cosmopolitan Utopia,” *PMLA*, 124, no.2, (2009): 592-599. Greenblatt makes an exception for Mandeville’s treatment of Jews in the text. For examples of the second, see Andrew Fleck’s article, “Here, there, and in between: Representing difference in the Travels of Sir John Mandeville,” in *Studies in Philology*, 97, no.4, (2000): 379-400; and Chapter 5 of Geraldine Heng’s *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). Taking a slightly different tack, Marianne O’Doherty, in examining *TBJM*’s use of Christian history not through a biblical lens but through *translatio imperii*, has described how several different redactions of the Mandeville text create “imperial fantasies.” See O’Doherty, Marianne. “Imperial Fantasies: Imagining Christian Empire in Three Fourteenth-Century Versions of the Book of John Mandeville,” *Medium Aevum* 86, no.2 (2017): 323-349.

²⁸⁶ Charles Moseley, “The *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* and the Moral Geography of the Medieval World,” *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 12, no. 1 (2015).

²⁸⁷ Higgins, 38 “...et cel lieu ils appellent Oreb don’t Seinte Escripture emparle: ‘*Et ambulavit in fortitudine cibi illius usque ad montem Dei Oreb.*’ Et la delez est la vigne qe saint Johan l’evangeliste plaunta et homme appelle roisins Scaphis.” Deluz, 168.

As a divine gift, then, they are meant for Christians. Higgins mentions that “no other source mentions this odd legend,”²⁸⁸ which of course does not mean that it never existed outside Mandeville’s imagination, but could certainly mean it was less widely circulated. This does make it more likely that Mandeville was the first to pair the quotation and story, which, again, helps to position the grapes as a gift from God to Christians in times of need.

Yet more common in the text is the pairing of a description of a wonder and a Latin quotation. At the end of his description of Sri Lanka, after stating that on the island live geese with two heads and giant albino lions, he says, “Know that in this country and other islands around there the sea is so high that it seems to hang from the clouds and should cover all the earth. It is a great wonder how it can be held up thus, except by the will of God who holds up the air, and therefore David says in the Psalter: ‘*Mirabiles elaciones maris*’.”²⁸⁹ God created this miracle, Mandeville implies, and that is proved in the Psalms. He rules what is in the Indian Ocean as well as what is in Europe.

This particular example, which describes God holding up the air, is all the more relevant for illustrating Mandeville’s conception of how wonders from abroad fall into the purview of Christendom. As Evelyn Edson explains, Mandeville’s world view is consistent with that displayed visually by the medieval T-in-O map, a *mappamundi* in which Jerusalem is the center of the world and the remaining land mass is divided into quadrants containing Europe, Africa, and Asia. The Garden of Eden, or Paradise, is often situated at the very top, somewhere near

²⁸⁸ Higgins, n. 38.

²⁸⁹ Higgins, 122. “Et sachez qe en ceo pays et autres isles la entour la me rest si haute q’il semble qu’elle pende as nues et q’elle doive covrer toute la terre. Ceo est grant merveille coment elle se poet ensy tenir, forsquez de la volonté de Dieu qe l’air le sustient, et pur ceo dit David el sautier: ‘*Mirabiles elaciones maris*.’” Deluz, 353.

India. Some of these maps – the Hereford Mappamundi and the Psalter World Map, for example – contain a representation of the Day of Judgment above the earth itself, where Christ is shown looking down on the world. On both the Psalter and the Hereford Maps, biblical markers such as Noah's Ark or the Tower of Babel coexist with France and England, which coexist with cynocephali and griffins. Christ encircles them all, holding them all up, as Mandeville describes.



Figure 4.1. London: British Library, Add MS 28681 (*Psalter World Map*) f.9r

There are no biblical quotations on the Psalter or Hereford maps; the labels and the images are the biblical references instead. As such, the maps' medieval viewers would have needed minimal Latin literacy to read them. Less important than their understanding of the biblical quotations, however, is that Mandeville's audience *knows* that these are biblical quotations. The phrases that introduce them become the most important instead. For example, In Mandeville's description of the fish in Java that throw themselves out of the sea for people to take and eat, Mandeville says this is because "he fulfilled what God said to Adam, '*Crescite et multiplicamini et replete terram.*'"²⁹⁰ Understanding that the Latin means, "grow and multiply and fill the earth" might offer another, interesting layer of interpretation for a reader, but more important is that he or she knows the miracle occurs because of what God has ordained.

Even if a wonder is already Christian, a Latin quotation can give it a degree of familiarity. In describing the spot where the Crucifixion took place, Mandeville notes that there is writing in Greek:

Otheos vasilion ysmon perseonas ergasa sothias emesotis gis," which is to say in Latin, "Here God our king before the ages wrought salvation in the middle of the earth." Also, on the rock where the cross was set is written in the rock: "*Cyos nyst ys basys tou pisteos they thesmosy,*" which is to say in Latin, "What you see is the base of all the faith in the world."²⁹¹

Higgins notes that the Greek here is garbled, and it is unknown whether the Mandeville author himself knew any Greek. Mandeville, however, *expects* that his audience will not know Greek.

Latin, in this case, demystifies the marvelous. In the English versions of *TBJM*, a third version of

²⁹⁰ Higgins, 119. "...pur ceo q'il adcomplist ceo qe Dieu dit a Adam, '*Crescite et multiplicamini et replete terram.*'" Deluz, 348.

²⁹¹ Higgins 47 "'*Otheos vasilion ysmon perseonas ergasa sothias emesotis gis,*' c'est a dire en latin '*Hic est Deus rex noster ante secula operatus est salutem in medio terre,*' Item sur la roche la ou la croiz fust fichié est escrit dedeinz la roche, '*Cyos nyst ys basys tou pisteos they thesmosy,*' c'est a dire en latin: '*Quod vides est fundamentum totius fidei mundi hujus.*'" Deluz, 348.

the inscriptions are given: “þat es to say, Here Godd our king before werldes has wro3t hele in myddes of þe erthe,” and “þis es to say, þat þou seez es þe ground of alle þe fayth of þis world.”

Kara McShane observes that the Hebrew version of this inscription that appears in the Gospels is erased and replaced here, and suggests, “the insertion of English where Hebrew once was suggests a type of *translatio studii* in which Hebrew speakers are replaced by English readers.”²⁹²

There is no vernacular translation in the French versions, which implies that Latin should make the inscription clear enough. In contrast to either English or French, however, there is no risk that Latin could be appropriated by nationalist arguments. The True Cross, the Anglo-Norman version implies, is for all Christians.

Latin quotations, however, are not the only way that Mandeville attempts to bring exotic objects into Christendom’s purview. In a parallel way, scribes inserting the foreign alphabets that occur in many manuscripts of *TBJM* also work to assimilate them to the known Latin Christian world. Paris: BNF NAF 4515, for example, has the following illustration of the Chaldean alphabet:

²⁹² Kara McShane, “Deciphering Identity in The Book of John Mandeville’s Alphabets” *Philological Quarterly* 97, no.1 (2018).

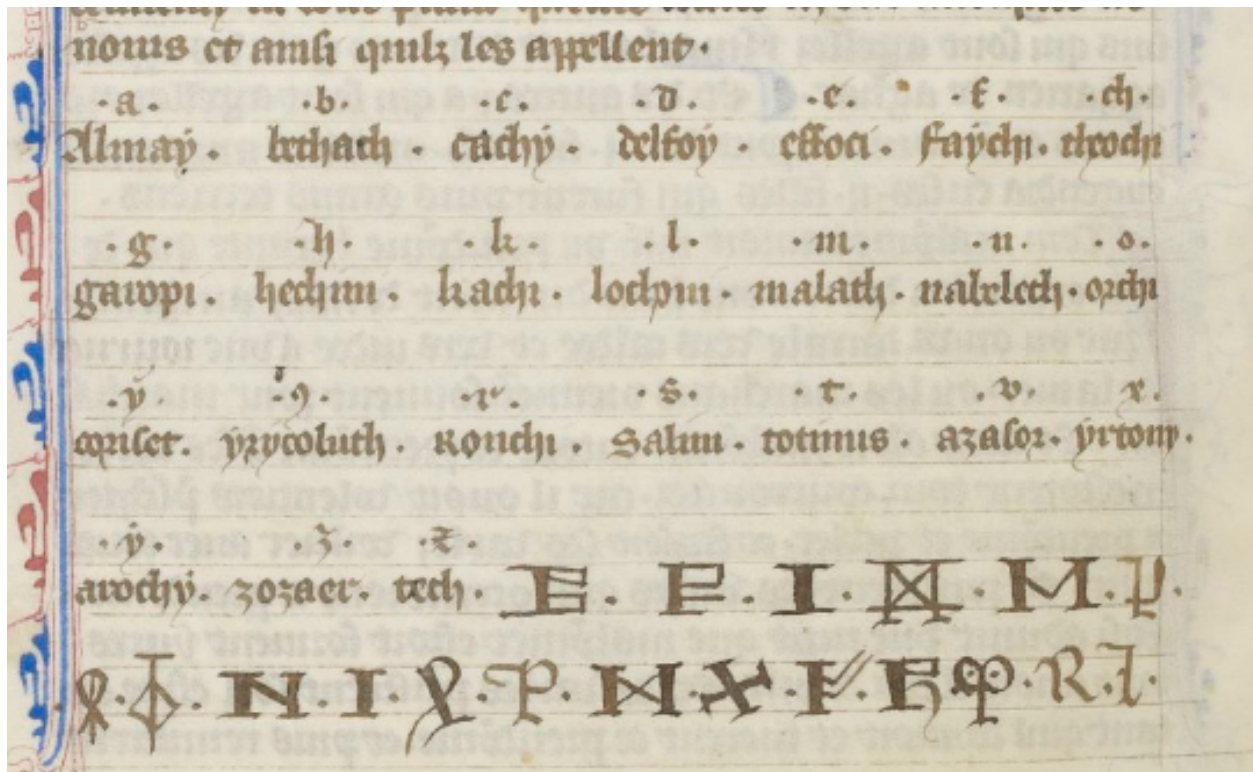


Figure 4.2. “Chaldean Alphabet.” Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France NAF 4515 f. 96v

Letters are given, but their Latin equivalents are interpolated above. This is a relatively common move in the manuscripts that include foreign alphabets; the Morgan Library MS M.957 does this, as does the British Library’s Harley 3954. Moreover, in the same BNF manuscript, the image of the Arabic alphabet is as such:

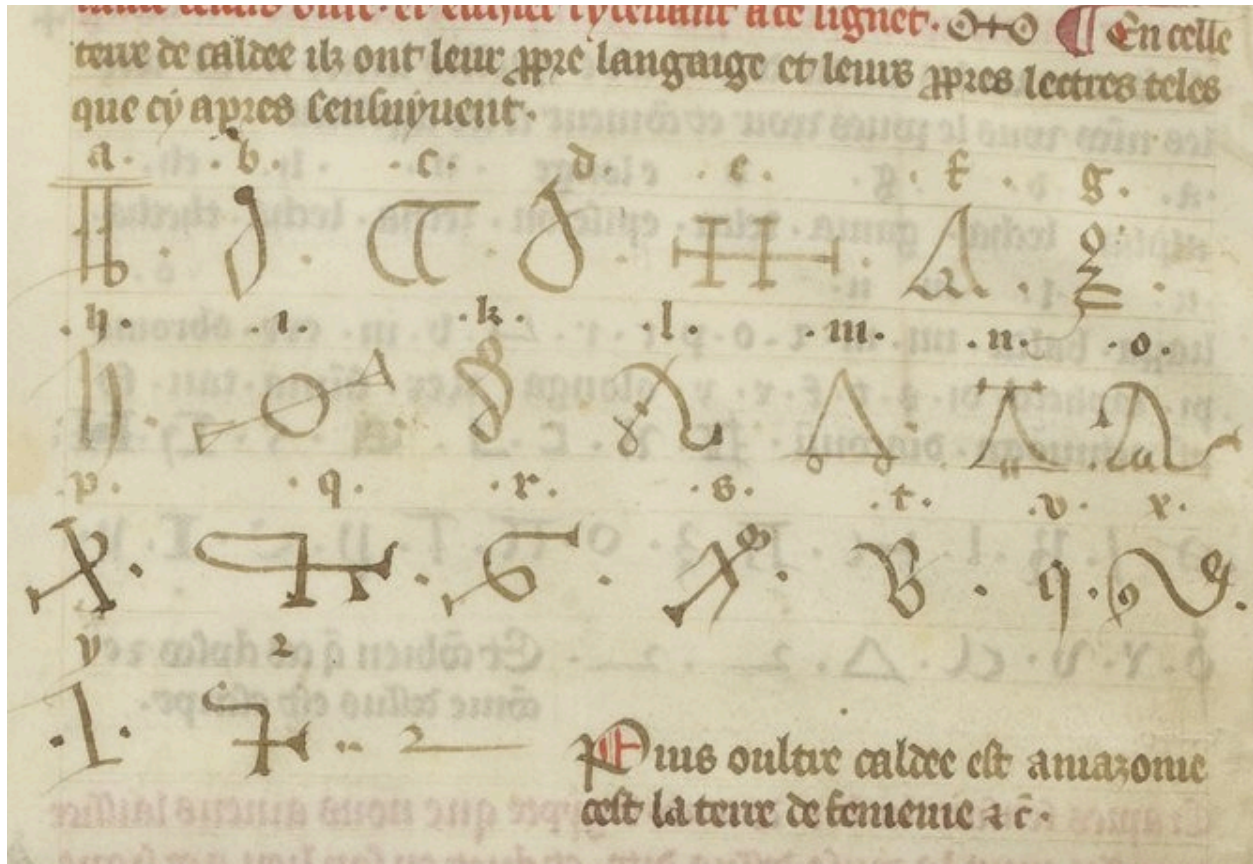


Figure 4.3. “Arabic Alphabet.” Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France NAF 4515 f.43v

In this example, Latin letters are not just interpolated, but Arabic characters are entirely replaced with their names written out in Latin letters. This is not the case in all of *TBJM* manuscripts.

Nonetheless, these are the scribe’s attempts to bring the foreign alphabets onto familiar ground. It not just compares letterforms, but also assumes that these writing systems are, indeed, alphabets; in other words, it fits foreign writing systems into the writer’s pre-existing cultural schema. A similar kind of comparison and assumption takes places when at one point the Mandeville author refers to the “bishops of the Jews”²⁹³ or when he announces of the fantastical country of Prester John, “The patriarch of Saint Thomas is just like a pope, and the archbishops are all kings in that

²⁹³ Higgins, 55. “evesqez des juys.” Deluz, 208.

country, and so are the bishops and the abbots.”²⁹⁴ Jews, of course, do not have bishops. The description of religious hierarchy in Prester John’s land is just after the description of his palace, which includes an extensive catalogue of the crystals and jewels that adorn it. Even in as wondrous a kingdom as Pentexoire, it seems, Latin Christian honorifics are still in place.

For those who were literate in Latin, five translations into that language were made of *TBJM*, and the most popular, called the Vulgate, in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Given Mandeville’s program of making his text more accessible by putting it into the vernacular, choosing to translate it back into Latin might seem an odd choice until several factors are accounted for. First, the Vulgate version does not purport to be a translation of anything. Second, as Higgins notes, in it a “closed-minded translator meets an open text.”²⁹⁵ This translator makes the Mandeville persona more pious and orthodox, presents other religions more negatively, and emphasizes the nature of the journey as a pilgrimage.²⁹⁶ What’s more, the translator works harder to cast Christians as the rightful possessors of the Holy Land. Emphasizing the pain that pious Christians ought to feel knowing that it is in the hands of Saracens, he informs the reader that it was lost for lack of virtue. Marianne O’Doherty notes that he is not merely grasping at empire for empire’s sake, but rather fretting about the potential spiritual consequences of a fracturing Christendom. Small wonder then that the translator has decided to use Latin to bring back the spiritual *auctoritas* that is not present in the vernacular versions. Ultimately, this translation

²⁹⁴ Higgins, 164. “Ly patriarches de Seint Thomas est aussy come papes, et ly archevesques sont touz roys en celle pays, et ensy sont ly evesques et ly abbés.” Deluz, 439.

²⁹⁵ Higgins, *TBJM* 206.

²⁹⁶ Iain Higgins, *Writing East: The “Travels” of Sir John Mandeville* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

represents the fact that *TBJM* is a complex, international text, capable of being read and appropriated for myriad purposes.

The Exotic

Among the many ways of considering language in *TBJM*, scholarly research has tended to consider its vernacular forms, its occasional Latinity, and the non-Latin alphabets that it often includes, which are discussed briefly above. These alphabets have been of especial interest to modern scholars, who have used them as touchstones to explore how Mandeville thinks about exoticism and cultural differences broadly. They are largely inaccurate and were sourced from chroniclers and encyclopedists. The text draws the reader's attention to them by pausing self-consciously. For example, at the end of the description of how Islam came into existence, Mandeville announces, "Since I have described for you part of their law and their customs, I will describe for you, if you like, what letters they have with the names that they call them."²⁹⁷ He then proceeds to list the letters in order. Marcia Kupfer has looked at the role of the surprisingly accurate Hebrew alphabet in a single French manuscript of *TBJM*, while Higgins says that taking the alphabets from their encyclopedic settings and putting them into a travel book has "rehumanized" them, and they "belong to peoples who resemble Latin Christians even as they differ."²⁹⁸ Kara L. McShane takes this one step further, arguing that "each alphabet negotiates cultural identity differently depending on English Christian positioning in relation to the culture

²⁹⁷ Higgins, 89. "Et puis qe jeo vous ay devisé partie de lour loy et de lour custumes, jeo vous deviseray si vous plect quells letters ils ount ovesqez les nouns si q'ils les appellent." Deluz, 283.

²⁹⁸ Higgins, *TBJM*, 268.

in question, and thus the work as a whole resists any straightforward reading of either variance or sameness across *The Book's* alphabetic cultures.”²⁹⁹

I do not disagree with any of these readings; my intention in the remainder of this chapter is to focus on the overlooked aspect of the Mandeville author's use of non-European foreign *words* in the text, and, even more particularly, how he “overwrites” his sources with these non-European words. Foreignness in language looks different at the level of the alphabet than it does at the level of the word, especially when those words refer to tangible objects that a fourteenth-century European might consider a luxury good.

Like the alphabets and his descriptions of marvels, Mandeville's foreign words feed a fourteenth-century Western European interest in the exotic. This interest is especially demonstrable among fourteenth-century English nobility. Edward III, to whom several of the Anglo-French manuscripts have a dedication, had crusading ambitions, and a court tournament of 1331 had its participants wear masks to look like Mongols.³⁰⁰ He was demonstrably interested in the Alexander legends and the tradition of “The Marvels of the East,” which described fantastical beasts and peoples in faraway lands.³⁰¹ Of the luxury goods at court, too, many were imported from Africa and Asia.³⁰² The Tower of London had had a menagerie that included exotic animals since the thirteenth century.

²⁹⁹ McShane, 28.

³⁰⁰ Michael J. Bennett, “MANDEVILLE'S TRAVELS AND THE ANGLO-FRENCH MOMENT,” *Medium Aevum* 75 no.2 (2006): 273-292.

³⁰¹ Ormrod, “John Mandeville, Edward III, and the King of Inde.”

³⁰² Pamela Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community: The Grocers' Company and the Politics of Trade of London, 1000-1485* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995) 70-72.

Books could contribute to fulfilling this desire for the exotic in several ways. In terms of content, stories of fantastical adventures in faraway lands are an obvious way, or descriptions of wondrous animals in a bestiary. Nobles could afford prestige, illuminated manuscripts, and illustrations can make these lands, peoples or adventures, feel more immediate. In the Parker Library's manuscript version of his *Chronica Majora*, Matthew Paris (1200-1259) mentions the elephant that King Henry III kept in his palace: "About this same time, too, an elephant was sent to England by the French king as a magnificent present to the king of England. We believe that this was the only elephant ever seen in England, or even in the countries on this side of the Alps; wherefore the people flocked together to see the sight."³⁰³ Also in the *Chronica Maiora* is a remarkably accurate illustration (at least, accurate in comparison to other medieval drawings of elephants).

³⁰³ Matthew Paris. *Matthew Paris's English History: Vol. I: From the Year 1235-1272*, trans. Rev. J.A. Giles (London: Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden, 1852) 115. "Tempore quoque sub eodem, missus est in Angliam quidam elephas, quem dominus rex Franciae pro magno munere dedit domino regi Anglorum. Nec credimus quod unquam aliquis elephas visus est in Anglia, immo nec etiam in partibus cisalpinis, praeter illum; unde confluebant populi ad tantae spectaculum novitatis." Matthaei Parisiensis, *Chronica Majora*, Vol. 5, ed. Henry Richards Luard (London: Longman & Co, 1880) 489.



Figure 4.4. *Chronica Maiora*. Cambridge: Corpus Christi College, MS 0161, f. iir

The elephant, its illustration, and various other ways in which Henry indulged his interest in exotic lands, creatures, and artifacts, all offered what Laura Julinda Whatley has described as “spectacular virtual adventures”³⁰⁴ to the courtly audiences who saw them. Part of what makes the elephant itself spectacular, of course, is its uniqueness “on this side of the Alps,” as Matthew Paris emphasizes. The corollary to this uniqueness, however, is that the number of people who

³⁰⁴ Laura Julinda Whatley, “Romance, Crusade, and the Orient in King Henry III of England’s Royal Chambers,” *Viator* 44, no. 3 (2013): 175-198.

can view it in person is limited, no matter how many people “flocked” to see it. Likewise, of the two manuscript copies of *Chronica Majora*, only one has a drawing of the elephant. Assuming that one of the (many) purposes of a chronicle or travel narrative was to offer its readers virtual adventures, how might an author do that without recourse to an actual elephant, or even a drawing of one? As a case in point, most of the Anglo-French versions of *TBJM* are not illustrated. BL MS Harley 1739, for example, identified as belonging to Richard Lee, London alderman and Warden of the Grocers’ Guild in the mid fifteenth century is not; neither is Bodleian Add. C. 280, which belonged to John Heruy, who joined Lincoln’s Inn, a legal society, in 1509. Beyond illustration, however, there are other ways to make faraway places, people, and objects feel more immediate and corporeal.

Thorough description, of course, is an option for doing this. To return to the example of bestiaries: Like the *TBJM* manuscripts themselves, medieval bestiaries were often illustrated, but not always, and even illustrated ones might not have pictures of every animal described. Likewise, one version of a text could have illustrations, but another may not. For example, Paris: BNF Latin 16169, a copy of Albertus Magnus’s *De animalibus* is a deluxe manuscript containing both a description and a reasonably accurate picture of an elephant; Paris: BNF Latin 6520, the same text, has a decorated frontispiece, but is otherwise unilluminated. In both manuscripts, the description of the elephant begins:

The elephant is the largest animal among the quadripeds, of which the same shape and copulation and generation enough was said above, also having a snout ten cubits in length, used in place of a hand, so as in war as in food as in other works; and at times it makes a noise sounding through the mouth and then the

sound is frightful, at other times it makes a sound through the trunk: and then the sound that is brought about is sweet as in the hollow of a great pipe.³⁰⁵

The description continues with an explanation of which other animals the elephant fears (mice and the grunting of pigs), how it has no joints in its legs, and what curative properties its excrement has. About the rumor that dragons drink elephants' blood to cool themselves, Albertus remarks, "But I believe this to be fabulous" (*fabulosum*), this note of skepticism lending credibility to his list of the elephant's other, slightly-less-fabulous features.

Even this thorough description, however, could well leave a medieval reader at a loss as to what to imagine. In the absence of the object, the signifier is necessarily its translation, a step removed from the object itself. Arguably, a description of the object is also a translation, a necessarily circuitous attempt to bring to life something that inherently cannot be recreated with words. This becomes even more obvious when one attempts to describe an exotic object, or one from a foreign culture. Homi Bhabha explains this impossibility of translation, and then a kind of double impossibility in translating across cultures:

The newness of cultural translation is akin to what Walter Benjamin describes as the 'foreignness of languages' – that problem of representation native to representation itself... With the concept of 'foreignness' Benjamin comes closest to describing the performativity of translation as the staging of cultural difference. The argument begins with the suggestion that though *Brot* and *pain* intend the same object, *bread*, their discursive and cultural *modes of signification* are in conflict with each other, striving to exclude each other. The complementarity of language as communication must be understood as emerging from the constant state of contestation and flux caused by the differential systems of social and cultural signification. This process of complementarity as the agonistic

³⁰⁵ Translation my own. Albert Magnus, *De animalibus*, ed. Hermann Stadler (Münster 1920), in: *Beiträge zur geschichte der philosophie des mittelalters: Texte und Untersuchungen*, ed. Clemens Baeumker. Vol. XVI. liber XXII, tract. 2, cap. 1.37, p. 1376. "Elefas est animal maius inter quadrupedia de cuius quidem figura et coitu et generatione satis in antehabitis dictum est, promuscidam enim habens longitudine decem cubitorum utitur ea loco manus tam in bello quam in cibo quam in aliis operibus; et sonans aliquando sonat per os et tunc terribilis est sonus, aliquando autem sonat per promuscidam: et tunc efficitur dulcis sicut est sonus in concavo magnae fistulae."

supplement is the seed of the ‘untranslatable’ – the foreign element in the midst of the performance of cultural translation.³⁰⁶

Although he is discussing translating between modern languages, Bhabha’s formulation of the untranslatable resonates with medieval formulations of translation as well. In *De doctrina christiana*, Augustine encourages the study of foreign languages because some words or idioms will be impossible to translate accurately.³⁰⁷ John Fyler points out that Jean de Meun’s, Dante’s, and Chaucer’s ideas about language all rely on the idea, also developed by Augustine, that human language has degenerated since the expulsion from Paradise.³⁰⁸ The correspondence between word and thing existed in Adamic language, but not fallen language. If this is the case, the translation of what is already a fallen language must be even further removed from the thing itself. In the context of attaining “perfect wisdom” (*sapientia perfecta*), Roger Bacon expresses the same set of concerns when he explains that Latin is lacking in vocabulary necessary to name things described by foreign authors.³⁰⁹ This formulation of what is the untranslatable can function as a useful lens through which to understand Mandeville’s descriptions of objects – particularly plants and animals – outside Latin Christendom. The contexts are vastly different, of course: Bhabha is describing Western Europe’s colonizing impulse, while thirteenth- and fourteenth- century England did not yet have its sights set on creating an empire. At the root of both contexts, however, is a kind of fetishism. Divorced of its original social context, the object

³⁰⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 1994) 325.

³⁰⁷ *De doctrina christiana*, Book 2.

³⁰⁸ John M. Fyler, *Language and the Declining World in Chaucer, Dante, and Jean de Meun* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁰⁹ Roger Bacon, “Opus Tertium.” *Opera quaedam hactenus inedita Vol I, Containing: 1. Opus tertium. - 2. Opus minus - 3. Compendium philosophiae*, ed. J.S. Brewer (Burlington : TannerRitchie Publishing in collaboration with the Library and Information Services of the University of St Andrews, 2008).

becomes strange and inscrutable -- but that much more valuable and interesting -- to the reader. The Latin language might have a word for elephant, *elefas*, but its mode of signification would not be the same for a medieval reader who had never seen one, as it would have been for, say, Matthew Paris, who had.³¹⁰ To mean anything to a reader who had never seen an elephant, the word must be accompanied by a description, but for the description itself to mean anything, it must use words the reader understands, and assimilate to what is already known. In assimilating to what is already known, the description lacks the ability to represent anything entirely foreign.

Given this necessity for assimilation, but also given an often secular audience with a taste for the exotic, how can the Mandeville author provide the experience of the entirely foreign, thus providing a reader with a yet more spectacular “spectacular virtual adventure”? A solution could be to bring in to the text an untranslated word; or, *a thing that is entirely foreign*. (Again, in a different context, this is also Roger Bacon’s solution to Latin’s lack of vocabulary: when translating, he advises, use a foreign word and don’t bother with finding an imperfect Latin equivalent.) In *TBJM*, the Mandeville author describes elephants at the court of a king in Southeast Asia as such:

And he has a good fourteen thousand or more tame elephants that he has fed by his servants in the towns, for in case he goes to war with some other king thereabouts, he has people mounted in castles on his elephants to fight his adversaries and so do all the other kings around there. *For the way in which they go to war over there is not at all the order of battle over here* [emphasis mine]. And the elephants are called *barkes*.³¹¹

³¹⁰ Even an accompanying illustration might still not adequately convey an image. Take, for example, John of Wallingford’s copy of Matthew Paris’ elephant in BL Cotton MS Julius D VII f.114r, which is inexplicably pink.

³¹¹ Higgins, 119. “Et si ad bien XIII^mil des olifantz privez ou plus q’il fait norir a ses vilains par my les villes, qar en cas q’il averoit guerre a ascun autre roy d’enviroun, il fait mounter de gentz en chastels sur ses olifantz pur combattre a ses adversaires et ensy font les autres roys la entour. Qar la manere de guerroyer par dela n’est pas de tout de l’ordenance de cea. Et appelle homme la ly olifantz *barkes*.” Deluz, 347.

This description of soldiers going to battle in castles on the backs of elephants is a common one in medieval descriptions of the military customs of East Asia. In *The Rochester Bestiary*, British Library Royal MS 12 F XIII, folio 11v, the reader is provided with a picture of this³¹²:



Figure 4.5. London: British Library Royal MS 12 F XIII (*The Rochester Bestiary*) f. 11v

³¹² Incidentally, *The Rochester Bestiary* also provides two words for “elephant”: *elephas* and *barrus*. The bestiary authors claim that the elephant is called *barrus* in India, after the word *barritus*, which means “trumpeting.” *Barritus*, however, is a Latin word; *barkes* is not.

In the bestiary, the illustration embodies the exoticness of the elephant and the military strategy. In *TBJM*, the phrase, “For the way in which they go to war over there is not at all the order of battle over here,” an attempt to emphasize how strange this animal and custom is, can only embody exoticness negatively, because, to have any meaning, a contrast necessarily compares to something *already known*. That is, a contrast explains what something is *unlike*, requiring the reader to understand *a priori* what something is, but does provide a positive model for the second item in the comparison. What instead embodies the foreign is the word *barkes*, which, as Iain Higgins notes, occurs as *warkes* or *karkes* in some copies. The strangeness of any of the versions of this word is what substitutes for the strangeness of the picture, and what helps provide a positive model for that second item in the contrast. Or, to put it another way, the foreign word is the closest that Mandeville can come to bringing an artifact from his travels in Asia back to Europe.

One might argue that this “bringing back” an artifact is still metaphorical, in that the word is still only a signifier, attached to a page, and dependent upon the audience’s imagination. A fourteenth-century reader however could have had a different conception of metaphor as more than metaphorical. Augustine explores the relationship between sign and thing in the first book of *De doctrina christiana*: “No one uses words except as signs of something else; and hence may be understood what I call signs: those things, to wit, which are used to indicate something else. Accordingly, every sign is also a thing; for what is not a thing is nothing at all.”³¹³ The idea that words have a tangible quality persisted. Albeit in the context of documentary culture instead of

³¹³ *De doctrina christiana*, Book 1, Chap. 2. “Nemo enim utitur verbis nisi aliquid significandi gratia. Ex quo intellegitur quid appellem signa: res eas videlicet quae ad significandum aliquid adhibentur. Quamobrem omne signum etiam res aliqua est; quod enim nulla res est, omnino nihil est.”

travel literature, Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, points to the eleventh- and twelfth-century debates over universals, the real presence of God in the Eucharist, and the emergence of nominalism to explain “the new semiotic conception that a sign be representative through its capacity to embody the ontological characteristics of its referent.”³¹⁴ She explains that the use of wax seals on documents came to be representative of a document’s author *in situ*, and this was an extension of the idea that the doctrine of transubstantiation is not metaphorical, and that the Eucharist truly becomes the blood and body of Christ. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas dealt with some of these same concerns about the Eucharist in his *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei lecture*, saying that a sacrament is “a sign that effects what it signifies.”³¹⁵ Bedos-Rezak explains how this theological discussion extended to semiotics in general: a personal seal on a document was an extension of the author’s identity, and worked to personify him as well as real presence. A fourteenth-century reader could conceivably consider a unique sign to embody the identity of its object in a way that would bring them closer to the object’s real presence.

This is not to say that a fourteenth century reader would have understood the word *warkes* as the *same* as an elephant, or that reading the word was performing any kind of transformative sacrament. Similarities exist, however, between the experience of reading a foreign word and the doctrine of transubstantiation. The mystery of the Eucharist cannot be fully comprehended by humans and must be taken on faith,³¹⁶ if it were to be understood by humans, it would cease to be the thing that it is. Likewise, Bhabha’s “seed of foreignness” is inherently

³¹⁴ Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 9 (2000): 1521.

³¹⁵ “Sacramenta novae legis efficiunt quod signant,” quoted in Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014) 239.

³¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III.75.1.

untranslatable, and trying to translate it turns it into something it is not. The kind of mystery that is a foreign word in *TBJM* is, in this way, the same kind of mystery that the idea of “mystery” draws upon etymologically: something closed, hidden away. To uncover it makes it not itself. Counterintuitively then, it is the mysteriousness of *barkes* that makes it closer to bringing back an elephant from the East than thorough description.

To illustrate: returning once more to the example of elephants, *barkes* may have come from Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies*, which provides the Indian word for elephant as *barrus*.³¹⁷ The word is *not* in Mandeville’s primary source for this portion of the text, which is Odoric of Pordenone’s *Relatio*. Mandeville took a majority of the second half of his narrative from the *Relatio*, in which the Franciscan friar Odoric describes his mission in Central, Southern, and East Asia from 1318 to 1329. (More specifically, he used the monk Jean Le Long’s French translation of 1351, but since the content is Odoric’s, I will refer to him as the author.) Odoric does provide some of the native names for plants and animals that he comes across, along with their descriptions, but in places where he does not include names, Mandeville tends to provide them. This is in accordance with Higgins’s claim that Odoric tends to focus on “veracity” as opposed to describing “mirabilia”³¹⁸; in this case, Higgins is referring to descriptions of marvelous races, but the same seems to hold true for marvelous languages. To wit, Jean Le Long’s translation of Odoric’s passage about domestic elephants, which inspired Mandeville, reads as follows: “Celui rois a bien XVIII^M oliffans privez, lesquels il fait gardeir et nourrir par les gens de ses villes.”³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Higgins, *TBJM*, 119n.

³¹⁸ Higgins, *Writing East*, 143.

³¹⁹ “This king has a good 14,000 domestic elephants, which he has watched and fed by the people of his towns.” Andreose and Menard, 32.

Mandeville has added that the elephants were used in battle, how they were used in battle, and – of course - the foreign word for “elephant.” And, seemingly to drive home how fabulous this all is, he points out that nothing like this exists in Europe.

As another case in point, Mandeville’s discussion of pepper in the description of the islands in the Indian Ocean says, “There are three kinds of pepper all on one tree: long pepper, white pepper, and black pepper. The long pepper is called *sorbetin*, and the black is called *fffulful*, and the white *bano*.”³²⁰ Higgins notes that *fulful* is Arabic for “pepper”; like the alphabets, which although inaccurate bear some resemblance to reality³²¹, Mandeville’s foreign words are not purely a product of his imagination. (The source(s) of the other two words, as Higgins points out, is unknown.) His imagination, however, was not inspired by Odoric in this case; Odoric describes how pepper is grown, harvested, and dried, and he compares it to grapes (*comme raisins*), but does not differentiate between three types, and he does not provide any native names for it.³²² Mandeville could be toying with the tendency of medieval natural or scientific treatises to keep Greek or Arabic technical terms in their original languages; Isidore of Seville and Albertus Magnus do this with Greek, for example. Gerard of Cremona (c.1114-1187) does this with Arabic; in translating Al-Nayrizi’s (fl. 900) commentary on Euclid, for example, he uses the

³²⁰ Higgins, 105. “Et si ad trois maneres de poivre tout en un arbre poivre long, poivre noir, et poivre blanc. Le poivre long, ils appellent *sorbetin* et le noir ils appellent *fffulful*, et ly blanc *bano*. Deluz, 319.

³²¹ See Higgins, *TBJM*, Appendix C, No. 3. for a discussion of the alphabets’ sources.

³²² Andreose et Ménard, 22.

word *meguar* instead of “axis.”³²³ Mandeville could merely be following a trope; or, he might be following a trope in order to lend a cast of encyclopedic authority to his work.

Nonetheless, whatever he might lack in “veracity,” Mandeville makes up for not just in *mirabilia*, but in something that approaches an artifact from abroad. Indeed, the three different names act as a type of verbal ornament. As explained above, Roger Bacon encourages the use of neologisms in writing for the sake of exactness, but others did too for the sake of capturing audience interest. Ramon Llull, for example, argues, “[P]eople delight more in hearing new and strange words...Just as a thing is more substantial when it is said about *esse* than about *bene esse*, so every new strange word comes closer to [satisfying] the desire of the soul that lacks it, than do old words that the soul has used in matters where the soul finds no fulfillment.”³²⁴ Amusingly, but not coincidentally I think, several modern scholars have called Odoric “dull”³²⁵, and it is not surprising that Mandeville would want to add ornament to his text. The idea of Llull’s verbal ornament that excites curiosity in this passage takes on a somewhat more corporeal cast in Mandeville.

In certain cases wherein a name for a foreign object is provided by Mandeville’s primary source text, he amplifies its foreignness by incorporating another word from a different source text. When describing the island of Cyprus, for example, he mines primarily from William of

³²³ Anaritius; Gerard of Cremona, *Gerard of Cremona's translation of the commentary of Al-Nayrizi on Book I of Euclid's Elements of geometry : with an introductory account of the twenty-two early extant Arabic manuscripts of the Elements* (Boston : Brill Academic Publishers, 2003) 20.

³²⁴ Ramon Llull, *Libre de contemplació*, chapter 359.25-26. Qtd. in: Mark D Johnston, *The evangelical Rhetoric of Ramon Llull* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 88.

³²⁵ These critics include Moseley, who unequivocally calls him “dull.” Higgins, who describes Odoric’s account as “breathless and untidy,” and “inferior in intelligence and style not only to William of Boldensele’s memoir, but also to the records of his Franciscan predecessors in Asia, John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck.” Igor Rachewiltz, while he does not call Odoric boring, describes the friar as “naïve and somewhat gullible.”

Boldensele's *Liber de quibusdam ultramarinis partibus et praecipue de terra sancta*, although, as he did with Odoric, he mostly uses Jean le Long's French translation. About Cypriot hunting practices he writes, "On Cyprus they hunt with papions that look like tamed leopards that catch the wild animals all too well. They are a little bigger than lions and fiercer, and they catch the wild animals more violently and more fiercely than the dogs do. They also hunt with tamed dogs, but the papions hunt more fiercely."³²⁶ William's Latin, also, describing Cypriot hunting practices, focuses on the prey, the "wild sheep" that move quickly but have "good, sweet meat." He continues, saying, "I have seen many captured, brought forth in hunting with dogs and chiefly with tamed leopards."³²⁷ John le Long's French translation uses for the phrase "tamed leopards," "luppars princiez."³²⁸ Whether the animal is a leopard or not, the point is that Mandeville has gone outside his main source text to provide both extra description for it, and a name. In the first place, he has swapped the emphasis on the more placid prey animal for an in-depth description of the more violent, more exciting predator. Then, as Higgins points out, he has turned to Jacques de Vitry's *Historia Orientalis* for the name: "There are also *papiones*, which they call wild dogs, fiercer than wolves, and howling at night with unceasing noises."³²⁹ Beyond Jacques de Vitry's

³²⁶ Higgins, 19. "En Cypre l'en chace ovesqez papiouns qe semblent leopardz privez qe prignent trop bien les bestes savages et son un poy plus grantz qe leon et plus aigres et prignent les bestes savages plus asprement et plus aigrement qe les chiens ne facent. L'en chace auxi ovesqez chiens domestes mes les papiouns chacent plus aigrement." Deluz, 123.

³²⁷ William of Boldensele, "Die Edelherren von Boldensele, oder Boldensele," *Zeitschrift des historischen Vereins für Niederachsen*, ed. Carl L. Grotefend (Hanover: 1855) 31. Translation my own. "oves silvaticae"; "bonas carnes et dulces"; "Plures capi vidi, existens in venatione cum canibus et maxime domesticis leopardis."

³²⁸ William of Boldensele. *Liber de quibusdam ultramarinis partibus et praecipue de terra sancta : de Guillaume de Boldensele (1336) ; suivi de la traduction de Frère Jean le Long (1351)*, ed. Christiane Deluz, Thèse 3^e cycle Lettres (Paris, 1972) 302.

³²⁹ Jacques de Vitry, *Historia Orientalis* (Ex Officina Typographica Balthazaris Belleri: 1596) 176. <https://archive.org/details/IacobiDeVitriacoCardinalisLibriDuo1596/page/n229>. "Sunt tibi papiones quos canes siluestres appellant, lupis aciores, continuis clamoribus de nocte vlulates."

use of the term, there is no evidence of its occurrence anywhere else (besides Mandeville, of course), and we have no further information about its etymology.³³⁰ It is significant that Mandeville would choose a *hapax legomenon* to include in his description, and one without apparent connections to any other words, since that makes the animal he is describing all that more exotic. The word itself is a unique artifact, attached only to a mysterious and fierce beast on a faraway island.

Even while one can say that Mandeville “chose” these *hapax legomena*, we do not have an autographed copy of his work, and ultimately we can only know what scribes chose to include in their copies. As mentioned above, the word for elephant occurs in various copies as *barkes*, *warkes*, and *karkes*; that is, the unique words may even be unique to their own manuscripts. Indeed, it is the very fact that these words are so unusual that result in their multitude of variations. Mark Cruse points to this phenomenon in his analysis of place names in the manuscripts of Marco Polo’s *Devisement du monde*, wherein the scribes’ unfamiliarity with foreign toponyms means that the same place is referred to by several, slightly varying names, even within the same manuscript.³³¹ The proliferation of unique toponyms without social or institutional reference in fourteenth-century Europe, Cruse points out, means that these words can become existing places in the minds of their audience. In the case of the Marco Polo manuscripts, Cruse suggests that some noble readers of the text could think about toponyms in terms of different kinds of power and wealth, and where those reside. I would like to suggest a

³³⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*. “papion.”

³³¹ Mark Cruse, “A Quantitative Analysis of Toponyms in a Manuscript of Marco Polo’s *Devisement du monde* (London, British Library, MS Royal 19 D1).” *Speculum* 92 no. S1 (2017): S247-S264. <https://doi.org/10.1086/694170>.

similar interpretation for the variations across French Mandeville manuscripts. Across three different manuscripts, the words for types of pepper, mentioned above, occur as *sarbotin*, *phissul*, *banos*, and *danole*.³³² Each of these texts brings back a unique, exotic artifact that lends prestige to the manuscript, and by extension its owner.

It is no coincidence that the words under discussion have all been names for flora and fauna. Giving names to plants and animals recalls the beginning of Genesis, wherein Adam does this in Paradise. Susan Crane points out, “Within temporality, each animal was decisively conceived as soon as Adam spoke its name,”³³³ and the idea that naming something brings it into being is pertinent here. The notion of a word as substitute for a desirable, foreign artifact is most effective when it names something tangible that *could* and sometimes *was* brought back from a long voyage. To wit, a study of archaeobotanical records in northwestern Europe and England have shown that a large number of exotic condiments, fruits, and vegetables were known in the medieval period, but their possession and use was restricted to the elite classes.³³⁴ I have already mentioned Henry III’s elephant, but his menagerie also included lions and a polar bear.

That said, I should caution that there are, indeed, other categories of foreign words Mandeville uses. There are names for titles: he gives three different words for the Islamic Qur’an as *Alkaron*, *Meshaaf*, and *Harme*. Although a different sort of title, he tells the reader that *Cadebiriz* are a group of men on an island in the Indian Ocean who take the virginity from young brides to protect their husbands from snakes that might potentially be living in their bodies. He

³³² Deluz, 319n.

³³³ Susan Crane. *Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) 90.

³³⁴ Alexandra Livarda, “Spicing Up Life in Northwestern Europe: Exotic Food Plant Imports in the Roman and Medieval World,” *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 20, no. 2 (03, 2011): 143-164.

provides a war cry of people living north of the Balkans as “*Kera, Kera, Kera!*” I would argue, however, that these words represent things that are either less desirable (a Qur’an) or more difficult (a person, a sound) to bring back. There are few points at which Mandeville gives a foreign word for an *object* that is not a plant or animal, but when he does, its desirability is obvious. In his description of the Great Khan’s court, he writes that while in the presence of Christian monks, “he takes off his *galahoth* – which sits on his head like a felt hat, [and] which is made of gold and precious stones and large pearls, and it is so rich that it would be worth a kingdom in this country – and bows to the cross.”³³⁵ This passage evokes the thought of spectacular wealth in conjunction with a foreign, pagan leader’s deference to Christianity. And a hat – a small, tangible thing - would be easy enough to bring back.

Conclusion: Balm

In the section where Mandeville describes Egypt, he explains that balm³³⁶ grows in a field outside Cairo, and in that field “are seven wells, one of which was made by the feet of Our Lord Jesus Christ when He went to play with the other children.”³³⁷ He lists its various names:

“The Saracens call the wood *enothblasse*, and the fruit, which is like cubebs, they call

³³⁵ Higgins, 145. “...il ouste sa *galahoth* qe siet sur sa teste en guyse d’un chapeau de feutre, qe est fait d’or et des pierres precieuses et de grosses perles, et est si riche qe homme le priseroit bien une roialme en ceo pays, et s’encline a la croiz.” Deluz, 401.

³³⁶ Higgins explains that this “balm” is the resin of the balsam tree, similar to myrrh, and was rare and expensive. It had medicinal, alchemical, and ritual uses.

³³⁷ Higgins, 31. “En ceo chaump y a VII fontaignes don’t Nostre Seignur Jhesu Crist en fist un des ses piez quant il aloit juer ovesqez les autres enfantz.” Deluz, 153.

abebissam, and the sap that flows from the branches they call *quybalse*.”³³⁸ He then claims that only Christians can cultivate this balm, and then segues into a detailed explanation of how to tell real balm from counterfeit. The result of this arrangement is a repeated parallel between Christian lore and valuable, exotic artifact. The second part of the artifact description is not even obliquely about possession; it is, quite literally, about how to purchase a product. It is worth noting that the section on balm does appear in William of Boldensele’s account, as well as Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies*. Like Mandeville, Isidore gives different names for the balsam tree’s wood, fruit, and sap, as well as a description of how to tell whether the sap has been adulterated, but he does not attach its production to any religious group.³³⁹ William of Boldensele does, but with a few differences: he says the balm trees grow where Mary poured out the water she had used to wash Jesus’ clothes, and he does not include the lengthy portion about how to test balm’s purity. As Elly Truitt notes, the change in the type of miracle that Mandeville makes, “rationalize[s] Christian dominion over Egypt,”³⁴⁰ that he also includes all of its various foreign names and a section on buying it encourages this all the more.

The polysemousness of foreign words in general has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, but I end specifically with the discussion of balm because of the way that *TBJM* cuts off that polysemousness through its reification and juxtaposition with Christian imagery. Having been brought as close to corporeality as possible through the “Saracen” names that Mandeville

³³⁸ Higgins, 31. “Ly Sarazin z appellent le bois *enothblasse*, et le fruit q’est comme quibibes ils appellent *abebissam*, et la licor qe degoute des braunches ils appellent *guybalse*.” Deluz, 153.

³³⁹ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, trans. and ed. Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 349.

³⁴⁰ Elly Truitt. “The Virtues of Balm in Late Medieval Literature,” *Early Science and Medicine*, 14, No. 6 (2009): 711-736.

lists, he then broaches the possibility of counterfeit balm and Muslim deception. Something with the same name as the balm could actually be one of several different things. But, in the way that the text constructs the description, real balm is firmly attached to Christ and Christians. It is likely not coincidental that the longest passage on a possibly forged object is attached to New Testament imagery (as opposed to Old Testament or Psalm imagery). Christ is the Word made flesh; Christians continue to have access to this in that most real of metaphors, the Eucharist. Christ walked in the field where the balm grows, and now real balm can only be grown by Christians. Through the Eucharist, Christians continue to have access to metaphors – words – that become reality. In this passage, balm *is* Christian.

Mandeville's missionary sources are, of course, more than just the context against which to display exotic words and take possession of them; as the bulk of his travelogue, he reshapes and transforms them in multiple ways. As a corollary, some of the missionary sources themselves contain exotic words, and not all of Mandeville's are drawn from non-missionary ones. It is the pattern of questioning and manipulating that Latinity, however and the way in which he sets Asiatic words against that background that suggest the use of particular interpretive strategies and to think of what and how they would mean to a fourteenth-century Francophone English reader. These interpretations, so dependent on the interplay between Latin and the foreign, suggest a particular interest of the audience in this historical moment.

Conclusion

After the mid-fourteenth century, few traces of the Roman Church remained in the region that is today's China. Of the four ilkhanates that made up what was once Chinggis Khan's empire, the three westernmost adopted Islam. While the easternmost, the Yuan Dynasty, did not, the Ming Dynasty ousted them in 1368. This new dynasty ceased to offer the friars the "favourable patronage"³⁴¹ the khans had previously accorded them. From the European side, the Black Death (1348-1351) drastically reduced the number of current and potential missionaries. Additionally, the Great Schism (1378-1417) between the popes at Avignon and Rome "risked diluting papal attempts to sustain the Orders' activities"³⁴² as they focused their energies elsewhere than missionary activity. In any case, approximately two centuries elapsed before the newer Jesuit order once again took up Roman Catholic missions to East Asia in the late sixteenth century. These missions were substantially more successful: for reasons beyond the scope of this project, the rulers in these years of the Ming Dynasty were more tolerant of the Europeans' proselytizing. It was not only Chinese policy, however, that contributed to this success. These new Jesuit missionaries learned Chinese, and "not just any local colloquial idiom but the refined speech of the mandarins, *guanhua*."³⁴³ Intensive language study was largely the reason they were successful to any degree in their conversion efforts. Liam Matthew Brockey estimates that by the year 1700, there were approximately 200,000 Chinese Christians.³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and The West: 1221-1410*, Second edition (Routledge: London and New York, 2018) 301.

³⁴² Jackson, 300.

³⁴³ R. Po-chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci 1552-1610* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 62.

³⁴⁴ Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008) 4.

In this dissertation I hope to have demonstrated the utility of examining how language functions in cases where it is ostensibly *not* successful in its social function. Chapter 1 examined three case studies of Franciscan friars - William of Rubruck, John of Plano Carpini, and Odoric of Pordenone - who traveled to the Mongol Empire and who did not know the local language(s). Through an analysis of the ways in which they necessarily mediated their spoken Latin through translation, both abroad and when back in Europe, I argue that Latinity becomes fraught and messy in ways that force them to contend with their identities as Roman Christians vis-à-vis the world outside Western Europe. Chapter 2 moves to written Latin in the form of short letters sent across the Asian continent. Here, using the letters of Pope Innocent IV, John of Montecorvino, Peregrine of Castello, and Andrew of Perugia as case studies, I argue that epistolary genre conventions can be manipulated to convey both explicit and indirect messages. Looking at the letters through this lens suggests new interpretations of the social functions of both Innocent's and the friars' letters.

From short letters, Chapter 3 moves to discussing Latin books outside Europe, particularly those books' materiality. Here I use Riccoldo of Montecroce as a touchstone to talk about the role books played in friars' missionary efforts in Asia, how they viewed the Qur'an as material object, and how they thought about the destruction of both Christian books and those of other religions. While many scholars have discussed the destruction or loss of churches and relics outside Europe, the place of books specifically has been neglected. I argue that a discussion of the materiality of Latin books abroad provide new dimensions and a more complete picture of inter-religious conflict, specifically between Christians and Muslims, during this time period. Finally, looking at *The Book of John Mandeville* as a case study, Chapter 4 culminates with a

discussion of how Latin produced abroad could be manipulated and transformed for other social functions back in Western Europe. I argue that Mandeville simultaneously demonstrates a suspicion of Latin's status as a language of *auctoritas* while using it to lend *auctoritas* to his own work. Against this backdrop, non-European words can function like exotic artifacts brought back from a voyage abroad.

Examining the texts of these missionary friars through the lens of Latin and Latinity is twofold. In the first place, it highlights an important way in which medieval Western European religious, ethnic, and geographical communities could construct their own identities against those of others. Even when these texts were read in Europe after being penned by their authors, the ways in which they tackle Latinity form an integral component of their reception. Perhaps more crucially, this dissertation contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations about the global Middle Ages. A great deal of important work has been done in recent years within this subdiscipline, but discussions of language in particular have been either tangential or absent. I hope to have shown the value of how a sustained treatment of a language's social function can illuminate our understanding of cross-cultural, trans-continental interactions in the medieval world. Moreover, it underscores that Latin is never a socially neutral language whether at home or abroad. When removed from its native environment, this becomes ever more obvious in the way that the friars must wrestle with the ways in which their identity is tied to their Latinity. The ways in which it works across various spaces and the new forms it can take on are a testament to the fact that, even in the pre-modern world a *lingua franca* or a sacred language is never just one-dimensional in its social function.

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