An Early Moment in the Discourse of "Terrorism:" Reflections on a Tale from Marco Polo

BRUCE LINCOLN

University of Chicago

My goal in this paper is to revisit a classic text that raises the most contemporary of issues: Marco Polo's stereotyped, highly influential, and highly prejudicial description of the "Old Man of the Mountain," a text of virtually mythic status and power. Having invoked the category of "myth," however, in a context where it is not commonly applied, it is useful to indicate how I use this term and why it seems appropriate. To begin, I would reject three widely accepted notions. First, myths are not sacred narratives. Although many myths claim sacred status, in this they misrecognize their own nature, for they are human stories, like any other. They simply make more exaggerated claims to a more elevated kind of authority. Second, myths are not collective narratives or the speech of any group as a whole. Rather, they are stories that are told and retold in countless variants. Often the authorship of these variants is unacknowledged, forgotten, or deliberately hidden, but in its details each variant advances the specific interests of those responsible for its production, revision, and circulation. These anonymous agents and absent authors misrepresent themselves—and those for whom they speak—as the group as a whole. Third, myths are neither false stories, nor true, but simply stories that claim to speak with authority about issues of deep importance. Sometimes these claims succeed and sometimes they fail, and the same story can change its status over time from myth to fable and back again, since such status is a function of reception.

If myths are not sacred, not collective, not true or false, what distinguishes them from other narratives? My best attempt at definition runs as follows: Myth is ideology in narrative form. More precisely, mythic discourse deals in master categories that have multiple referents: levels of the cosmos, terrestrial geographies, plant and animal species, logical categories, and the like. Their plots serve to organize the relations among these categories and to justify a hierarchy among them, establishing the rightness (or at least the necessity) of a world in which heaven is above earth, the lion the king of beasts, the cooked more pleasing than the raw. Sometimes issues of human

0010-4175/06/242–259 $9.50 © 2006 Society for Comparative Study of Society and History

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

society are given explicit attention—in stories that treat the relations of men and women, uncles and nephews, our tribe and its neighbors, etcetera—and sometimes these are left implicit, as when stories about lions serve to make points about royalty. But always this concern to rank (or to recalibrate the ranking of) human groups is present, and this is the most consequential aspect of any mythic story.[1]

Scholars have long recognized Polo's description of the "Old Man of the Mountain" as a text that raises the most contemporary of themes: the conjunction of religion, politics, violence, and fear. Beyond this, as I hope to show, it also takes pains to ponder the relations of three populations—Christians, Muslims, and Mongols—that encountered one another in the Middle East and Central Asia of the thirteenth century. Certain events disrupted what Polo's Christian audience considered the normative hierarchic ranking of these peoples, and his text responded to this situation in an extremely creative, and hitherto unappreciated way. But we are getting ahead of our story.

II

After twenty-four years of travels in Asia (1271–1295), Messer Marco Polo returned to Venice, only to be captured by the Genoese shortly thereafter, following which he was put in prison, where he remained from 1298 until July 1299.[2] There, he encountered a certain Rustichello da Pisa, an author of chivalric romances.[3] Apparently a friendship developed and the two men co-authored a text that combined the literary genres Rustichello controlled and the content Polo gathered in Asia. The latter included memories of his own experience and the hearsay testimony of others, as their prologue acknowledges:

> Those who will find all the greatest marvels and the great diversities of Greater Armenia and Persia, of the Tartars and of India, and many other territories, our book will relate them to you openly, in the order that Messer Marco Polo, a wise and noble citizen of Venice, recounted them, just as he saw them with his own eyes. There are also things that he did not see, but heard from reliable and truthful men.

[1] I have treated these issues most extensively in *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[2] Unless otherwise cited, I have followed the critical edition of the earliest Franco-Italian text: Luigi Foscolo Benedetto, ed., *Il Milione, prima edizione integrale* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1928). The information regarding the circumstances of the text's writing is found in its first chapter (pp. 3–4).

[3] Rustichello, who is sometimes referred to as Rusticiano da Pisa, is best known for a "Romance of Palamedes" that makes use of Arthurian materials. The text is available in E. Löseth, ed., *Le Roman en prose de Tristan, le roman de Palamède et la compilation de Rusticien de Pise, Analyse critique d'après les manuscrits de Paris* (Paris: Émile Bouillon, 1890). See further Giorgio del Guerra, *Rustichello da Pisa* (Pisa: Nistri Lischi, 1955).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Therefore, we will set down the things that were seen as seen, and those heard as heard, so that our book may be true and dependable, without any lies. And those who read or hear this book can believe it, for all these things are true.[4]

The chance encounter of a Venetian merchant and a Pisan author in a Genoese jail thus made possible the production of a text that rapidly diffused throughout Europe.[5] It was not random fortune, however, that prompted the merchant's travels.[6] Rather, this came in response to large historic forces: specifically, the way the Crusader beachhead in the Levant (1100–1291) coupled with Mongol conquests further east (1206–1260) conspired to permit the resumption of trade in silk, spices, and other precious goods, which had been disrupted since the rise of Islam in the seventh century.

Vatican diplomats were the first to investigate the new opportunities.[7] In their immediate wake followed merchants, led by Niccolò and Maffeo Polo, who in 1260 set out from Constantinople and made their way to Sudak, Bukhara, and Beijing (Khan-balik) before returning home. In Beijing, they met with Kubilai Khan (r. 1259–1294) and when they made ready to depart, he sent an ambassador with them, bearing a letter for the Pope. In addition, he asked the brothers to return with holy oil from Jerusalem and a hundred Christian missionaries.[8] Falling ill, the Mongol ambassador abandoned the journey, and the Vatican has no record of receiving his letter. Other correspondence between Mongol rulers and the papacy is preserved, however, dating as early as 1246.[9] For their part, the Polos returned to

[4] Ch. 1 (Benedetto, 3): "Et qui trouverés toutes les grandismes mervoilles et les grant diversités de la grant Harminie et de Persie et des Taqrtars et [de] Indie, et de maintes autres provinces, sicom notre livre vos contera por ordre apertemant, sicome meisser Marc Pol, sajes et noble citaiens de Venece, raconte por ce que a sez iaus meisme il le voit. Mes auques hi n'i a qu'il ne vit pas, mes il l'entendi da homes citables et de verité. Et por ce metreron les chouse veue por veue et l'entendue por entandue, por ce que notre livre soit droit et vertables sanz nulle na[n]sogne. Et chascuns que cest livre liroie ou oiront le doient croire, por ce que toutes sunt chouses vertables."

[5] More than 150 medieval and renaissance manuscripts of the Polo text survive in a dozen different languages. Regarding the relations among these, see Benedetto, *Il Milione*, pp. xi–ccxxi; A. C. Moule and Paul Pelliot, *Marco Polo, The Description of the World* (London: George Routledgte and Sons, 1938), 1: 40–52; or John Larner, *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 46–58, 105–15.

[6] On the ancient trade between Mediterranean Europe and China, its disruption by the rise of Islam, and medieval attempts at its reestablishment, see Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 90–135. Regarding the role played by Venetians, see Roberto Sabatino Lopez, "Venezia e le grandi linee dell' espansione commerciale nel secolo XIII," in *La Civiltà Veneziana del secolo di Marco Polo* (Venice: Sansoni, 1955), 37–82; and Yves Renouard, "Mercati e mercanti veneziani alla fine del Duecento," in idem, 83–108.

[7] The first were Giovanni di Piano Carpini, sent to the Mongols in Karakorum by Pope Innocent IV in 1245, and William of Rubruck, sent by Louis IX of France (St. Louis) in 1253.

[8] Ch. 8, (Benedetto, 6).

[9] See A. Mosstaert and Fr. Woodman, "Trois documents Mongols des archives secretes Vaticans," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 15 (1952): 419–506; and *I tesori dell'Archivio segreto vaticano* (Florence, 1991), 104, and plate XXXVII. Philippe Ménard, ed., *Le devisement du monde, edition critique* (Paris: Droz, 2001), 179), also mentions correspondence between

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Venice in 1269. After some unanticipated delays, they set out on a second voyage in 1271, this time as personal emissaries of Pope Gregory X. As requested, they took with them holy oil, also papal letters and sumptuous gifts for the Great Khan. In place of the requested hundred missionaries, however, the Pope could spare only two Dominican friars, who quickly turned back. More determined was Niccolò's seventeen-year-old son Marco (1254–1323), who accompanied his father and uncle on the journey.[10]

Part travelogue, part merchants' manual, part geographic treatise, Messer Marco's book describes countless regions and cities, from Armenia in the west to Cathay in the east, and southward to Sri Lanka. Typically, it recounts the customs and mores, religion and politics, remarkable sights, natural resources, and outstanding industries of each locale.

To organize the myriad peoples it describes, the text employs three master categories based on considerations of religion: Christians in the first place, Muslims or "Saracens" in the second, and Buddhists or "idolaters," in the third. (This last term may also encompass Confucians, Taoists, Manicheans, and Hindus, all of whom otherwise go unmentioned.)[11] The text also provides three figures, who serve as the paradigmatic leaders of each community. The Great Khan played this role for the idolaters, as did the legendary Prester John for the Christians.[12] For the Saracens, it fell to the so-called Old Man of the Mountain.[13]

Although the "Old Man" is the only Muslim leader mentioned in Messer Marco's account, the title encompassed a number of individuals, all of who served as the heads of various Nizari Isma'ili communities.[14] The Nizaris

Mongol rulers and Philip the Fair of France that is preserved in the French national archives, dating from 1289 and 1305.

[10] Ch. 13 (Benedetto, 8–9).

[11] Those referred to as *sensin* in chapter 75 (Benedetto, 65) may be Taoists. If so, they are treated respectfully. In some manuscripts, Jews appear in a few formulaic phrases, but they play no part in the action.

[12] A great deal has been written of late on the place of Prester John in early Orientalism. See Igor de Rachewiltz, *Prester John and Europe's Discovery of East Asia* (Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1972); L. N. Gumilev, *Searches for an Imaginary Kingdom: The Legend of the Kingdom of Prester John*, R.E.F. Smith, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Bernard Hamilton and Charles F. Beckingham, eds., *Prester John, the Mongols, and the Ten Lost Tribes* (Brookfield, Vt.: Variorum, 1996); and Wilhelm Baum, *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes: Rom, Byzanz und die Christen des Orients im Mittelalter* (Klagenfurt: Verlag Kitab, 1999).

[13] The "Old Man" appears in chs. 41–43 (Benedetto, 32–35). Useful secondary literature includes: Charles Nowell, "The Old Man of the Mountain," *Speculum* 22 (1947): 497–519; Leonardo Olschki, *L'Asia di Marco Polo. Introduzione alla lettura e allo studio del Milione* (Venice: Instituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1957), 356–76; Alfons Gabriel, *Marco Polo in Persien* (Vienna: Verlag Typographische Anstalt, 1962), 184–96; Farhad Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma'ilis* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co., 1994), 108–25; and W. B. Bartlett, *The Assassins: The Story of Medieval Islam's Secret Sect* (London: Sutton, 2001), 207–32.

[14] The most important of these figures were Hasan-i Sabbah (d. 1124), Rashid al-Din Sinan (d. 1192 or 1193), who led the Syrian community at the height of their power, and 'Ala-al-Din Muhammad III (1221–1255), penultimate ruler of the Persian Nizaris.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

were a radical Shiite sect, which is to say a minority within a minority. Full consideration of their beliefs and practice lies beyond the scope of this paper, but several excellent accounts are available.[15] Like other Shi'is, they maintained that spiritual authority rightly belongs to the Prophet's direct descendants and that such leaders—whom they call imams—are desperately needed, for they alone possess the charisma and esoteric knowledge on which humanity depends. And like other Isma'ilis, the Nizaris believe that upon the death of the sixth Imam in 765, his successor withdrew from this troubled world and went into occultation. Until the return of the hidden imam as a triumphant savior (*mahdi*), the community stands in wait.

Unlike other Isma'ili factions, however, the Nizaris adopted a less pacific and patient attitude toward their adversaries, who arrogated authority for themselves on very different principles. Beginning in the 1090s, the Nizaris waged active struggle against their Sunni enemies, above all the sultanate of the Saljuq Turks, who held paramount military, political, and religious power.

Nizari strategy involved seizing mountain fortresses and using them to stage subsequent operations. The first and most important was at Alamut, in the Alburz range of northern Iran. Others followed in Persia, Khurasan, Syria, and Lebanon. Young men fiercely committed to this movement and its leaders held the title of *fida-'i* (plural *fedayeen*), "devotee, self-sacrificer." On occasion, they were charged with the murder of the movement's opponents and a small number of spectacular killings provoked widespread discussion. Most victims were high-ranking Saljuq officials, but the Syrian and Lebanese branches, which confronted Crusaders as well as Sunnis, were responsible for the deaths of several European nobles, beginning in the latter half of the twelfth century.[16]

"Old Man of the Mountain" is the title Christian authors used of Nizari leaders, mistranslating Arabic *Shaykh* as "old man" rather than "lord," and associating Nizaris everywhere with Alamut.[17] Similarly, Europeans generally referred to the Nizari *fedayeen* as "Assassins," after the Arabic *hashishiyan*. Most literally, this word denotes "hashish-users," but it was also employed as a term of opprobrium for low lives and scoundrels in general.

[15] The modern discussion begins with Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizari Isma'ilis against the Islamic World* (The Hague: Mouton, 1955). Subsequent contributions include Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967); Pio Filippani-Ronconi, *Ismaeliti ed 'Assassini'* (Milan: Thoth, editions basilenses, 1973); and Bartlett, *The Assassins*.

[16] Hodgson (facing p. 88) lists the following assassinations by the Nizaris: Sâwa muezzin (1082), Nizâm al-Mulk (1092), Jahâh ad-Dawla (1102), Mutarshid (1135), Râshid (1138), Raymond of Tripoli (1152), and Conrad of Montferrat (1192). Unsuccessful attempts were also made on Saladin and Prince (later King) Edward of England in 1272.

[17] An Arabic equivalent, *Shaykh al Jabal* ("Old Man of the Mountain"), is not attested in any extant source. Regarding the terminology and its implications, see Daftary, 114–17, passim.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The Sunni seem to have used the less restrictive sense in their anti-Nizari invective, since none of the surviving Islamic sources ever charge the group with drug use.[18]

III

If the Sunni gave the name "Assassins" to Nizari *fedayeen*, they called the community in general *malāḥida*, "heretics" (singular *mulḥid*). This term—and its construction of the Nizaris as outside Islam proper—were taken over by western authors who obtained their information about the sect from its Sunni adversaries. The earliest of these was Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish traveler who visited the Holy Land in 1167. Taking the term of disparagement "*mulaḥid*" ("heretic") for the name of a territory, he located it in Lebanon, where one finds "a people who do not believe in the religion of the Ishmaelite [=Islam] and they settle in the high mountains. They answer to an elder, who is in the land of al-Hashishim."[19]

Benjamin's account is the earliest western description of the Assassins, although his use of the derogatory terms Mulahid and Hashishim reveals his dependence on Sunni polemic, as does his judgment that the Nizaris were not really Muslims. He wrote of them as follows: "Near Gebala is a people called al-Hashishim and they do not believe in the religion of the Ishmaelite [=Islam], but in one of their number whom they think to be a prophet, and everything he says to them they will do, whether for death or for life. They call him Shaykh-al-Hashishim. He is their Elder, and upon his command all of the men of the mountain come out or go in. The place where they settle is in the city of Kadmus, which is Kadmot in the land of Sihon. And they are believers of the word of their elder and everyone everywhere fears them, because they even kill kings."[20]

Six points are noteworthy in this brief text and will recur in others that followed it: (1) the name of the group ("Assassins"); (2) its heretical nature ("they do not believe in the religion of the Ishmaelite"); (3) identification of its leader as the Old Man ("Elder," also "Shaykh"); (4) the absolute obedience

[18] The etymology and significance of the term was established by Antoine I. Sylvestre de Sacy, "Mémoire sur la dynastie des Assassins, et sur l'origine de leur nom," *Annales des Voyages* 8 (1809): 325–43, an expanded version of which was published in the *Mémoires de l'Institut Royal de France* 4 (1818): 1–84. An English translation of the latter is included in Daftary, 136–88. For more recent discussions, see Daftary, 89–92; or Bartlett, 213–16.

[19] Translation by Maria Rethelyi. The text is found in Marcus Nathan Adler, ed., *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela. Critical Text, Translation and Commentary* (New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1907), 53–54. Cf. William of Rubruck's report to Louis IX (*Itinerary* 18.4): "To the south are the Caspian mountains and Persia; to the east, the mountains are Muliech [variant: Mulihet], that is, the mountains of the Assassins." (Habet enim montes Caspios et Persidem a meridie, montes vero Muliech, hoc est Haxasinorum.) Text in, Anastasius van den Wyngaert, ed., *Sinica Franciscana: Volumen I. Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum Saeculi XIII et XIV* (Florence: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1929), 210.

[20] Translation by Maria Rethelyi. The text is in Adler, *Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, 16–17.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the Old Man's followers; (5) the Old Man's status as a prophet (a charge of scandalous heresy according to the normative tenets of Islam, and one that badly distorts the Nizaris' position); and (6) the Old Man's use of the *fedayeen* to murder—"assassinate"—his adversaries.

Farhad Daftary has carefully studied the way subsequent Christian authors reproduced these points and added to them. Gradually, several other stereotyped items accumulated around the picture of the Assassins, including: (7) residence in a mountain stronghold, with castles and gardens reminiscent of paradise; (8) rigorous training of devotees in many languages, which knowledge they used to infiltrate their enemies' camps; (9) the devotees' practice of prostrating themselves before the Old Man; (10) the Old Man's promise of heavenly reward to those who carried out his bidding, whether they lived or died in the attempt; (11) the gift of a consecrated dagger, and (12) the use of drugs. The distribution of these motifs over the relevant western texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is detailed in Table 1. In other ways, the authors responsible for these accounts differed from one another, often quite markedly. The extent to which they agreed as regards the Old Man—about whom they told much the same story, with much the same terminology and details, recounted in much the same order—suggests that they participated in a common discourse, drawing on the same sources and, in some cases at least, quoting from one another.

Although Messer Marco explicitly states that his account of the Old Man and Assassins was based on oral testimony gathered *in situ*,[21] the pattern evident in Table 1 suggests that he, too, recycled conventional motifs drawn from earlier written sources. Working these into a single coherent narrative, he and Rustichello produced what subsequently became the definitive version of the legend.[22] Two motifs that figured in earlier variants were dropped by the co-authors. One of these—the dagger—has no great significance. The other is enormously important: all other western authors took their lead from Sunni sources and treated the Assassins as heretics, construing the sect as outside the pale of Islamic orthodoxy, and in active opposition to it. Polo's text, in the strongest possible contrast, treated the Old Man and his minions as an emblematic part of the Saracen world, which revealed with exceptional clarity the dangerous, threatening nature of Mohammed's religion. For example, in describing the details of the paradise garden, Messer Marco noted that the Old Man had it built "in the same fashion that

[21] Ch. 41 (Benedetto, 32): "I will tell you all his story just as I, Messer Marco, *heard it told* by many men." (Or vos conterai tout son afer solonc que je meser Marc *oi la conter* a plusors homes.)

[22] See, for instance, John Critchley's pronouncement: "The well-informed among Polo's fourteenth-century readers would have found his book a mixture of the familiar and the incredible. And the incredible stories were ones they had heard before.... The most over-ripe chestnut among Polo's near-eastern anecdotes was the story of the Old Man of the Mountains" (*Marco Polo's Book* [Cambridge: Variorum, 1992], 83–84).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TABLE 1

Motif Analysis of Western Descriptions of the Nizaris, 1167–1299. Boldface Type Indicates Particular Exaggeration of this Motif; Parentheses Mark a Subtler or Less Emphasized Version Than Usual

	Benjamin of Tudela (1167)	*Burchard of Strassburg (1175)*	*William of Tyre (1180)*	*Arnold of Lübeck (before 1210)*	*James of Vitry (c. 1216–1228)*	*Marco Polo (1299)*
1) Name "Assassins"	X	X	X		X	X
2) Heretics	X	**X**		X	**X**	
3) Leader "Old Man"	X	(X)	X	X	X	X
4) Absolute obedience	X	X	X	X	X	X
5) Leader regarded as prophet	X			(X)		X
6) Murder of high-ranking enemies	X	X	X	X	X	X
7) Mountain fortress and gardens		X			X	X
8) Rigorous training of devotees		X			X	X
9) Self-prostration		X		**X**		X
10) Promise of paradisal reward		X		X	X	**X**
11) Consecrated dagger		X	X	X	X	
12) Drug use				X		**X**

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Mohammed had made the Saracens understand."[23] Such an assertion occurs in no other western account, and the same is true of Polo's observation that *fedayeen* placed in the garden recognized where they were because they had "heard it said that according to their prophet Mohammed, paradise was made in such a manner."[24]

More telling still, the Venetian offered an interpretation of the imaginary place-name "Mulecte" (<Arabic *malāḥida*) that transformed its original sense ("heretics") into the very opposite: "Mulecte means 'of the Saracens.'"[25] So shocking a transformation is this that the editor of the critical edition felt obliged to imagine the text was defective. Although the vast majority of manuscripts make no explicit mention of heresy, he relied on a late, atypical Latin version (MS. Z) and emended the text in a way that undoes Messer Marco's attempt to represent the Assassins as good Muslims.[26] That the Latin text restores the older view of the group as heretical is interesting in itself, and a point to which we will return.

In two other motifs, one also notes significant change from earlier to later variants, as discourse about the Old Man became more fabulous and lurid with repetition. Thus, Burchard of Strassburg's account of the Assassins was quoted by Arnold of Lübeck and survives in the latter's *Chronicle of the Slavs*. In his own account, Arnold generally followed Burchard's lead, but when Burchard described the Nizari practice of prostrating themselves to signify submission, Arnold either misunderstood or wanted to tell a more dramatic story.[27] In his version, the Assassins did not just bow to the Old Man (*predibus suis provoluti*), but leapt to their death (*se precipitaverunt*) on his command. The two variants are contrasted in Table 2.

[23] Ch. 41 (Benedetto, 33): "Et por ce l'avoit faite en tel mainere que Maomet ne fist entendre a les Sarain. . .."

[24] Ch. 41 (Benedetto, 33): ". . .les quelz savoient bien por oir dir, solonc que Maomet lor profete dist elç, que le parais estoit fait en tel maner com je vos ai contés."

[25] Ch. 41 (Benedetto, 32): "Mulecte vaut a dire de Sarain."

[26] Benedetto, 32, emended as follows: "Mulecte vaut a dire (*heretiques selon la loy*) de Sarain." Not only is this contrary to the clear wording and sense of the Franco-Italian text, of the 130 manuscripts he consulted it finds support in only two: the late MS. Z, discussed below, and the Tuscan of MS. R, which includes a learned interpolation: "Mulehet is a country, in which the Old Man called 'of the Mountain,' used to live in the past, because this name 'Mulehet' means 'place where there are heretics' in the Saracen language, and the men of that place are called 'Mulehetics,' that is heretics under their law, as the Patarine Christians learned." (Mulehet è una contrada, nella quale anticamente soleva stare il vecchio detto della montagna, perchè questo nome di Mulehet è come a dire luogo dove stanno li heretici nella lingua saracena e da detto luogo gli huomini si chiamano Mulehetici, cioè heretici della sua legge, si come appresso li Christiani Patarini.) Unnecessary and unwarranted, the emendation has regrettably obscured one of the most original, important, and intriguing features of the Polo text.

[27] The motif of self-prostration recurs in the same position in the Polo text, but there is no question of self-immolation (ch. 42, [Benedetto, 33]): "They now went before the Old Man, *and they bowed deeply before him*, as if they believed that he were a great prophet." (Il alent mantinant devant li Vieus et *se humelient mout ver lui*, come celz que croient que soit grant profete.) The Tuscan version of the text states that the *fedayeen* kneeled (*inginocchiandosi*).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TABLE 2

The Incident of Throwing One's Self Down in Two Western Sources

	Burchard of Strassburg (1175)	*Arnold of Lübeck (before 1210)*
1	When they are set in the presence of the Prince, he asks if they wish to obey his commands	
2	In order that he might confer paradise on them.	He also offers them a certain hope and certain pleasures of eternal prodigious enjoyment so that they are better able to die than to live.
3	And as they have been instructed, without contradiction or ambiguity, all respond, **throwing themselves at his feet**.	Many of them at his nod or command, when standing on a high wall **will throw themselves down**
4	Fervent in soul, they will obey in all that he has commanded them.[1]	
5		so that they die a miserable death with a broken neck.[2]

[1]Burchard of Strassburg, quoted in Arnold of Lübeck, *Chronicle of the Slavs*, bk. 7, ch. 8; text in Georgius Heinricius Pertz, ed., *Arnoldi Chronica Slavorum ex recensione I. M. Lappenbergh* (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1868), 275: Tunc in presentia principis contituti, querit ab eis, si preceptis suis velint obedire, ut eis conferat paradisum. Qui ut instructi sunt, omni contradictione et amiguitate remota, predibus suis provoluti ferventi animo respondent, se fore obedientes in omnibus, que preceperit eis.
[2]Arnold of Lübeck, *Chronicle of the Slavs*, bk. 4, ch. 16; text in Pertz, 145–46: Qui etiam quondam spem et quedam gaudia eterne iocunditatis monstruose eis pollicetur, ut potent magis mori quam vivere. Sepe enim multi eorum at nutum vel imperium suum stantes in muro excelso se precipitaverunt, ita ut cervicibus fractis miserabili morte interirent.

Arnold also went beyond his sources on another point. Thus, where earlier authors used the name "Assassins" in its non-restrictive sense, he alone heard a reference to drug use.[28] In his version, when the Old Man dispatched the *fedayeen* on a mission, "he intoxicates them with a drink that carries them off to ecstasy or madness. By his magic he shows them fantastic dreams full of pleasures and delights—no, full of foolishness—and he asserts they will have these eternally in return for such deeds."[29]

[28] Here, William of Tyre's testimony is of interest (*Chronicle*, bk. 20, ch. 29): "Neither our people, nor the Saracens know from what the name Assassins was taken." (Hos tam nostri quam Sarraceni, nescimus unde nomine deducto, Assissinos vocant.) R.B.C. Huygens, ed., *Guillaume de Tyr, Chronique* (Turnholt: Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1986), 953.

[29] Arnold of Lübeck, *Chronicle of the Slavs*, bk. 4, ch. 16; text in Pertz, 146: "tunc poculo eos quodam, quo extasim vel amentiam rapiantur, inebriat, et eis magicis suis quedam sompnia in fantastica, gaudiis et deliciis, immo nugis plena, ostendit, et hec eternaliter pro tali opere eos habere contendit."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

All prior authors treat the promise of paradise in terms consistent with Islamic doctrine, as the reward extended to martyrs. Insofar as they offered any critique, it was to suggest, if only subtly, that the Old Man's promises may have been self-serving.[30] Arnold, however, was more aggressive in his diction and, more importantly, in his story of drug use.[31] The Polo text took this further still. Here, the Old Man is said to have built splendid gardens in his mountain redoubt and filled them with beautiful maidens. After giving his *fedayeen* a drink that rendered them unconscious, he had them carried into his garden. When they awoke, they believed they were in paradise and as long as they remained there, the women—favored Orientalist trope of Muslim concupiscence—were constantly at their service.[32] When the Old Man wanted to send a *fidāʾi* on a mission, however, the lad was drugged once more and carried out.

When these youths awoke and found themselves in the castle and palace, which were great marvels, they were not happy with it, for they would never have left the paradise from which they came by their own will. Now they went before the Old Man and they bowed deeply before him, as if they believed he was a great prophet. The Old Man asked them where they came from and they said that they came from paradise. And they said that truly this was the same paradise that Mohammed described to our ancestors. They told all the things that they found there. And the others who heard this and had not been there, had great desire to go to paradise and wished to die, because they would be able to go there and they greatly desired to go there that day. And when the Old Man wanted to have a great lord killed, he assigned it to the one of his assassins who was best. He sent many very far from him to other countries and ordered them to kill these men. Now they went and obeyed the order of their lord, then they returned

[30] Thus, William of Tyre omits the promise of paradisal reward from his account, while Burchard of Strassburg has no unfavorable comment on it. Only James of Vitry shows hesitation when he describes the *fedayeen*, inflamed by this promise as: "wretched and misguided youths" (*miseri et seducti adolescentes*). Text in Sabina de Sandoli, *Itinera Hierosolymitana Crucesignatorum (saec. XII–XIII)* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1978–), 3: 304.

[31] In contrast to all earlier authors, Arnold speaks of the Old Man as having used "tricks" or "illusions" (*prestigiis*) to deceive his Assassins.

[32] This motif is taken from Sûras 52, 55, and 56 of the Qurân, which were notorious in medieval Europe. Compare, for instance, the testimony given by Burchard of Strassburg: "The Saracens also believe one can obtain paradise in the land to which one is transferred after this life, where they believe there are four rivers: one of wine, the second of milk, the third of honey, the fourth of water, and they say that every species of fruit is born, and they feast and drink there. Every one of them, every day sleeps with nine virgins for the satisfaction of his sensuality (*pro voluptatis explemento*), and if he should die in battle with a Christian, in paradise he sleeps with ten virgins daily." (Item credunt Sarraceni, se habere paradisum in terra, in quem post hanc vitam sint transituri, in quo credunt esse quatuor flumina, unum scilicet de vino, secundum de lacte, tertium de melle, et quartum de aqua, et omne genus fructuum ibidem dicunt nasci, et ibi pro velle comedent et bibent; unusquisque eorum omni die pro voluptatis explemento nove virgini commiscetur, et si quis in prelio a christiano moritur, cottidie in paradiso decem virginibus utitur.) Text quoted in Arnold of Lübeck's *Chronicle of the Slavs*, bk. 7, ch. 8; Pertz, 271. See further, R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to his court—those who escaped, since some were taken prisoner and died—when they had killed the man.[33]

In varying degrees, earlier accounts of the Assassins permitted one to regard the Old Man as a religious leader, albeit dangerously misguided. Committed to a cause he regarded as sacred, he recruited and trained other believers, to whom he promised—in good, if mistaken faith—a heavenly reward. In contrast, Polo's text introduced sex, drugs, and illusion to the myth of the Assassins' paradise, thereby reconstituting the Old Man as a cynical, deceptive cult leader, a fiend worthy of Orientalist romance, and a murderer devoid of scruples. At the same time, it transformed those who constructed themselves as *fedayeen*, *mujahedeen*, and *shahideen*—self-sacrificers struggling on behalf of their faith and courting martyrdom—into drug addled dupes and "terrorists" or, as the current master of such discourse has defined this term, "barbaric criminals who profane a great religion by committing murder in its name."[34]

There is one last place where the Polo text was innovative, partly because its authors had different purposes than did their predecessors, and partly because new information was available to them. While earlier works treated the Assassins as an ongoing problem, Messer Marco and Rustichello spoke of them in the past tense, for they wrote after the Nizari community had been destroyed, first at Alamut by the Mongols in 1256, then in Syria and Lebanon by the Mamluks in 1273. Conflating these two defeats, misdating them, and giving all credit to the Mongols, the Italians provided a satisfying closure for the story.

It was about the year 1262 after Christ had been born, that Alau, the lord of the Tartars of the Levant, who knew all the evil things that the Old Man did, said to himself that he was going to destroy him. He took some of his barons and sent them against that castle with a great many men. They besieged the castle a full three years without being able to take it. And they would never have taken it, had those inside been able to eat. But after three years, they had nothing more to eat. Thus the Old Man was taken and killed, the one named Alaodin, with all his men. And from that Old Man up to now, there has been

[33] Ch. 42 (Benedetto, 33–34): "Et quant cesti jeune sunt desveillés, et il se trovent en cel caustiaus el palais, il s'en font grant meraveie et nen sunt pas lies, car del parais dont il venoient por lor voluntés nen s'en fuissent il jamés partis Ils alent maintenant devant li Vieus et se humelient mout ver lui, come celz que croient que soit grant profete. Le Vielz le demande dont il viennent et celz dient qu' il viennent dou parais. Et disoient bien que voiramant est cel le parais come Maomet dist a nostri ancesor. Lor content toutes les couses qu' il hi trovent. Et le autre que ce oent et ne avoient esté, avoient grant volunté d'aler el parais et avoient volunté de morir porcoi il hi posent aler et mout desiroient cel jor qu'il hi aillent. Et quant le Vielz vuelt faire occir un grant sire, il fait approver de sien asciscin celz que melor estoient. Il envoie plosors ne grantment logne environ soi por les contrees, et lor comandent qu'il ocient cel homes. Celz vont mantinant et font le comandamant lor segnor, puis retornent a cort—celz que escanpent, car de telz hi a que sunt pris et morti—puis qu'il ont occis le home."

[34] George W. Bush, Presidential Address to the Nation, 7 October 2001, in *We Will Prevail: President George W. Bush on War, Terrorism, and Freedom* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 33.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

no other Old Man and no Assassins, and with him all the lordship ended, as did the evils that the Old Men of the Mountain had done in the past.[35]

In truth, the battle was much less fierce and the siege much less long, but the text is concerned to exaggerate both the formidable nature of the Assassins and the admirable nature of the Mongols' victory. Its last sentence passes final judgment, construing the whole as a morality play, with Alaü—that is, Hulagu, younger brother to both Möngke (r. 1248–1259) and Kubilai Khan (r. 1259–1294)—as the instrument through whom sinners were punished and righteousness secured.

IV

The Polo text makes clear that people and goods were in global circulation long before the modern or post-modern eras, and further that the circulation of people and goods then, as now, stimulates and yields material for the circulation of narratives. In the thirteenth century, we observe a dense network of interaction, leading from Constantinople to Persia and Cathay; France, England, and Egypt to Acre; Alamut to Lebanon and Baghdad; Mongolia to Alamut; Beijing to Venice, and to a Genoese prison. The traffic involved diplomats, merchants, missionaries, soldiers, *fedayeen*, and authors of romances.

Circulation of goods and people often produces conflict, be it of a mercantile, martial, or religio-ideological sort. And conflict often conditions the circulation of narratives and signs, for the myths people tell about the others they encounter are instruments for mediating and theorizing their relations, but also instruments of struggle. Always, they reflect the perspective and advance the interests of those who tell them.

As such myths diffuse, their variants ramify, for every telling is a retelling that spawns others in its wake. Every variant, moreover, draws on earlier versions, but revises their details to pointed purpose, as struggles are waged through the introduction, elimination, or modification of motifs, episodes,

[35] Ch. 43 (Benedetto, 34–35): "Il fu voir que, entor a les MCCLXII anz que avoit que Crist avoit nasqui, Alaü, les sire des Tartars dou levant, que soit toutes cestes mauveis chouse que cest Vielz faisoit, il dit a soi meesme qu'il le fara destruere. Adonc prist de sez baro[n]s e les envoie a cest castiaus con grant gens. Et asejent le caustaus bien trois anz que ne le postrent prendre. Et ne l'ausent jamés pris tant com il aussent en que mangier; mes a chief de trois anz il ne ont plus que mangier. Adonc furent pris et fu ocis le Vielz, que avoit a nom Alaodin, con tute sez homes. Et de cestui Viel jusque a cestui point ne i ot Viel ne nul asescin et en lui se fenist toute le segnorie et les maus que les Vielz de la montagne avoient fait jadis ansi[e]nemant." William of Rubruck, the French ambassador who was at the court of Möngke Khan in 1255, reported back to Louis IX concerning the Assassins' fate (Itinerary 32.4): "This Möngke has eight brothers: three full brothers and five half-brothers on his father's side. He sent one of the full brothers to the land of the Assassins, which is called Mulibet after them, and he commanded that all of them be killed." (ipse Manguchan habet octo fraters: tres uterinos et quinque de patre. Unum ex uterinis misit in terram Hasasinorum, qui dicuntur Mulibet ab eis, et precepit quod omnes interficiantur.) Text in van den Wyngaert, 287. On the considerations that prompted the Mongol assault, see Thomas T. Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism: The Policies of the Grand Qan Möngke in China, Russia, and the Islamic Lands, 1251–1259* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and characters in a widely circulating narrative. The goal of such interventions is to reposition the story's master categories to the benefit of some and the detriment of others.

In the preceding discussion, I have tried to trace changes in the way the Assassins were narrated over numerous texts that culminate in the Book of Marco Polo (Table 3). The trajectory begins with Sunni propaganda, the purpose of which was to establish the superiority of the orthodox Sunni to the heretic Nizaris (and to the Shi'a in general). All western authors before Polo adopted this position, but added a third category—Christians—which they set in the paramount position, higher than Muslims of whatever sort.

To appreciate the force of Messer Marco's retelling, one must understand that he wrote in the immediate aftermath of 1291, when Acre—the last Crusader stronghold in the Levant—fell to the Egyptian Mamluks, who were fast replacing the Saljuq Turks as the chief Muslim power. After two centuries of crusading, Christendom had nothing to show for its efforts. The trade routes, briefly opened, were now closing down and the Saracens seemed triumphant once more. Inter alia, Polo's book addressed Europeans' fears at this reversal of fortunes, reminding them that beyond their Muslim enemies lay a greater power still, and a potential ally. This was the Mongols and their Khan, who had proven their superiority when they crushed the Old Man and his Assassins, whose representation was revised so that he might appear as the most terrifying Muslim of all.

Making common cause with the Mongols offered a solution to the problem of Islamic power, for which Polo's narrative offered a precedent in its account of how the descendants of Prester John and Chingiz Khan forged an alliance to vanquish common enemies.[36] Many in Europe were urging a new Crusade in the 1290s, and Venetians were prominent among them. In support of this venture, they actively explored the possibility of a Mongol alliance, particularly after the Mongols won several victories over the Mamluks in 1299–1300.[37] Along these lines, it has been plausibly suggested that Messer Marco meant

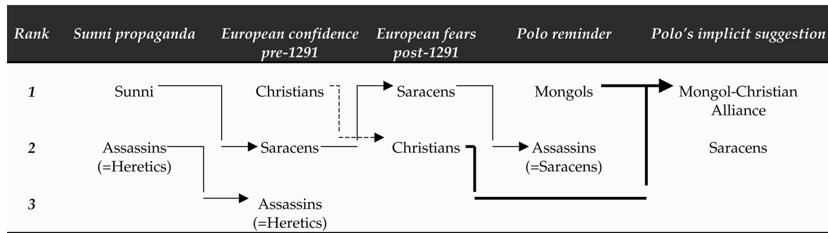
[36] Prester John's rivalry with the Mongols and his defeat by Chingiz Khan are narrated in chapters 64–68 of the Polo text (Benedetto, 50–52). The story of how his descendants and those of the Khan cooperated to defeat the Kaidu appears at chapter 200 (Benedetto, 218–20).

[37] Diplomatic exchanges between the Mongol rulers of Persia (the Il-khans, descended from Hulagu) and European powers, seeking to make common cause against the Mamluks, dated back to 1262, when Hulagu made overtures to Louis IX, and continued until 1307. See further, D. Sinon, "Les relations entre les Mongols et l'Europe jusqu'à la mort d'Arghoun et de Béla IV," *Journal of World History* (1957): 193–206; John Andrew Boyle, "The Il-khans of Persia and the Princes of Europe," *Central Asiatic Journal* 20 (1976): 25–40; Sylvia Schein, "Gesta Dei per Mongolos, 1300," *English History Review* 94 (1979): 805–19; Paul Meyvaert, "An Unknown Letter of Hulagu, Il-Khan of Persia, to King Louis IX of France," *Viator* 11 (1980): 245–59; C. J. Tyerman, "Marino Sanudo Torsello and the Lost Crusade: Lobbying in the Fourteen Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 32 (1982): 57–73; Jean Richard, "Chrétiens et Mongols au concile: la Papauté et les Mongols de Perse dans la seconde moitié du XIIIe siècle," in Richard, *Croisés, missionnaires et voyageurs* (London: Variorum, 1983); David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 183–87; and Critchley, 68–70.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TABLE 3

Recalibration of Hierrarchic Relations in Asia, as Advanced in Variants of the Assassin Myth



Rank	Sunni propaganda	European confidence pre-1291	European fears post-1291	Polo reminder	Polo's implicit suggestion
1	Sunni	Christians	Saracens	Mongols	Mongol-Christian Alliance
2	Assassins (=Heretics)	Saracens	Christians	Assassins (=Saracens)	Saracens
3		Assassins (=Heretics)			

to advertise himself as a potential ambassador to Ghazan Khan (r. 1295–1304), Mongol ruler of Persia, who was responsible for those victories and whom Polo knew well, having delivered a bride to him as the agent of Kubilai Khan.[38]

Neither the personal nor the international ambitions came to pass, however. European negotiations with the Mongols continued until 1307 but ultimately went nowhere, and such enthusiasm as there was for a Ninth Crusade gradually waned. Released from prison when Genoa and Venice made peace in 1299, Messer Marco returned home and lived out his life without further adventure. Many years later, when the worries of the 1290s were long past, he prepared a revision of his book for his own private use and for circulation among a small circle of trusted friends.[39] There, when he was no longer agitating for another Crusade, Mongol alliance, or diplomatic employment, he revised his text to make it less aggressive, restoring the notion that the Assassins were heretics and deleting all mention of their drug use (Table 4).

Regardless of whether Polo accomplished his immediate objectives, his version of the Assassin myth had considerable effect and its influence was of an enduring nature. His portrait of the Old Man has become a stock item of the western imaginary, its elements continually reproduced in variants that range from Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu to George Bush's Osama bin Laden. As implied in this last example, the simplistic fantasy of east and west united in a "coalition of the willing" against the Islamic middle remains current in certain circles. Nor should we forget that Polo's description of Cathay's wealth stimulated a Genoese sailor to imagine a westward passage by sea that would avoid the unfortunate obstacle of Muslim power. On his first

[38] Chapters 18–19 (Benedetto, 11–13) tell how the Polos were charged by Kubilai Khan to escort a bride to his great-nephew Arghun (grandson of Hulagu, r. 1284–1291). After a long and difficult journey, however, they arrived shortly after Arghun's death and, following some consultation, conferred her on his son, Ghazan (variant: Taxan). The idea that Messer Marco's book was motivated, in part, by a desire to advertise his potential utility as an ambassador is explored by Critchley, 68–76.

[39] On the nature and significance of Manuscript Z, see Larner, 46–58.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TABLE 4

Revision of Polo's Text Late in Life to Restore the Charge of Heresy (Items 2 and 7) and Remove the Charge of Drugs (Items 4 and 6)

	Marco Polo, Manuscript F (written with Rustichello for a broad public, c. 1299)	*Marco Polo, Manuscript Z (private text, revised late in life)*
1	Mulecte is a country where the Old Man of the Mountain used to live in the past	Mulhec is that country in which the Old Man of the Mountain was accustomed to live in ancient time.
2	Mulecte means "of the Saracens. . .."[1]	**In that country lived those who were heretics according to Saracen laws**. . ..[2]
3	He had a castle at the entrance of the garden, so strong that no man of the world could take it; on the other hand, one could only enter by that way.	At the entrance was an extremely strong fortress.
4	The Old Man took into his court all the youths of that country between twelve and twenty years old: it was these who seemed to be men of arms. They knew well, having heard it said, that according to their prophet Mohammed, paradise was made in such a manner as I have told you, and thus they truly believed it. And what should I tell you about it? The Old Man had these youths put in this paradise in groups of four, ten, or twenty, as he liked, in this fashion. **For he had them given drinks that made them fall asleep right away.** Then he had them taken and placed in this garden and had them awakened. When the youths were awakened and found themselves inside and they saw all the things I have described to you, they believed themselves truly to be in paradise. And the ladies and maidens stayed with them constantly, playing music and dancing and soothing them greatly and doing their every wish. It was as if these youths had all they wanted and never would they willingly leave there. And the Old Man held his court, very beautiful and grand, and he lived very nobly and made the simple people of the mountains around him believe that he was a prophet.	

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TABLE 4 (*cond.*)

5	And when the Old Man wanted to send someone in some place and have him kill some man,	The Old Man sent those attendants to commit many bad deeds.
6	**he had him given the drink, as much as he liked.** And when he was asleep, he had him taken to his palace. And when these youths awoke and found themselves in the castle and palace, which were great marvels, they were not happy with it, for they would never have left the paradise from which they came by their own will.	
7	Now they went before the Old Man and they bowed deeply before him, as if they believed that he were a great prophet.	**He made simple people believe him a prophet**, and they truly believed.
8	The Old Man asked them where they came from and they said that they came from paradise. And they said that truly this was the same paradise that Mohammed described to our ancestors. They told all the things that they found there. And the others who heard this and had not been there, had great desire to go to paradise and wished to die, because they would be able to go there and they greatly desired to go there that day. . . .[3]	
9	And when the Old Man wanted to have some lord killed, or some other man, he took some of his assassins and sent them where he wanted and he told them that he wanted to send them to paradise and that they should go kill these men and, if they died, they would all go to paradise.	Thus, he promised them paradise if they would kill certain magnates,
10	Those who were thus ordered by the Old Man, they gladly did more things than they thought to do and they went and did all that the Old Man ordered them. And in this way, no man escaped being killed when the Old Man of the Mountain wanted it.[4]	and in this way he had many killed.[5]

[1]Ch. 41 (Benedetto, 32): Mulecte est une contree la ou le Viel de la montagne soloit demorer ansienemant. Mulecte vaut a dire de Sarain. Note Benedetto's attempt to emend this passage, discussed earlier in the text, and in note 26.

[2]Alvaro Barbieri, ed., *Marco Polo, Milione. Redazione Latina del Manoscritto Z* (Parma: Ugo Guanda Editore, 1998), 57: Mulhec est quedam patria in qua Veglus de Montanea manere consuevit antiquitus; in qua patria habitabant heretici secundum legem sarracenam.

[3]Chs. 41–42 (Benedetto, 33–34): Il avoit un castiaus a l'entreee de cel jardin si fort ne doutroit home dou monde; et por autre part ne i se pooit entrer que por iluec. Les Vielz tenoit o lui, en sa cort, tult les jovenes de doç anz en vint de la contree, ce estoient celz que senbleient estre homes d'armes: les quelz savoient bien por oir dir, solonc que Maomet lor profete dist elz, que le parais

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press

estoit fait en tel maner com je vos ai contés: et ensi croient il voiramant. E que vos en diroie? Li Vieilz en fasoit metre de cesti jeune en cel parais a quatre et a X et a XX, selonc que il voloit, en cest mainere: car il faisoit elz doner bevrajes por lo quel il s'adormoit mantinant; puis les faisoit prendre et metre en cel jardin et les faisoit desveiller. Et quant les jeunes estoient desvoillés, et il se trovent laiens et il voient toutes cestes couses que je vos ai dit, il croient estre en parais voiramant. Et les dames et les dameseles demoroient tout jor con elz sonant et cantant et faisant grant soulas; et en fasoient a lor voluntés. Si que cisti jeune avoient tout ce que il voloient et jamés por lor voluntés ne istront de laiens. Et le Viel tient sa corte mout belle et grant et demore mout noblemant et fait creere a cel senple jens des montagnes que entor lui sunt qu'il est profete: et ensi croient il voiramant. Et quant le Vel en vult aucun por envoier en aucun leu e faire occire aucun home, il fait doner le be[v]raje a tant come il li plet; et quant il sunt endormia il fait prendre [et porter] en son palasio. Et quant cesti jeune sunt desveillés, et il se trovent en cel caustiaus el palais, il s'en font grant meraveie et nen sunt pas lies, car del parais dont il venoient por lor voluntés nen s'en fuissent il jamés partis. Il alent mantinant devant li Vieus et se humelient mout ver lui, come celz que croient que soit grant profete. Le Vielz le demande dont il viennent et celz dient qu' il viennent dou parais. Et disoient que voiramant est cel le meme parais come Maomet dist a nostri ancesor. Lor content toutes les couses qu'il hi trovent. Et le autre que ce ocut et ne avoient esté, avoient grant volunté d'aler el parais et avoient volunté de morir porcoi il hi posent aler et mout desiroient cel jor qu'il hi aillent.

[4]The Franco-Italian contains two variants of this passage, one given in Chapter 42 and the other in Chapter 43 (both in Benedetto, 34). The latter is the more polished of the two and is the one quoted here. The earlier version follows immediately on the passage cited in cells 3–8 of Table Four. The two variants read as follows.

	Chapter 42	*Chapter 43*
1	Et quant le Vielz vuelt faire occir un grant sire,	Et quant le Vielz voloit fair occir aucun segnor ou aucu[n] aotro homo,
2	il fait aprover de sien asciscin celz que meior estoient.	il prennoit de cesti sien asciscin
3	Il envoie plosors ne grantment logne environ soi por les contrees,	et les envoie la ou il voloit,
4	et lor comandent qu'il ocient cel homes.	et lor disoit qu'il les voloit mandere en parais et qu'il alasent occire le tiel homes et, se il morisen, que tant tosto ira en parais.
5	Celz vont mantinant et font le comandamant lor segnor,	Celz, que cest estoit lor comandés por le Vielz, le fasoient mout volunter plus que couse que il penssent faire et aloient et fasoient tout ce que le Viel lor comandoit.
6	puis retornent a cort – celz que escanpent, car de telz hi a que sunt pris et morti – puis qu'il ont occis le home.	Et en ceste mainere ne escanpoit nul home que ne fust occis, quant le Vielz de la montagne voust.

[5]Barbieri, 58: In introitu erat quidem quoddam castrum fortissimum. Qui Veglus mitebat istos satellites ad multa mala commitendo; qui faciebat gentes simplices credere quod esset propheta, et vere credeba ⟨n⟩ t; et sic promitebat eis paradisum si velent occidere aliquos magnates, et sic multos fecit occidi.

voyage, Columbus constantly consulted Messer Marco's book, but to consider that moment of circulating bodies, goods, and narratives would open another chapter in the history of myth and globalization.[40]

[40] Regarding the extent to which Columbus was inspired by reading Marco Polo and perceived the Americas through the mediation of his text, see F. Reichert, "Columbus und Marco Polo—Asien in Amerika," *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 15 (1988): 1–63.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417506000107 Published online by Cambridge University Press