

“aims to release the man Marco from the musty documents and weighty scholarly tomes which have tended to obscure him.”

Since the original publication dozens of books and articles have appeared on the topic of Polo and his travels, perhaps the best of which are those of Leonardo Olschki, *Marco Polo's Precursors*, and *Marco Polo's Asia*. This revision adds very little to the newer works, or the older standard work of Moule and Pelliot, *Marco Polo: The Description of the World*.

In freeing Marco from dusty documents, the author very often loses him completely. The book might better have been titled ‘Venice, Its Life and Times.’ A full two-thirds of it is devoted to that city, its citizens and its history. The author divides his work into ten chapters, of which only three are devoted to Marco’s journey, titled respectively, ‘The Journey’, ‘Cathay’ and ‘Homeward Bound’. The rest of the book is given over to Venice, Genoa, the politics of the city-states and *memorabilia* of every kind.

On the topic of Venice, the book is a masterpiece of scholarship. One is led with admitted fascination through the temples, taverns, berths and brothels of 13th century Venice; pauses for the 9th century body-snatching of San Marco; tours a 15th century Venetian war galley production line. Copious footnotes are a delight through which to rummage, covering as they do such things as the extent and nature of Venice’s 14th century slave trade, the hanging pillars of Samarkand, and the advantages of being accompanied by a woman-servant on the long trip to Cathay. Marco intrudes but rarely in the first seventy-five pages. One catches a glimpse of him at the installation of the Doge Lorenzo Tiepolo in 1268, or passing time watching the construction of the Church of St. Mark’s. Then, in only eighty pages, Cathay and the way thither is disposed of, and Marco is on his way back to Venice.

The volume leaves much to be desired as a biography of Marco Polo or as an accounting of his book; as an history of Venice it impresses. A most helpful improvement in the revision would have been the use of a standard method of transcription of Mongol names, and an expansion of the section devoted to Marco’s sojourn in Cathay. Having read the book one is left with the feeling that the Polo manuscript said little about China, Asia or the Mongols, which is, of course, not the case. Even a cursory treatment, such as that of Maurice Collis’ *Marco Polo*, includes much more detail on Polo’s observations of China and Southeast Asia.

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Sinor, Denis: *Inner Asia. History-Civilization-Language, A Syllabus*, Indiana University Publications, Uralic and Altaic Series, Volume 96, (Bloomington, The Hague, Mouton & Co., 1969), xvi + 261 pp., \$ 7.00

The book under review is a syllabus conceived of as a guide for teachers of a course designed for undergraduates having no specialized knowledge of the Central Eurasian area. It gives a thematical guide for a two-semester course divided into sixty lectures. The object of the course is to give fundamental

knowledge of the history, civilization and languages of peoples having lived or living in the central part of the Eurasian continent.

Though the book is entitled "Inner Asia," in the text the term "Central Eurasia" is used synonymously. This latter term was introduced by Prof. Sinor in his earlier works, especially in his fundamental book: *Introduction à l'étude de l'Eurasie Centrale*, (Wiesbaden, 1963). The definition of Central Eurasia is given by the author as follows: "It is that part of the continent of Eurasia that lies beyond the borders of the great sedentary civilisations" and he rightly adds "This definition implies that this frontier is unstable and changed from period to period" (p. 2). The term Central Eurasia is a fortunate innovation. It underlines the unity of the history of Europe and Asia which was hitherto—statements to the contrary notwithstanding—far from being recognized. At the same time it focuses the interest on the central part of that region which—curious though this may be—was never at the center of historical research. I hope that this and similar books will help to change the historical image of Central Eurasia for the educated world and draw more attention to this important and unduly neglected part of human history.

The definition quoted above is somehow negative, for it tells what Central Eurasia is not, leaving the formulation of a positive idea to the book itself. The book is divided into three major parts. The chapters intended for the first fifteen teaching periods are concerned with the geographical setting of the area, with the languages and scripts prevalent there, as well as giving some basic information on the sources of the history and the difficulties in using them. The following thirty-three teaching periods are dedicated to the history of the great empires of Central Eurasia, beginning with the Scythians and the Huns and continuing with the various Turkic and Mongolian states up till the Russian penetration into Siberia and the last great migrations, those of the Oirat-Kalmucks to the Volga in 1632 and the return of a part of them back to the Ili-region in 1770/1771. Four chapters deal with the three great religions, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, and the great rôle they played in the history of the peoples concerned, as well as with the autochthonous religious beliefs, mainly shamanism. The last chapter gives a bird's eye view of the most important literatures of the area. The respective chapters are followed by bibliographical data and some short instructions for the teacher.

The book gives a well-proportioned framework of the history of the greatest nomad empires and provides further incentive for both teacher and student to continue the studies and to specialize in the field. This is helped in a great measure by the stimulating style of the author, who successfully unites the tasks of giving basic information and sketching the most important trends.

I can only express my hope that this instructive syllabus will soon be used at universities which have not yet established programs for teaching the history of Central Eurasia.

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