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*The Quest for Eastern Christians*

TRAVELS AND RUMOR IN THE  
AGE OF DISCOVERY

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#### THE QUEST FOR EASTERN CHRISTIANS

interpreter who knew both Latin and Turkish, probably a member of the Armenian delegation who remained in the council after proclamation of union of his people with Rome. The man of mystery may have been a representative of the Chaldeans. If this conjecture is correct, he represented that same Nestorian Patriarch of "Babylon" or Catholicos of the East who supplied bishops for the St. Thomas Christians in Malabar, as Polo had reported and the Portuguese were about to observe at first hand.

In the last section of Book IV Poggio proffers knowledge of Ethiopia obtained from the Ethiopian delegation to the council. He never employs the ambiguous term Prester John and refers to the ruler of Ethiopia as the King of Kings.

In summary: the fourth book of this treatise on the vicissitude of fortune reports information on Indians and on Ethiopians — Asian Indians and African Ethiopians. The Asiatic data embrace Central Asia and Cathay. In his dedicatory epistle Poggio himself recognizes the bi-continental orientation, for he specifies the contents as items about Indians and Ethiopians "which we believe to be pleasing to readers."

A description of portions of two of the three known parts of the world, Poggio's Book IV treats of the lands beyond Islam, beyond the Moslem belt which girded the underbelly of Christian Europe. Although not primarily concerned with Christians, the locale and circumstances of composition direct attention to a Christian Ethiopia, to Christians in India, and to Christians in Central Asia bordering on Cathay. This Book IV was printed in 1492 as a little volume sponsored by Cristoforo da Bollate and succinctly entitled *India Recognita* (The Indies Rediscovered). Its editor clearly indicated by this title the meaning he ascribed to the Latin word *India*, namely the Indies, from Ethiopia to Cathay.

Book IV was translated into Portuguese and printed by Valentim Fernandes, along with Marco Polo's text and a letter from Girolamo da Santo Stefano, in Lisbon in 1502. It was translated into Spanish by Rodrigo Fernández de Santaella and printed, in the company of Marco Polo only, in Seville in 1503.

The editor of the Portuguese edition initiated an unfortunate prac-

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tice to which many modern scholars adhere: on his title page he labeled Poggio's Book IV "The Book of Nicolò the Venetian." This point of view considers the treatise essentially the dictated account of Conti's travels, a narrative of a man and of his actions. It leads to a minimization, if not complete omission, of the third and fourth sections. The incunabulum alone among printed editions reflects Poggio's intent: a new presentation of the world of the East. Its text is accordingly a fitting companion to Polo's panorama. The book is Poggio's, not Conti's, and manifests a humanist's range of interests. It is a revelation, a description, a map in prose.

These first editions are extremely rare today. One of two recorded exemplars of the 1492 Latin Poggio was recently given to Harvard University by Mr. Harrison D. Horblit, of the class of 1933, in memory of his son Mark M. Horblit II. The only exemplar of the 1502 Portuguese volume in the Western Hemisphere, and one of six known to be extant, belongs to Mr. Philip Hofer, curator of printing and graphic arts in the Harvard College Library. One of three recorded exemplars of the 1503 Spanish book is the possession of the Hispanic Society of America established by the late Archer M. Huntington in New York City.

The age which witnessed the publication of these treasures was one of Portuguese and Andalusian preoccupation with the Indies. In 1501 an authentic Christian of St. Thomas journeyed from the Malabar Coast with Cabral on the return voyage to Lisbon after the epoch-making outward journey which resulted in the discovery of Brazil. This Joseph, surnamed "the Indian," was most hospitably received in Europe. In the introduction to the Polo portion of the Portuguese volume of 1502 Valentim Fernandes exclaims: "Oh, what a marvelous thing to find Christians in the other world who with just as much joy inquired after our lands as our men after theirs!"

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The years 1500 to 1505 witnessed feverish organizing activity in Malabar. Gama returned in 1499, and in 1500 the first of the annual fleets sailed from Lisbon, the great armada headed by Cabral. The most significant letter from the new-found land of Brazil, dated May 1 of that year and directed by Pero Vaz de Caminha to King Manuel, lay in manuscript until 1817, perhaps in demonstration of a well-maintained secrecy or a lack of interest in the New World of the West.

In Cochin, Cabral's men encountered Christians, among them two brothers who had come over from Cranganore and expressed their desire to accompany the Portuguese to the West and thus facilitate a visit to Rome and Jerusalem. The Portuguese most graciously received them and took them aboard. One died en route, and the other, the aforementioned Joseph, reached Lisbon with the fleet in the early summer of 1501.

The fleets continued to return to Malabar annually. Pursuant to the discovery of Brazil, the Portuguese, moreover, explored northeastern North America. The introduction to the Portuguese edition of Polo and Poggio, completed on February 4, 1502, reports on Portuguese activities in this area, for the realms of King Manuel, as Valentim Fernandes conceived them, extended not only beyond the equator to the south and east but also to the farthest limits of the West, where the East begins, even unto the lands of the Great Khan. The near shores of these latter lands, he adds, were found, as far as he could judge, by Gaspar Corte-Real.

By 1505 development of affairs in India led Manuel to dispatch a viceroy. Led initially by this nobleman, bloodthirsty Dom Francisco de Almeida, and then by a "governor," the non-noble Afonso de Albuquerque, who succeeded Almeida in 1509 and continued in office until his death in 1515, the Portuguese in the East accomplished deeds of epic proportions. The years immediately following the death of Albuquerque witnessed the penetration of Ethiopia, the opening of the tomb in Mylapore, and the birth of the Age of Latin Arrogance.

In summary, the Portuguese activity in the Orient and the concomitant printed literature fall logically into three successive periods: first, the preliminary organization from 1500 to 1505; second, the

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spectacular governments of Almeida and Albuquerque until 1515; and third, the fulfillment of the dream of John and Thomas.

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In the present era of fashionable anticolonialism and its attendant anti-Christianity and overwhelming emphasis on Western movement to Africa and the East, we occasionally overlook Oriental visitors to the West. The long list would provide ample material for a very colorful book and would of course include the visitors to a Pope Eugenius mentioned in the preceding chapter. Of all these fascinating people the outstanding, in my opinion, remains Joseph the Indian, first of the ultra-Islamic Christians who voluntarily journeyed to the West, including Rome, in the age of quest of union which immediately preceded our own. Europe fell easy prey to Joseph's exotic charm, and his tales form the lengthy final portion of the great *Paesi Nouamente retrouati* published in Vicenza in 1507.

This compilation by Fracanzano da Montalbocco on "lands recently rediscovered" admirably portrays the omnidirectional vision of Europe as its six books sweep around the compass card from Corte-Real in the northwest to Columbus in the west, fifteenth-century Portuguese and Italians in Africa, and Gama, Cabral, and the 1502 fleet in the East. Its title recalls that of the 1492 edition of Poggio: *India Recognita*.

The end of Book VI, and consequently of the *Paesi Nouamente retrouati*, recounts the tale of Joseph the Indian. Joseph remained in Lisbon until early 1502, when he set forth on his proposed visit to Rome, Venice, and Jerusalem. He arrived in Venice in June 1502 for a brief sojourn and there, like Nicolò de' Conti, the Nestorian delegate, and Ethiopian monks in Italy sixty years earlier, submitted to skillful interrogation. His report readily qualifies as the first supplement to Poggio's Book IV. As Joseph phrases his responses, the reader constantly recalls Poggio's very words and forcibly concludes that the interrogators had either carefully reviewed the wording of Poggio's account or actually had an exemplar or a copy before them in a systematic search for confirmation. The numerous references to

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Rome the Christians were being molested by this Simon Magus. As there was no one to stop him, St. Peter was beseeched to transfer his see to Rome. Leaving behind a vicar, he came to Rome and this vicar is the one who at present is called Catholicos and serves in the place of Peter. For the purpose of naming the said pope or Catholicos, the twelve above-mentioned cardinals betake themselves to the province of Armenia, where they name their pope. They affirm they have this authority from the Roman Pope."

A proficient canonist must judge the validity of this statement, which appears here solely as a remarkable document when appraised in its appropriate context of Italy in the year 1507. Above all tolerant and ecumenical, it portrays the Churches of India and Cathay (China) as dependencies of the Catholicos of the East, who, separated from Rome, rules an entire Church canonically by virtue of the authority of Peter. While the text makes no open assertion, many of its readers, Giuliano Dati among them, would probably have welcomed immediate union with this Catholicos and his patriarchs and would thus have fulfilled two thirds of their dream.

(A double parenthesis is now opened. In the first place, it should be noted that the degree of Nestorianism of the Malabar Christians in 1500 is a hotly disputed question. Cardinal Tisserant has expressed the opinion that Rome did not look upon these Christians, poorly instructed in theological controversies, as formal heretics, for "they had always believed one way or another in the primacy of the Roman See." He adds, however, that "their priests accepted the Nestorian formulas," but their Nestorianism "remained a dead letter in practice, even if their liturgical books contained objectionable formulas." In the second place, the Polo text used by the compiler of the *Paesi* was obviously neither the slightly emasculated first Latin edition — the Pipino text — owned by Columbus nor the text on which Ronald Latham based his new English translation. Mention of a Catholicos named Jacob who creates prelates and sends them forth to the East points directly to an early Italian printed edition, of which the first is dated Venice, 1496.)

The following chapter of the *Paesi* details certain religious practices of the Indian Christians. Although it never specifically states

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that St. Thomas evangelized their ancestors, the name of the Apostle frequently occurs. The Octave of Easter is accorded particular respect because at that time Thomas placed his hand in the wounded side of Christ. The Indians also observe the feast of St. Thomas, whom Christians and pagans alike hold in very great veneration.

The last chapter satisfies our longing. Entitled "Of King Narsinga and of a Church of St. Thomas," it describes Vijayanagar (in South-Central India due east of Goa and near Bellary) and then Mylapore, "in which city is a church of St. Thomas as large as that of Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice, in which is placed the body of St. Thomas, the source of many miracles; both pagans and Christians hold it in the highest esteem."

The *Paesi Nouamente retrouati*, which proffers knowledge acquired at least three years, and in the case of Joseph five years, before it appeared in print, is a document of the first half-decade of the century. This first period and its foreign literature terminates in 1505 with what passes as the first of the printed Manuel letters. Unlike the later and indubitably authentic missives always written in Portuguese and translated into Latin in Italy, this was published in Italian and appeared in two editions in Italy at the end of 1505; parallels between its multiple authorship and that of Vespucci's *Mundus Novus* have recently been pointed out by Dr. Luis de Matos of Portugal, the distinguished director of the new *Boletim Internacional de Bibliografia Luso-Brasileira*. A summary of Portuguese activity in the East over the five-year period, this letter honors the ancient dual interest.

Concerning Ethiopian Christians the letter narrates (in Dr. Pacifici's translation): "These two kingdoms, Kilwa and Malindi, are on the west side of the Red Sea, adjacent to the territories of the Gentiles and Prester John, whom they call *Abichi* in their language — which means iron-branded, because in this fashion in fact they brand themselves with hot steel and thus they are baptized without water." Ariosto may have known this passage!

The use of the title "Prester John" by the Portuguese monarch at this late date requires explanation, for in the introduction, dedicated to King Manuel, which precedes the Marco Polo portion of his magnificent volume of 1502 Valentim Fernandes had unequivocally af-

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[Ca. 1500.] Joannes de Hese. *[Itinerarius per Diversas Mundi Partes.]* [Antwerp]: Govaert Bac. Stillwell H132. ¶ Contains 1, 2, 3, 4, a, b, c, and d.

[Ca. 1500.] Quintus Curtius Rufus. *De la vie et gestes dalexandre le grant* (About the Life and Deeds of Alexander the Great), tr. Vasco de Lucena (Vasque de Lucène). Paris: Antoine Vérard. Stillwell C890. See fol. ccxxxix.

February 4, 1502. Valentim Fernandes, ed. *Marco paulo. Ho liuro de Nycolao veneto. O trallado da carta de huum genoues das ditas terras* (Marco Polo. The Book of Nicolò the Venetian. Copy of the Letter of a Genoese about the Said Lands). Lisbon: Valentim Fernandes. ¶ Contains the book of Marco Polo, Book IV of Poggio Bracciolini's treatise *De Varietate Fortunae*, and the letter of Girolamo da Santo Stefano.

May 28, 1503. Rodrigo Fernández de Santaella, ed. *Cosmographia breue introductoria enel libro de Marco paulo. El libro del famoso Marco paulo veneciano . . . Con otro tratado de micer Pogio florentino . . .* (Brief Cosmography Introductory to the Book of Marco Polo. The Book of the Famous Venetian Marco Polo. With Another Treatise of the Florentine Messer Poggio). Seville: Stanislaus Polonus and Jacobo Cromberger. ¶ Contains an introductory treatise by Fernández de Santaella, the book of Marco Polo, and Book IV of Poggio Bracciolini's treatise *De Varietate Fortunae*. The entire book was translated into English by John Frampton and published in London in 1579 with the misleading title *The most noble and famous trauels of Marcus Paulus . . .*

January 24, 1504. Joannes de Hese. *[Itinerarius per Diversas Mundi Partes.]* Deventer: Jacobus de Breda. ¶ Contains 1, 2, 3, 4, a, b, c, and d.

[After June 4, 1505.] Diogo Pacheco. *Obedientia Potentissimi Emanuelis Lusitaniae Regis & c . . . ad Iuliū II. . . .* (Obedience of the Most Powerful Manucl, King of Lusitania . . . to Julius II . . .). [Rome? Eucharius Silber?] ¶ The oration was delivered on June 4, 1505.

[After June 4, 1505.] Diogo Pacheco. *Obedientia Potentissimi Emanuelis Lusitaniae Regis &c . . . ad Iulium II. . . .* [Rome? Eucharius Silber?]

[After June 12, 1505.] Manuel I, King of Portugal. *Epistola . . . Respon-soria ad Summum Romanum Pontificem . . .* (Reply to the Supreme Roman Pontiff). [Rome?] ¶ The letter is dated Lisbon, June 12, 1505.

October 23, 1505. Manuel I, King of Portugal. *Copia de vna littera . . . mandata al Re de Castella del viaggio & successo de India* (Copy of a Letter . . . Sent to the King of Castile about the Voyage to and Deeds in India). Rome: Johann Besicken.

December 17, 1505. Manuel I, King of Portugal. *Copia de una littera . . . mandata al Re de Castella del viaggio & successo de India*. Milan: Petrus Martyr de Mantegatis.

[After 1505.] Joannes de Hese. *[Itinerarius per Diversas Mundi Partes.]* Paris: Robert Gourmont for Olivier Sénant. Stillwell H136. ¶ Contains 1, 2, 3, 4, a, b, c, and d.

November 7, 1506. Manuel I, King of Portugal. *Gesta Proxime per Portu-galenses in India: Ethiopia: & Alijs Orientalibus [sic] Terris* (Deeds Recently Accomplished by the Portuguese in India, Ethiopia, and Other Oriental Lands). Rome: Johann Besicken. ¶ The letter is addressed to Cardinal Jorge da Costa.

February 1, 1507. Manuel I, King of Portugal. *Gesta Proxime per Portu-galenses in India. Ethiopia. & Alijs Orientalibus Terris.* Cologne: Johann Landen.

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1507. Manuel I, King of Portugal. *Gesta Proxime per Portugalenses in India. Ethiopia & Alijs Orientalibus Terris.* Nuremberg: Johann Weyssenburger.

[After September 25, 1507.] Manuel I, King of Portugal. *Epistola . . . ad Julium Papam Secundum de Victoria contra Infideles Habita* (Letter . . . to Pope Julius II about Victory over Infidels). Paris: Guillaume Eustacc. ¶ The letter is dated Abrantes, September 25, 1507.

[After September 25, 1507.] Manuel I, King of Portugal. *Epistole . . . de Victoria contra Infideles Habita. Ad Julium Papam Secundum & ad Sacrum Collegium Reuerendissimorum Dominorum Cardinalium* (Letters . . . about Victory over Infidels. To Pope Julius II and to the Sacred College of Most Reverend Cardinals). [Rome?] ¶ Both letters are dated Abrantes, September 25, 1507.

November 3, 1507. Fracanzano da Montalbocco, comp. *Paesi Nouamente retrouati. Et Nouo Mondo da Alberico Vesputio Florentino intitulato* (Lands Recently Rediscovered. And the Mundus Novus, so called by Amerigo Vespucci the Florentine). Vicenza: Gio. Maria da Ca' Zeno.

[After June 12, 1508.] Manuel I, King of Portugal. . . . *Epistola de Pro-vinciis: Ciuitatibus: Terris: & Locis: Orientalis Partis: Sue Ditioni Fideique Christiane Nouissime per Eum Subactis . . .* Letter about Provinces, Cities, Lands, and Places in the Eastern Part Very Recently Subjected by Him to His Own Obedience and to the Christian Faith). [Rome? Stephan Plannck?] ¶ The letter, addressed to Pope Julius II, is dated Alcochete, June 12, 1508.

September 11, 1510. Jacopo Filippo Foresti da Bergamo, O.E.S.A. *Suma de todas las Cronicas del mundo. Llamado en latin Supplementum Croni-carum* (Synthesis of All the World Chronicles. Called in Latin *Supple-mentum Chronicarum*), tr. Narcis Viñoles. Valencia: Jorge Costilla. ¶ A Spanish translation of the Italian translation.

December 6, 1510. Ludovico de Varthema. *Itinerario de Ludouico de Var-thema Bolognese nello Egypto/ nella Surria/ nella Arabia deserta & felice/ nella Persia/ nella India & nella Ethiopia* (Itinerary of Ludovico de Varthema of Bologna in Egypt, Syria, Arabia Deserta and Felix, Persia, India, and Ethiopia). Rome: Stephano Guillireti de Loreno and Hercule de Nani Bolognese.

1510. Prester John. *Har begynnes eeu [sic] lystheliche Historie aff Jon Presth oc aff Hans stwre Ríckdom oc Mackt* [Danish] (Here Begins a Gay Story of Prester John and of His Great Riches and Might). Copenhagen: Gotfred aff Ghemen.

1511-22. *Of the newe landes and of the people founde by the messengers of the kynge of portyngale named Emanuel. Of the .x. dyuers nacyons cryst-ened. Of pope Johnn and his landes and of the costely keyes and wonders molodyes that in that lande is.* [Antwerp]: John of Doesborowc (i.e., Jan van Doesborch).

September 1, 1512. Martín Fernández de Figueroa. *Conquista delas indias de Persia & Arabia que fiz la armada del rey don Manuel de Portugal . . .* (Conquest of the Indies of Persia and Arabia Which the Fleet of King Manuel of Portugal Carried Out . . .), ed. Juan Augur de Trasmiera. Salamanca: Lorenzo Lion de Dei.

March 15, 1513. Jacobus de Voragine, O.P. *Ho Flos Sanctorum em lingoajem portugues* (The Flower of the Saints [Golden Legend] in the Portuguese Language). Lisbon: Hermão de Campos and Roberto Rabelo.

March 15, 1513. Odoric of Pordenone, O.F.M. *Odorichus de Rebus Incog-*