



## THE WORLDS OF MARCO POLO. THE JOURNEY OF A 13TH-CENTURY VENETIAN MERCHANT

Venice, Doge's Apartment at Doge's Palace

6 April - 29 September 2024

curated by Giovanni Curatola and Chiara Squarcina



**An exhibition to celebrate, rethink and reveal Marco Polo: his time, his life, his work, his journey, his example and his legacy**

A man, a citizen of the world by virtue of being born in Venice, the city that bridged the gap between East and West, rendering the distant and unknown more accessible. This is the theme of the exhibition scheduled from **6 April to 29 September 2024** at the Doge's Palace – organised in the **year that marks the 700th anniversary of Marco Polo's death**. It represents a tribute to the man but, above all, reveals a desire to share what he described in his literary work *Il Milione*: an inexhaustible source of inspiration for scholars, explorers and travellers of all ages.

Marco Polo's legacy echoes through an extraordinary tapestry of **historical, cultural, political, and human landscapes across Europe, the Middle East, and Asia during the thirteenth century**. His travels helped shed light on a rich heritage of traditions, customs, and ideas that circulated through thirteenth-century Venice, providing invaluable strategic insights for subsequent merchants and travellers.

The exhibition unfolds as a **journey within a journey**, delving into real, imagined, and sometimes omitted encounters across the diverse lands visited by Polo and his family over two decades. Featuring over **300 works** from the civic collections and prestigious institutions across Italy and Europe, alongside loans from museums in **Armenia, China, and Qatar**, the exhibition aspires to offer a comprehensive exploration of Marco Polo's worlds.

The journey commences in Venice and specifically at the Polo house in San Giovanni Crisostomo, located in the *sotoportego, corte seconda, ponte del Milion*, showcasing **unpublished discoveries** from excavations around the Malibran Theatre area. These provide a clearer picture of the Polo family's home and warehouse. The narrative expands to encompass Venice's cosmopolitan essence and its inhabitants, whose livelihoods depended on travel. This narrative unfolds through cartographic explorations and the grand decorations of the **Sala dello Scudo in the Doge's Apartments**, which highlight not only Venice's possessions but also the far-flung regions explored by Venetians and the Polo family, which the public will be able to admire once again on the occasion of the exhibition.

The exhibition delves deeper into Polo's life and writings, showcasing his will and artefacts from his era such as coins, fabrics, ceramics, and spices, all of which he frequently mentioned in his accounts. It also explores the **legend and literary significance** of his twenty-year odyssey, which resulted in the book stemming from his encounter with Rustichello da Pisa in a Genoese prison and Polo's own remarkable memory, intertwined with the richness of the writing.

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A pivotal section of the exhibition thus focuses on *Il Milione* which consigns the life of an ordinary Venetian merchant to history, fame and immortality. A text that has proliferated in translations and different versions, constituting a sort of travel guide with tips and curiosities *ante litteram* and a model for later famous literary works, from Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* to Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. These are just a few of the tributes, homages and examples of critical fortune that followed *Il Milione* and Marco Polo throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a fame that continued through the decades with revisitations in a pop style, a source of inspiration for modern and contemporary artists, as displayed in the exhibition.



Last but not least, the Civic Museums' exhibition project intends to recall, once again, the **value of the cultural inclusiveness of the journey**, its openness, curiosity towards what is other than ourselves, starting from the teaching of a young Venetian and his desire for knowledge. **Respectful of what he saw in the world, he wrote of the people, cultures, different faiths and religious cults he encountered**, telling of Christian populations in their various declinations, including Nestorianism, of the cult and mysticism of Islam, of the Confucian Chinese, Buddhists, Taoists, of Hinduism in India.

Celebrating Marco Polo and his travels 700 years after his death presents an opportunity to recount his unparalleled life, his thirst for knowledge, his drive to explore, his desire to discover new perspectives and other ways of living and, above all, to share all this. In his own words, *that they might make known the great things that are in the world*.

This cultural wealth of great educational and disseminative value will be the protagonist throughout 2024 with exhibitions, meetings and in-depth studies for everyone, with particular attention to the new generations. There will be events dedicated to schools and families, also with the collaboration of Geronimo Stilton as Marco Polo's travelling companion in the Activity Book.

The worlds of Marco Polo is organized as part of the initiatives promoted by the Municipality of Venice and the National Committee for the Celebrations of the 700th anniversary of the death of Marco Polo, chaired by the Mayor Luigi Brugnaro and carried out with the special collaboration of the Ca' Foscari University Venice and the Italian Cultural Institute of Shanghai.

The exhibition project received the Medaglia d'Oro from the President of the Republic.

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