

"Arnold - Princely Gifts"

Princely Gifts
and Papal Treasures

The Franciscan Mission to China
and its Influence
on the
Art of the West

1250 - 1350

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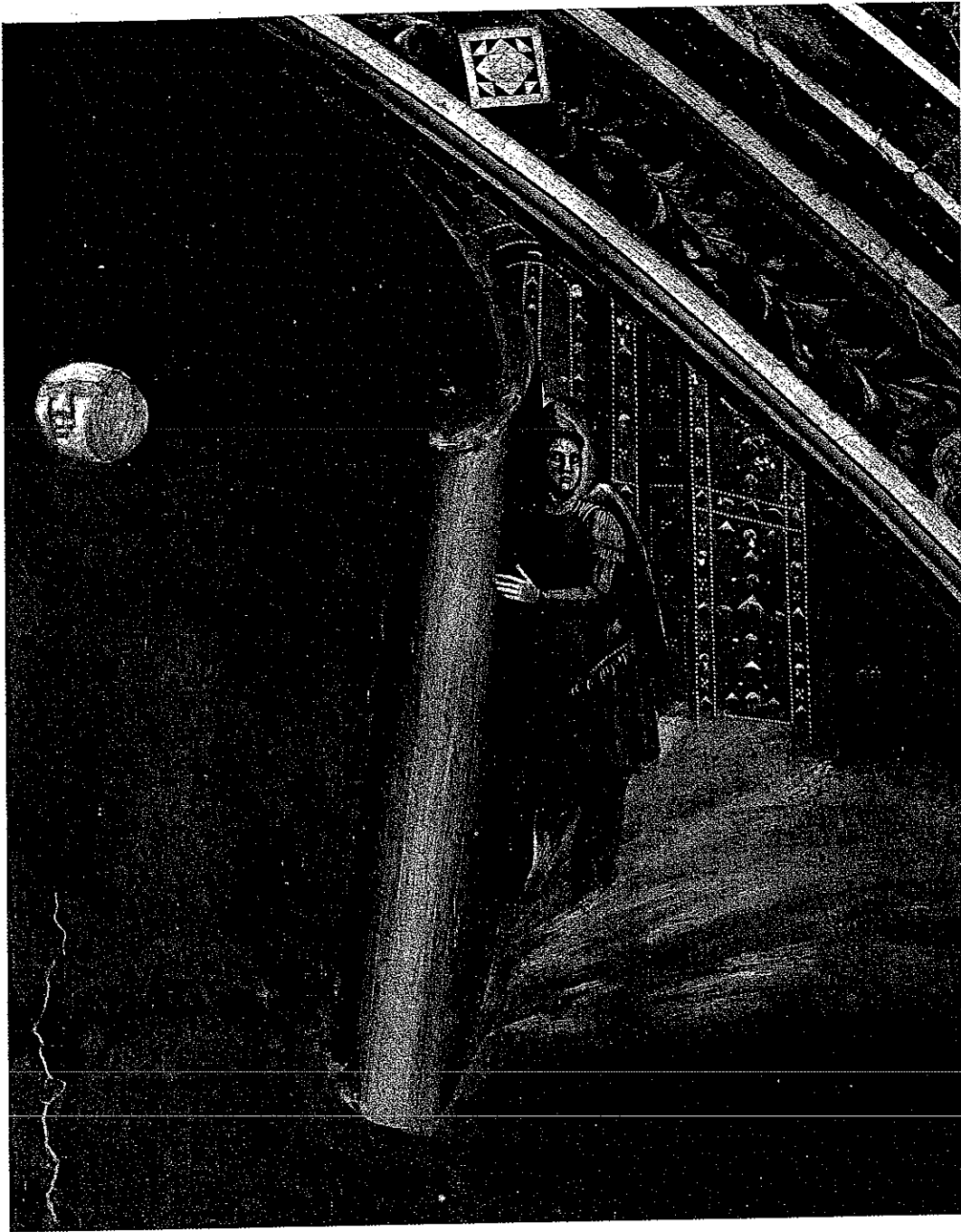


Fig. 9-1 *Angel Unscrolling the Heavens*, (detail of *Last Judgment*) Giotto, ca. 1306. Capella Scrovegni, Padua

One of the intriguing aspects of the Franciscan mission to China is the probability that painted scrolls were brought back and used as artistic models, adding another significant stylistic element to Giotto's and later generation's shift away from Byzantine forms.

*His back and breast...were painted with designs of knots
and circlets*

*No Tartar or Turk has ever woven a cloth
More colored in field and figure....*

Dante, Inferno, Canto XVII, lines 10-17

*If we may rely on the evidence of certain Genoese and
others who have visited those parts, it is an undoubted fact
that in Cathay there was [a man whose] residence stood by
a road almost inevitably traveled by anyone going from the
west to the orient or returning to the west. He was of a
generous and lavish disposition, and was anxious that
nobody should be in any doubt about this, so he had
himself built in the shortest possible time one of the most
beautiful, vast, and luxurious palaces ever seen – there
being no shortage of skilled craftsmen in the area – and
had it sumptuously furnished with everything required for
the proper entertainment of gentlemen....*

Boccaccio, The Decameron, X. 3

第九章

We know from a wealth of literary and documentary sources that items brought to Europe from China during the *Pax Mongolica* were prized possessions in royal, church, and private collections. Chinese items were familiar enough in medieval Europe that when Dante, Boccaccio and Chaucer needed a metaphor for worldly refinement, they referred to Tartary and its wares, knowing the educated reader of their day would recognize this reference as the epitome of luxury and skill.¹ Before the Black Death, specific mention of *panno tartarico* could be found in inventories stretching from the Vatican and the Lateran to Assisi; from Paris to Prague; even to snowbound Riga, Latvia.² The oriental wares so proudly assembled in western medieval collections included the ubiquitous *nasij* silks, delicate porcelains, intricate metalwork, and, in one inventory, a *papirum tartaricorum* – a scroll from China.³ Given as gifts, often passed from one royal collector to another, or among ecclesiastical holdings, these fragile wares from Mongol China held their cachet for *lux* for over a century, until the dusty hand of time obscured their glitter and far-off provenance.



Fig. 9-2 Fragment of the *paramentum* of Pope Benedict XI, ca. 1303. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 19.191.3

This sleeve of a papal *paramentum*, a fragment from a liturgical garment held in the church of San Domenico in Perugia, is the often-mentioned *panno tartarico*, woven in Mongol-dominated central Asia. The cloth was undoubtedly brought to the Pope as a diplomatic gift.

Today, western museums and church treasuries in Europe preserve a modest number of pieces of Yuan-era silk, many recently displayed in exhibitions related to trade along the Silk Road.⁴ [FIG. 9-2 Papal Sleeve] These fragments even now radiate some of their original brilliance, their lustrous workings of gold and silk still capable of dazzling the imagination. But to recapture the full impact of the exquisite *nasij* cloth so beloved by the Mongols for gift-giving, and so coveted by Italian merchants working in the east, it is best to turn to the meticulously rendered Italian panel paintings of the era.⁵

Most notable is Simone Martini's Angel of the Annunciation, dated 1333, wearing a swirling white-and-gold robe of *panno tartarico*.⁶ [FIG. 9-4 Simone's Angel] The robe is startling in its similarity to the fragment now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art from the *paramentum* of Benedict XI (r.1303-1304). Pope Benedict, the short-lived successor of Pope Boniface VIII, died in Perugia in 1304 (see Chapter IV). Brigitte Klesse links Simone's painting with a description of similar cloth in Boniface's inventory of 1295: *panno*

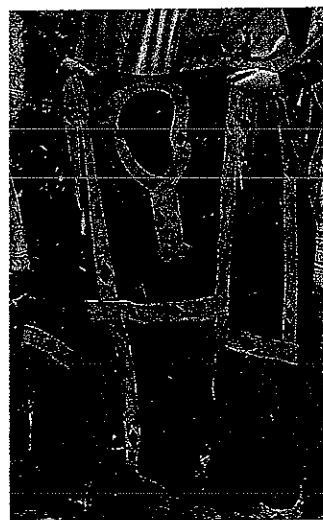


Fig. 9-3 *Bargaining for the Cloth of Christ*, detail of *Crucifixion*, Giotto, ca. 1306, Fresco, Capella Scrovegni, Padua

Tanaka first observed in the 1980s that Giotto had made use of Mongol *Phags-pa* script as a decorative motif at Padua and elsewhere.



Fig. 9-4 Annunciation, detail, Simone Martini, ca. 1333.
Uffizi, Florence

Simone Martini (born Siena 1283 – died 1344 in Avignon) depicted this angel wearing a robe of Mongol *nasij* cloth – a gold working of leaves on a white background – usually described in western inventories as *panno tartarico albo ad floria aurea*.

*tartarico albo ad folia aurea.*⁷ Certainly, a very similar brocade is depicted draping the shoulders of the Holy Roman Emperor Carl IV of Bohemia, who was buried in 1378 wearing Chinese silk.⁸ [See FIG. 9-9] Carl IV will serve in this chapter as a primary example of a dynamic fourteenth-century ruler: educated at Paris and Avignon, linked by blood and marriage to the French monarchy, he was a protector and promulgator of the Franciscans within his territories, and he was a voracious collector of all things rare and exotic. But it is in his role as the patron of Fra Giovanni di Marignolli, that he enters our tale, and later in this chapter, we will discuss what role Carl IV might have had in the provenance of one of the more interesting Chinese items to survive the intervening seven centuries in Europe.

The Franciscan Role in the Transmission of Chinese Stylistic Conventions into Europe

Marignolli reported that the Chinese gifts – *gold, silver, silk, cloth of gold, precious stones, pearls, camphor, musk, myrrh, and aromatic spices* – that he was carrying back from the Emperor Shundi were largely stolen from him in Sri Lanka. Still, not all was taken: he mentions that he arrived back in Europe with the diplomatic letters, money, and other personal souvenirs (i.e. he mentions an umbrella and some silk which he eventually donated to his Franciscan home church of Sta. Croce in Florence). It is possible that he arrived back with other small portable items from China that did not attract the attention of the thieves as well, although this is pure conjecture.

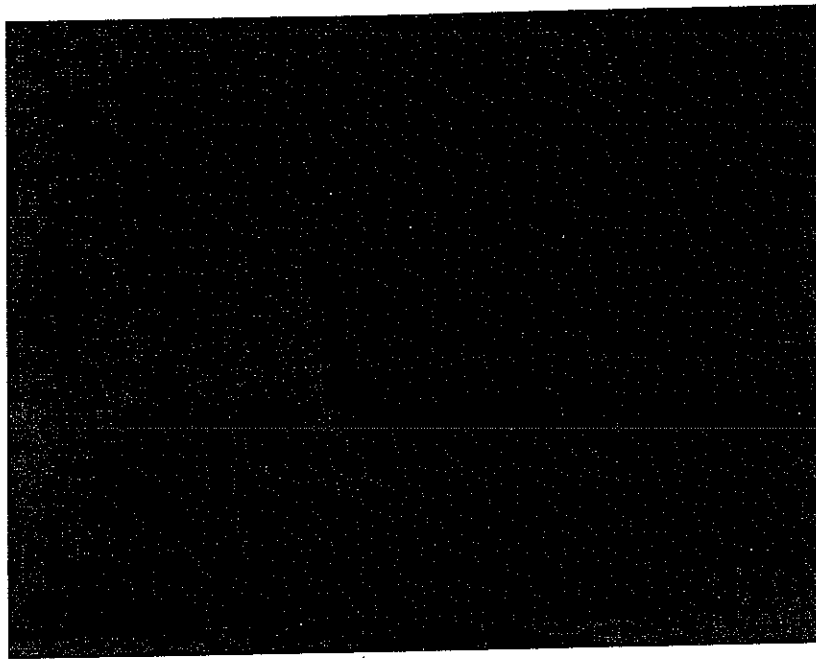


Fig. 9-5 *Hostelry in the Mountains*, (detail), Yan Ziyou, Southern Song, late 12th c. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 35.10

Painted scrolls of every variety and quality were available to European missionaries and traders during the Yuan era.

Still, the point is: like every good traveler of every era, he brought back something from his trip, even if only a few small curios. What of his luckier brother missionaries who were not robbed, or their merchant companions? Over a hundred Europeans are documented as making the trip, and surely many times that went and were not recorded – what did they bring back?

The variety of portable goods available to western travelers during the *Pax Mongolica* was staggering and the Franciscans had ready access to all of the goods of China during the entire era. They were welcomed at the highest levels, and were supported at the Emperor's court. They regularly traveled back and forth between Rome, Assisi, Avignon, and Beijing bearing gifts and letters. It is also a known fact that in the trading centers of Hangzhou and other coastal cities where the Franciscans had their churches, painted scrolls (often second or third tier copies in the style of famous Chinese masters), were produced in

abundance and were available to Europeans as gifts, souvenirs, or donations to religious communities.

[FIG. 9-5 Southern Sung scroll] At the same time in Europe, blessed with an abundance of money and public support, the Franciscans were the patrons of or received works by the premier artists of their day. Certainly they were at the vortex of a remarkable outburst of artistic activity in Europe, at the same time that they were being exposed in China to one of the oldest and most sophisticated of artistic traditions.

Without considering the Yuan era and its unprecedented medieval interchange of artistic objects, we would be missing a major source of visual inspiration around the year 1300 – the *papirum tartaricorum*. A Chinese landscape or figure scroll, in the hands of Giotto and his cohorts, goes a long way in explaining the sudden shift away from the *maniera greca* so prevalent before 1290. As a group of young artists trained in the Byzantine mode, Giotto and his contemporaries were ready to break with this confining



Fig. 9-6 *Miracle of the Spring*, Giotto, ca. 1290. Upper Church, Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi

We should consider that what we are seeing in this painting is a hesitant interpretation of a late-Song/early-Yuan landscape.

tradition at the behest of their patrons, the widely-traveled Franciscans, and a scroll from the east would provide the perfect catalyst for this transformation. Can visual traces of this documented interchange – i.e. Late Song or early Yuan stylistic elements in landscape, figure form, and perspective – be discerned in late-medieval European art?

The most logical place to begin looking for subtle, early signs of Chinese influence is at Assisi, which underwent several phases of decoration during the era of the *Pax Mongolica*. The pros and cons of whether Giotto ever painted there – quite simply, he did – are the subject for another book, but if we look with fresh eyes at two germinal scenes in the Life of St. Francis cycle – the *Miracle of the Spring* [FIG. 9-6] and *Saint Francis Preaching to the Birds* – the figure forms, their proportions, and the background landscape do, indeed, indicate a striking shift to an inno-

vative, non-Byzantine source.⁹ Consider then the possibility that we are seeing at Assisi a somewhat hesitant interpretation of a Chinese landscape, introduced into western artistic conventions in the last decade of the thirteenth century via a painted scroll.¹⁰ This is not a new speculation: in the 1980s, Hidemichi Tanaka pointed out that, stylistically, the tree in *Saint Francis Preaching to the Birds* was far closer to Chinese perspective than the nearest western prototypes at the time, and theorized a possible connection between the two traditions.¹¹ Certainly, if we compare the human and animal forms in Zhao Mengfu's *Horse and Groom in the Wind* [FIG. 9-7] and the panel of *Saint Francis Giving His Cloak* [FIG. 9-8] a stylistic resonance comes through in the Assisi fresco that cannot be ignored. In light of the Franciscan connection to China, this painting can be seen anew as another hesitant interpretation of a much more polished form, rather than a European innovation created in an artistic vacuum.

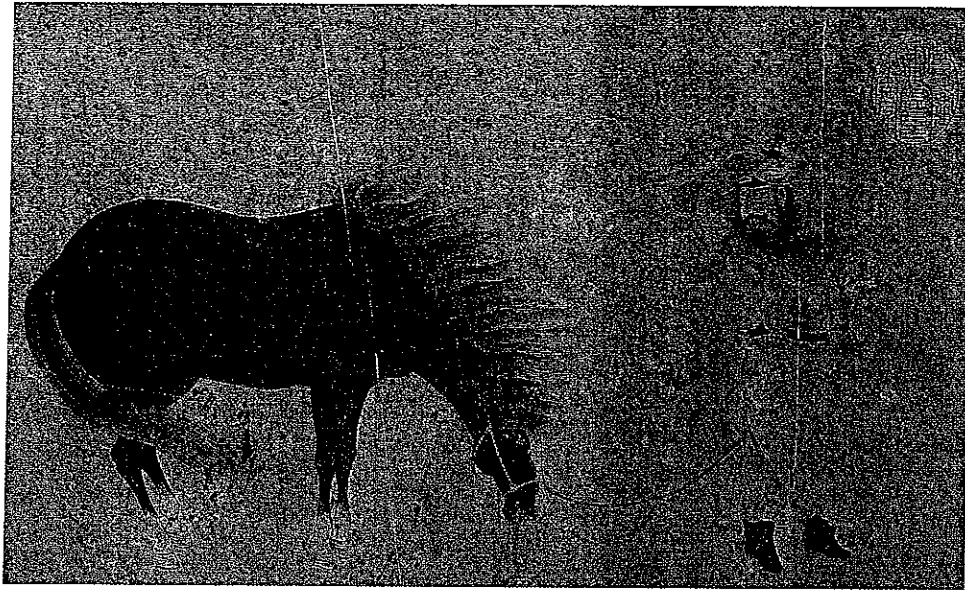


Fig. 9-7 *Horse and Groom*, Zhao Mengfu, ca. 1305. Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, National Palace Museum, Taipei

The solid and naturalistic figures depicted in Zhao's painting are representative of many early Yuan works, available as copies in the markets of coastal China.

Phags-pa Script and Giotto

That Giotto's generation of artists had been introduced to real people from Tartary is already witnessed by the fact that Mongol or Chinese faces are readily identifiable in such diverse works as Giotto's *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* (see Chapter IV), the *Crucifixion* at Subiaco (Chapter V), Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Martyrdom* (Chapter VI), and Giovanni del Biondo's *St. Sebastian* (Chapter VIII). Taken as a representative group of paintings produced by some of the premier artists of the century, we must conclude that these painters and their Franciscan or private patrons were keenly aware of China and its artistic lure. It has already been demonstrated that Yuan-era silks that arrived in Europe were carefully copied by Simone Martini and others, so faithfully replicated that we can identify their Mongol source. It stands to reason that other items or motifs from the east were copied as well, although some may have hidden in plain sight for centuries. Identifying one such motif, Hidemichi Tanaka in a brilliant insight has persuasively

established that Giotto was exposed to Mongol *Phags-pa* script, and that he used it as a decorative motif at Padua and elsewhere.² [FIG. 9-3] This subtle use of Mongol script as decoration went unnoticed in the west until Tanaka pointed it out in the 1980s.

Tanaka's was a breakthrough observation. Conservatively speaking, *Phags-pa* script as a decorative motif confirms that, at the very least, Giotto, who had already depicted a Mongol horseman witnessing the *Martyrdom of St. Peter*, had accurately observed and depicted material items from Mongol China. Taken to its logical conclusion, however, it implies that Giotto was exposed to the diplomatic scrolls from Tartary that his Franciscan patrons bore to the Pope and to their brothers in Assisi, and that the artist was allowed to or actively encouraged to use them as artistic sources.³ Certainly, the inclusion of Mongol script in the already innovative paintings of Giotto is provocative: can it be doubted that he was exposed to a scroll, or scrolls, from China? As Chapter I detailed, a wide variety of painted scrolls was available



Fig. 9-8 St. Francis Giving His Cloak, follower of Giotto, ca. 1300. Fresco, Upper Church, Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi

The stylistic resonance in this painting should be seen in light of the Franciscan mission to China, where the missionaries were exposed to a sophisticated artistic tradition radically different from their own, but easily transported to the west via scrolls.

to the Franciscans and the Italian traders living in China. These included blue and gold sutra scrolls; landscapes, bird and animal scrolls, and figure paintings. All of these paintings were easily had, relatively durable, and quite light and portable. We need only to look anew at the paintings of Giotto and his contemporaries to see how a late Song/early Yuan scroll – a *papirum tartaricorum* – could have informed his, and his followers, fundamental spatial shift away from the Byzantine norms of the time. It is time to reconsider the Franciscans, with their Chinese mission in full bloom and at their peak as artistic patrons in Europe, as the catalyst for this naturalistic breakthrough wrought by Giotto and his contemporaries.

Franciscan Maps and the Rise of Travel Collectanea

Whether the Franciscans are recognized as artistic catalysts or not, it is certain that Franciscan travelers from Roubrouck to Marignolli spawned a whole new genre in illuminated literature and in map design as well. The mid-fourteenth century saw the creation of

a new genre of illustrated writings – the travel compendium – that grew out of the reports of Franciscan wayfarers and missionaries to the east. The large number of surviving travel compendia indicates a burgeoning secular interest in the exotic lands explored by the friars in their quest for converts.

That the intrepid brothers of Francis were skilled and creative map makers, or that their travel reports engendered wide secular interest, should come as no surprise. A Fra Paolino Minorita of Avignon is cited as the creator of a circular map of the world, with new information on Asia and the Far East ca. 1320, which also incorporated some geographical data from Guillaume de Roubrouck.¹⁴ Fra Paolino's (second-hand? firsthand?) knowledge of Asia obviously had potential value for traders, indicated by the fact that his map apparently became the basis for another circular map of the same area, created by the commercial map maker Petrus Vesconte of Genoa, ca. 1321.¹⁵ Tartary as a medieval destination was last shown on a European map – the Catalan Map – in 1375.¹⁶ It dis-



Fig. 9-9 Portrait of Emperor Carl IV of Bohemia, before 1371.
Detail from the Votive Panel of Archbishop Jan Očko of
Vlasim, National Gallery of Prague, O 84

Carl IV, shown draped in a robe of *nasij* cloth, was the patron of Fra Giovanni di Marignolli, upon the Franciscan's return from China.

appears until approximately 1442, when it reappears on the Vinland Map, which was almost certainly drawn and commented upon by a Franciscan.¹⁷ The Vinland Map forms the outer edges of our study of maps and travel compendia, as it was bound with certain chapters of Vincent de Beauvais's *Speculum historiale* and a unique variant copy of Carpini's travel to the Mongol east, the *Relatio*.¹⁸

Collections of bound travel reports, similar to the one containing the Vinland Map, became widely popular in the late medieval period. Beginning in the mid-fourteenth century, travel compendia grew in popularity with royal patrons and other wealthy collectors, until they were produced away from the monasteries in secular workshops.¹⁹ Royal patronage certainly played a role in the widespread appeal of these books, and in one case, royal patronage was crucial for the survival of a particularly important account.

Marignolli's trip to China is given the barest mention in papal records; the only full report exists interspersed within the *Historica Boemiae*, which Marignolli wrote for Emperor Carl IV. After Marignolli returned from China, he took up residence in Prague in 1353 at the invitation of Emperor Carl IV. Ostensibly he was there to write the *Historica Boemiae*, but it is very likely that his patron, a noted collector of eastern objects, encouraged him to include his eye-witness account of the China of Emperor Shundi as well. Excerpted from the *Historica*, Marignolli's travel account was widely copied and included in numerous medieval travel compendia that began to be produced in the last half of the fourteenth century and on into the fifteenth.

Although each compendium was unique, these individualized collections of travel tales were built around a roughly consistent core. Richly pictorial, often with images based on existing illustrated Alexander romances, almost all of the existing travel compendia include a portion of Marco Polo's trip to China and they invariably include Fra Odorico's report as well; then an assortment of other accounts were added, probably at the behest of the particular patron. These might include Marignolli's version of his trip, Carpini or Roubrouck's account, the plagiarized stories of Sir John Mandeville, and so forth.²⁰ A large number of these travel collectanea survive, and they are a fascinating glimpse into the minds, tastes, and acquisition habits of those able to afford such diversions. Largely based on Franciscan written reports, these illustrated books were the secular offshoot of their pioneering missionary activity: in one sense, the Franciscans were the fourteenth-century equivalent of astronauts, showing the way for other aspiring travelers, merchants, or simply armchair dreamers.²¹

Paris 2810

The most famous travel compendium was illustrated around 1400 by the Boucicault Master for Jean the Fearless of Burgundy (nephew of the Duc de Berry). The volume was in the possession of the Duc de Berry at the time of his death. Contained within this beautiful volume are the following accounts:



Fig. 9-10 Carl IV Accepting Gifts from His Nephew, Jean, Duc de Berry, from the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, ca. 1378-80. Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, MS FR 2813, fol 478v

Both Carl IV and his nephew Jean, Duc de Berry, belonged to a royal family famous for its avid collecting and lavish gift giving. At their deaths, both men had Chinese items in their personal inventories. The Duc de Berry, in addition to owning a Yuan-era porcelain object similar to the Fonthill vase, also possessed the travel compendium which had been created for his nephew, Jean the Fearless of Burgundy.

- 1) excerpts from the travels of Marco Polo in French, *Le Livres des Merveilles* 2) Fra Odorico's Travels
- 3) William of Boldensele's *Pilgrimage to Egypt and the Holy Land* in 1336 4) Emperor Shundi's letter to Pope Benedict XII of 1338 and Pope Benedict's answer
- 5) Giovanni da Cora, the bishop of Soltaniyeh's report *The States of the Great Khan* 6) Sir John de Mandeville's *Travels* (largely lifted from Odorico)
- 7) the Armenian king Hetum's *Historia orientalis*²³
- 8) and Ricoldo da Montecroce's description of his eastern journey.²⁴

The book is a visual wonder, with pictures of fabled beasts and humanoid forms, accompanying the various texts. The illuminations refer to illustrated versions of Alexander romances, although nothing is included from the Alexander legend itself.²⁴ But the collection is more than a visual reference to an older, romantic form: the texts themselves dictate an "eastern" or oriental look to the illustrations. It has been

speculated that the Boucicault Master and others had perhaps been exposed to Persian landscape miniatures as a stylistic source for these exquisite little paintings. The influence of Chinese painting on Persian miniatures has been noted for years.²⁵ Speaking on illustrations in Rashid al-Din's *History of the World*, ca. 1314, created in the Rahidiyya scriptorium, Grey says: "...the layout on the page with the small proportions of height to width, immediately suggests that the model may have been a scroll-painting. Since Dr. Beyhan Yorukan demonstrated that some Persian drawings...were indeed cut from lateral scroll paintings, a direct and close connection is established between the Persian school of the early Timurid period and that of China. Nothing could be more probable than that such Chinese scroll-paintings were available [to the scriptorium]...."²⁶

The same direct route could be argued for such a Chinese scroll entering Europe during the first half



Fig. 9-11 *A Market Village by a River*, anonymous, 11th or 12th c., Song Dynasty, Section of a handscroll. Ink and colors on paper, Palace Museum collection, Taizhong, Taiwan

Chinese landscapes of this era often portrayed jutting mountains, with promontories wreathed in mist and water.

of the fourteenth century. [FIG. 9-11 Song Scroll]
Certainly, it is probable that some were already in royal collections at the same time that royal patrons became eager to have a travel account commissioned. What could be more natural than to copy a landscape scroll from Tartary that already depicted what that exotic land presumably looked like in the first place? The mountain cusps and jutting promontories in the manuscript are so Chinese in their style, we do not need the circuitous route of borrowing from Persian renderings of Chinese landscapes. Given the direct Franciscan and trade connection to China during the *Pax Mongolica*, these illuminations can be directly inferred from original Chinese sources, without relying on an intermediary stylistic filter. I suggest that illustrated travel compendia such as Paris MS 2810 provide one venue for tracing the broader introduction of Chinese pictorial forms – particularly landscape conventions [FIGS. 9-11 and 9-12] – into late medieval and early Renaissance paintings.

Blue and Gold Sutra Paintings and Their European Counterparts

Another form of Chinese scroll that should be considered for possible influence in late medieval European paintings is the Buddhist sutra scroll. Richly drawn in gold on a deep indigo background, these gorgeous scrolls were produced in abundance in Yuan China, not only to give grace to the commissioner, but specifically to be dispersed as conversion tools. That one or several of these scrolls made their way to Europe is not unlikely, either as a princely gift, a Franciscan example of a rival covenant, or as a trader's souvenir: in fact, a sutra dated 1346 exists in the Vatican Library [FIG. 9-13]. The artistic convention of using a gold silhouette on a deep blue background that took on a second life in the late Middle Ages could be completely coincidental, but in light of the abundance of sutra scrolls available in China, and the missionary activity during the *Pax Mongolica*, it



Fig. 9-12 *The Island of Ceylon*, from the *Travels of Marco Polo*, ca. 1400. Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, MS. Fr. 2810, fol. 106v

Miniature landscapes illustrating travel reports are evocative of contemporary Chinese landscapes, which were available in scroll format in all of the major cities of China during the *Pax Mongolica*.

would bear a serious study to see if there is an artistic connection. Certainly, the Duc de Berry favored this inclusion in his *Tres Riches Hours* and other European examples of deep indigo grounds with gold over-painting persist well into the fifteenth century [FIG. 9-14 *Black Hours*].

What Survives Today of the Princely Gifts?

Luxuries, as Allsen points out, are often a form of political currency.²⁷ This was as true for the Mongols of the Yuan dynasty as it was for the medieval kings of Europe, who also exchanged among themselves elaborate and exotic gifts that strengthened family and dynastic ties. One Chinese porcelain vase that began its European existence as a royal gift will serve as a metaphor in this chapter for all the missing princely gifts from China that made their way back to the west and have since disappeared over the passage of time.

Over the last seven centuries, since its creation in an experimental kiln in Jiangxi province in the early part of the fourteenth century, the Gaignieres-Fonthill vase has traveled through European royal and private collections. Fitted with gothic silver fittings that date it to Hungary around 1380, the vase was next documented in 1689 in the inventory of objects in the collection of the Dauphin of France.²⁸ It was in the royal collection in 1713, when it recorded by Roger de Gaignieres who, with the help of Barthelemy Remy, had the vase drawn in watercolor.²⁹ [FIG. 9-15 French watercolor] Sometime after 1713, the vase disappeared from the French royal collection (probably during the disturbances surrounding the French Revolution), only to re-emerge in the early nineteenth century in the possession of William Beckford of Fonthill Abbey, England.³⁰ At Fonthill, the vase was a prized *objet*, featured prominently in the frontispiece of a guide to Beckford's distinguished collection of medieval relics.³¹

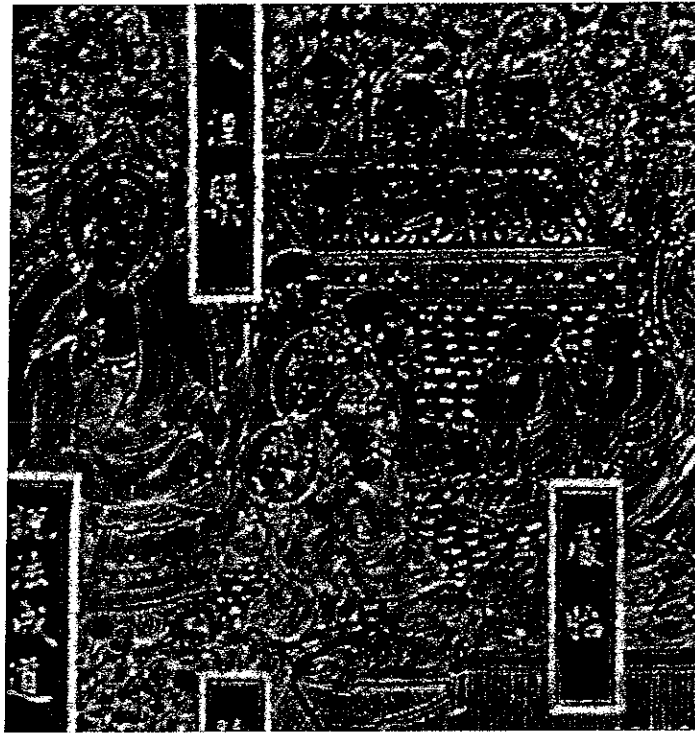


Fig. 9-13 Vatican Sutra. Detail of *Life of the Buddha*, Or. 148 II, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

The use of gold on indigo-ground sutras had a particular iconographic meaning in the east.

The Silver Mounts as Clues to Royal Patronage

Unfortunately, financial difficulties forced Beckford to sell the Abbey and his collection in 1823.²² After the sale, the vase disappeared again: at some point it was senselessly vandalized of its medieval silver embellishments, and broken. Then, in 1882, quietly and ignominiously, like a thoroughbred without its papers, it entered the collection of the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, as a simple Yuan vessel without further provenance. [FIG. 9-16] There it lay in obscurity until 1959, when the vase and its remarkable medieval pedigree was re-discovered by Arthur Lane, who published its history in 1961.²³

Of the Chinese porcelain vase with its medieval silver mounts, Lane says: "Since its publication...in 1897, the drawing in the Gaignieres Collection...has become generally recognized as an important docu-

ment in the history of ceramics.²⁴ It evidently represents a Chinese porcelain vessel, one of the earliest to reach Europe; a piece moreover of a most unusual kind, made during an experimental phase in the artistic development of the porcelain medium itself."²⁵ Lane continues on the singular importance of this vase: "...the Ching-te-chen potters improved the body of their porcelains, making it much harder, denser, and heavier; but with this they retained for some time the [Song-era] bluish *qingbai* glaze."

Sometime after its arrival in Europe, the vase was embellished with the silver fittings that eventually furnished a clue as to its original European owners. Medieval collectors from Abbot Suger on down frequently added heraldry and other indications of ownership: as Lane explains: "The European practice of mounting Chinese porcelain objects in precious metal

is attested by fairly numerous existing examples of sixteenth-century date, but from the fifteenth century, only one example survives – the celadon bowl... with the arms [of a German nobleman that date the fittings to] before 1453. The Gaignieres drawing is a unique record of the elaborate silver-gilt and enameled mounts of the fourteenth century, otherwise known to us only through brief descriptions in contemporary inventories.³⁷

In 1713 Gaignieres deciphered the arms and inscriptions on the mounts, and concluded that they referred to the accession of Charles III of Anjou to the throne of Naples in 1381.³⁸ Another connoisseur, Mazarolle, interpreted the arms and inscriptions slightly differently, to mean that the vase once had been in the possession of Louis the Great of Hungary (d. 1382).³⁹ But the mounts are unlike any commissioned by Louis of Hungary (who favored Italian work) and so Lane continues: “More fruitful comparison may be made with work done not for Louis the Great of Hungary himself, but for his contemporary and brother-in-law, the Emperor [Carl] IV of Bohemia (r. 1347–1378).”⁴⁰

Carl IV of Bohemia as a Royal Collector

A brief glance at this towering figure of the fourteenth century adds weight to Lane’s educated guess that Carl IV was connected with the vase’s entry into Europe. Patron of Marignolli, Carl IV of Bohemia was a man of widely ranging tastes, and an insatiable collector. Grandson of Henry of Luxembourg (see chapter VI), Carl’s early upbringing at the court of his uncle in France in the 1320s trained him to be a connoisseur: “In Paris [Carl] came to realize that art can be a pillar of royal might. At the same time, he received the first incentives for his passion for collecting objects and books. Immediately upon his arrival [in Paris as a seven-year-old boy in 1323] his uncle [Charles le Bel] gave him a Book of Hours, which served the boy as a reader.”⁴¹ After educational stints in Avignon (his former tutor, Cardinal Pierre Roger de Rosiers, became Pope Clement VI in 1342), and as a young mercenary *condottiere* in Italy, Carl inherited the throne of Bohemia and settled in Prague.

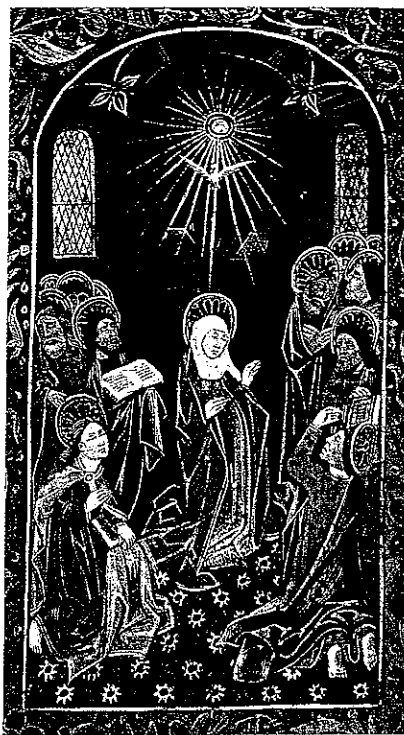


Fig. 9-14 Pentecost, follower of Willem Vrelent, ca. 1470, From the so-called *Black Hours*, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 493, fol. 18v

Gold embellishment on a deep blue page was a favored and very expensive late-medieval decorative device.

There his grand building projects and collecting of art objects began in earnest: St. Vitus’s Cathedral was built and embellished according to his taste. He collected all things rare and beautiful, and in particular, items from beyond the confines of continental Europe fascinated him. Byzantine objects, Sassanid paintings from 6th-century Persia, a rock crystal ewer from Egypt that he had set in a gilded silver mount, all of which he presented to the church treasury of St. Vitus Cathedral.⁴² He was the patron and protector of Saracen merchants, whom he settled in tents in Prague and encouraged to weave carpets.

And he invited Fra Giovanni di Marignolli, upon the Franciscan’s return from China, to settle in Prague, supporting him while Marignolli related his travels in the east. That Carl was a collector and connoisseur



Fig. 9-15 *Fonthill Vase*, Barthelémy Remy, 1713, Ink wash drawing, showing gothic silver fittings ca. 1380. Gaignieres Collection, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS FR 20070, fol. 8

As this watercolor attests, the Chinese vase was given elaborate silver fittings, with armorial chasings, after it arrived in Europe in the mid-fourteenth century. The silver handle and base were senselessly stripped from the vase sometime in the late 19th century.

of objects from Tartary has long been known: in addition to being portrayed in *nasij* he is considered to be the most likely source for the many *panno tartarico* silks that have been inventoried in St. Vitus's Cathedral. Certainly some of the brocades found in his own tomb were of Mongol origin.⁴⁵ Lane's contention that the fittings on the Chinese porcelain vase were more in the style of Carl IV, rather than his close relative Louis the Great of Hungary, is in line with what we know of the Emperor and his taste for all things exotic.

Royal Family Connections and the Trading of Gifts

Like their medieval royal compatriots and relatives all over Europe, Carl and Louis frequently exchanged lavish gifts. In any case, Louis is documented as giving Carl a silver pectoral cross of Byzantine manufacture.⁴⁴ It is entirely possible that the Chinese vase was given by Carl to his brother-in-law Louis, who, after Carl's death in 1378, had it embellished and in turn gave it to the Anjous. That the porcelain vase eventually was documented in the French royal collection is not odd either: the Anjous were a spur of the French royal family, also related to Carl of Bohemia and Louis of Hungary. [See Addendum III]

When or how the Gaignieres-Fonthill vase entered the French royal collection is not known.⁴⁶ It is worth noting that Jean, Duc de Berry, the famous connoisseur, beloved nephew of Carl IV, and younger brother of the King of France, had a similar porcelain vase of Chinese manufacture in his own collection at the time of his death in 1416.⁴⁶ How Jean acquired the vase is not known, but given the predilection for extravagant gift-giving among royal relatives, it is quite possible that Uncle Carl would be a chief candidate. There is a charming miniature in the *Grandes Chroniques de France* depicting the young Duc de Berry, at the behest of his older brother, giving a precious vessel to his gray and bearded uncle, while attendants wait in the margins of the text with further golden gifts. [See FIG 9-10 Presentation of Gifts] The Yuan-era vase in the inventory of the belongings of the Duc de Berry shows, as Lane points out "that the Gaignieres-Fonthill vase was not the only specimen of its kind [in Europe at the time]."⁴⁷

Conclusion

Princely gifts and ecclesiastical treasures were the bedrock of medieval diplomatic exchange. Although we can only guess at their artistic nature, it is documented that, at the behest of Khubilai Khan, Rabban Sauma gave princely gifts in 1288 to the kings of France and England, in addition to enriching the papal treasury of Pope Nicholas IV in Rome (see Chapter II). Later delegations from the east are also recorded traveling through Hungary and portions of Germany on their way into France and on to

Avignon, dispersing gifts as they wended their way from court to court.⁴⁸ Precious items (again, we must assume that silks, ceramics, metalwork, and other portable items of luxury, such as scrolls, were included) were carried with diplomatic letters and given as gifts – not only to the kings of Europe but subsequently given among related European kings and ecclesiastics, establishing rare Chinese items broadly in royal collections and church treasuries. Franciscan travelers and diplomatic couriers, sometimes supported by royal patrons, as Marignolli was by Emperor Carl IV, are another highly probable source of rare items from China finding their way into medieval collections. Certainly, in addition to their diplomatic responsibilities and missionary activities, the Franciscans were formidable patrons of the arts in their own right, open to new artists and methods as they spread the word of God.

This chapter, of all the chapters in this book, is the briefest of introductions, meant to spur the scholar and layman alike to consider anew the medieval era and its contact with the material goods and artistic traditions of China. It barely introduces the spectrum of objects from Yuan-era China that survive today in the west, and certainly the list of items included here is tantalizingly incomplete. Other royal connections and collecting habits, and the inventories that document them, are a virtually untapped source of data for further discoveries.⁴⁹ This chapter also outlines the probable role that the Franciscans played as catalyst for the transmission of Chinese stylistic forms into the west, via a *papirum tartaricorum*, where we can trace certain landscape and figure conventions being adapted by Giotto and his followers. As this new and rich vein of information is opened for exploration, however, it will be up to other scholars and archivists to expand on this brief introduction, to provide solid proof that certain decoration programs, for example, were the result of close observation of a specific scroll or scrolls of Yuan vintage. To this writer at least, this chapter is offered in the hope that somewhere in Europe, in some dim archive, a colleague will be puzzled anew by the existence of a Chinese handscroll of improbable Yuan vintage, in a chest with other western items of similar age, only waiting to be recognized and acknowledged for what it is; an artistic relic of a long-forgotten medieval exchange.



Fig. 9-16 Fonthill Vase, Chinese, Yuan dynasty, ca. 1300, Jiangxi porcelain, National Museum of Ireland

The product of an experimental kiln in Jiangxi province, this vase entered Europe sometime in the fourteenth century, and remained in royal collections until the 18th century.



Fig. 10-1 *Madonna of Humility*, detail of gravestone of Katerina Vilionis, died 1342, Yangzhou, China.

The image of the Madonna of Humility was introduced into China during the early 14th c. by the Franciscans, who brought illuminated books with them. By 1342, this image had been reproduced by local Chinese stonecarvers, who added several iconographic elements of the folk goddess Guanyin as well.

And thus they waited on us for about four years, always with infinite respect, honoring us and the retinue with costly clothing.... A great harvest of souls has been made in that empire.

For the Minor Brothers have a cathedral church in Beijing just next to the palace and a regular archbishop's residence and several churches in the city and bells, and they all live of the Emperor's table in the most honorable style.¹

Marignolli's report in the Historica Boemiae

第十章

Marignolli traveled extensively among the Christian communities and coastal cities of China during his four-year visit, and was obviously impressed by the sophisticated life his fellow Europeans led: *There is also Zayton [Quanzhou] a wonderful sea port, a city to us incredible, where the Minor Brothers have three very beautiful churches, most excellent and very wealthy, a bath, a warehouse, the depository of all the merchants.²* It is also apparent that he enjoyed generous imperial support: *They have also the best and most beautiful bells, two of which I had made with great ceremony, of which we decided that one, namely the larger, should be named Johannina and the other Antonina, and placed in the midst of the Saracens.³* That this Franciscan brother would have the freedom, the royal support, and the financial wherewithal to commission such expensive bells is completely at odds with the missionary experience in virtually every other country at the time (for instance, in India, where the Franciscans were robbed, humiliated, and martyred).

Certainly, China during the *Pax Mongolica* was open and welcoming to the Latin Christians, and quite simply, Marignolli never stopped marveling at the life being led in China's cities by his western contemporaries. He says: *And among them is a most famous city by the name of Campsay [Hangzhou], more wonderful, more beautiful, richer, and larger, with more people and more riches and delights, buildings (especially temples of idols, where there are 1000 and 2000 monks living together), than any city which is, or ever has been, in the world....⁴*



Fig. 10-2 Woodcut of Linggu Si Monastery, Nanjing

This undated woodcut from an old Chinese chronicle shows the grounds of the monastery, and identifies the Franciscan elements as the ruins of the old bell tower (1) and behind it, the church that became the *Wuliang Dian* (2).

Marignolli's report mentions several themes important to this chapter: the wealth of European merchants living in and doing business in China; their established communities and beautifully furnished churches; and the ready availability of local Chinese artisans, who apparently could paint church decorations, cast bells, and carve stone on commission with considerable skill. What, if anything, remains of this vibrant European presence that Marignolli described? In fact, Marignolli's admiring account of Latin Christian life in China is backed by a small but significant group of archaeological remains.

One of these objects, a gravestone unearthed in the city of Quanzhou during World War II while the medieval walls of the old city of Zaitun were being demolished, speaks to the memory of the brothers of Francis who went to China during the *Pax Mongolica*.

Certainly most of these men never saw Europe again. [See FIG. 5-10] Among the debris from the medieval wall were a number of tombstones, many identifiably Nestorian and Muslim, dating from the Yuan era. In the early 1950s, a schoolteacher who had photographed the stones shortly after they were unearthed sent the photos to the Rev. John Foster at Glasgow University.

Dr. Foster was intrigued to find that one stone was inscribed in Latin. Although the photograph he had been sent was difficult to read, Foster believed he could make out several words: *Hic[]sepultus Andreas Perusinus Ordinus[]apostolus M[]JXII*. If this is the gravestone of Fra Andreas of Perugia, dying in 1332 as Foster believes, then it marks the passing and memory of the small group of Franciscan *poverello* who spent their lives building the Latin church in Yuan China.

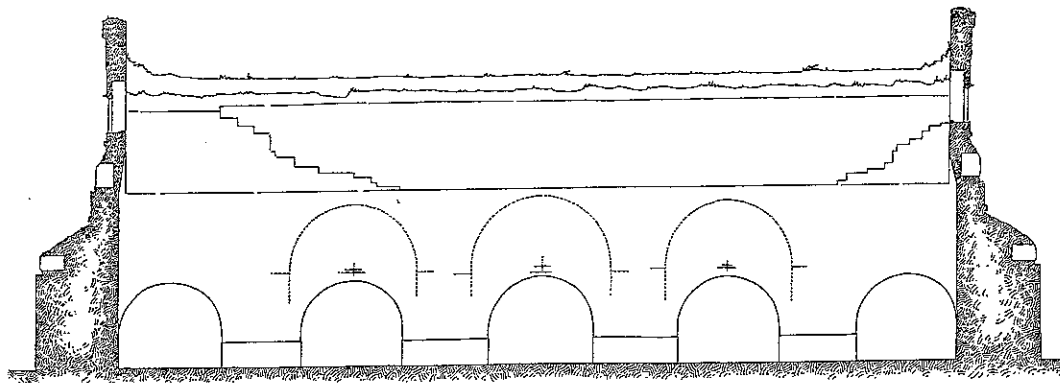


Fig. 10-3 Elevation of Linggu Si Monastery, Nanjing. Architectural drawing by Johannes Prip-Moller

Prip-Moller pointed out that the lower levels of brickwork in the *Wuliang Dian* were not typically Chinese in character or construction, and judged the building to be an Avignon-style beamless church, whose construction was probably overseen by a European-trained builder in the late 1320s.

The Archaeological Evidence at the Monastery of Linggu Si

In 1928, the Danish architect Johannes Prip-Moller began surveying temple sites in China for his classic study on Buddhist architecture.⁶ At the monastery of Linggu Si just outside Nanjing – famous in China as the tomb of the first successor to the Mongols – he made a singular discovery. [FIG. 10-2 woodcut of Linggu Si] The main temple building, built of brick, was a very old beamless hall – a *Wuliang Dian* – that had two side aisle flanking a wider central aisle. All three aisles had slightly pointed barrel vaults, the middle aisle had three centrally placed devotional niches, and the length of the building measured a perfect 150 *pieds du roi* by a 120 *pieds du roi*.⁷ In Prip-Moller's opinion, this was not an indigenous Chinese building at all. In fact, it was markedly similar to a European-style hall church, in particular to the beamless churches of the Avignon region of France. [FIG. 10-3 Elevation of Linggu Si]

Prip-Moller went back to the earliest Chinese mentions of the building to clarify his impression. The source – the Linggu Si chronicle – extolled the first Ming Emperor Hongwu (r. 1368-1398), who eschewed Khubilai's capital of Dadu in favor of Nanjing, and

built this compound in the hills outside the city in 1383 as his burial place. It had long been the site of a monastery and Buddhist shrine and when the emperor chose it for his tomb, the area was extensively reworked and refurbished. All of these changes to the holy site are mentioned by the chronicler in detail, except for one significant exception: the enormous brick hall. Prip-Moller wrote: "The queer thing about this, however, is his complete failure to say a single word about what ought to have been the feature of the whole lay-out, the wondrous beamless hall built entirely of brick. A hall of such dimensions and of a construction so unique should have commanded the chief attention of any writer trying to sing the praise of this new monastery. The fact that it is not mentioned at all, makes one suspicious."⁸ Furthermore, the chronicler states that the building and compound were completed in less than one year (including housing for a thousand monks), which Prip-Moller dismisses as impossible: "Two explanations suggest themselves: the one, that the hall was not built then but later, after the writing of the record; the other, that it was there [already], but that ...for some reason or another [it was] the best thing not to write too much about it."⁹ The architect compared the hall with the tomb and found that their brickwork was

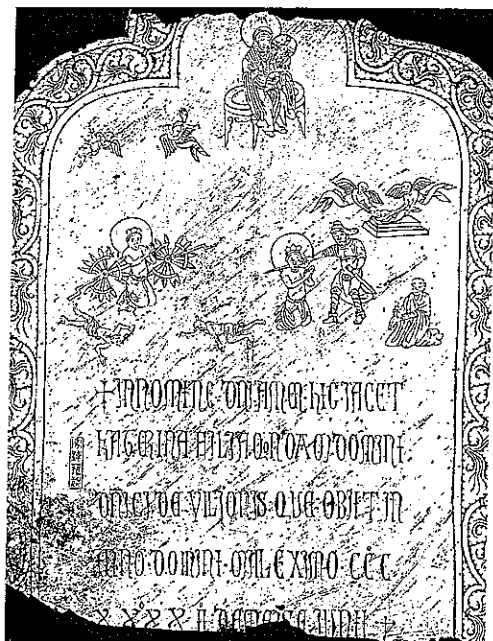


Fig. 10-4 Gravestone of Katerina Vilionis, 1342, Yangzhou. Carved stone rubbing

The Latin inscription states: *In the name of the Lord amen: Here lies Katerina daughter of the late Sir Dominico de Vilionis. [She] died in the year of our Lord 1342 in the month of June.* A Chinese seal carved on the far left of the marker was presumably left by a local admirer of the stoneworker's skill. The seal says: *Yin-wei obtained [the pleasure] of seeing [this].*

significantly different in composition, leading him to state: "...combined with the information extracted from the chronicle, [this writer has no doubt] that Hongwu's connection with the *Wuliang Dian* of Linggu Si was not that of its builder, but its restorer."¹⁰

Although Prip-Moller did not discover any Vatican documents that indicated a church seat in Nanjing (only a Latin Franciscan bible was reportedly found in the vicinity, see this book's Conclusion), he is firm in his judgment. Based on its structural composition and its unique brickwork, Linggu Si was originally a Franciscan edifice built on an Avignon plan, executed and overseen by an experienced European-trained builder, probably erected during the late 1320s. In Chapter V, the resolution by Zhao Mengfu of a conflict between Christians and Buddhists over ownership of a monastery in the Nanjing/Yangzhou vicinity lends weight to Prip-Moller's claim: religious sites were encroached upon and rebuilt by both religious adherents during the Yuan period.

The Two Latin Gravestones from Yangzhou

Contemporary with Marignolli's visit, and close in time to the building of Linggu Si, are two gravestones found in Yangzhou, that are interesting beyond their historical implications. Carving on both stones indicate a melding of medieval Christian iconography with traditional Chinese motifs during the late Yuan. Again, like the Nanjing temple above, we have no Vatican documents for Yangzhou as a missionary site. Nevertheless, Yangzhou has long-established Latin Christian references. Marco Polo claimed to have been headman of the foreign community there and Fra Odorico stated that when he visited it, the city had three Nestorian churches and one Franciscan house.

The tombstones are definitely Franciscan relics: their iconography sets them apart quite distinctly from Nestorian grave markers. Presumably carved by local artisans, the stones' Latin inscriptions commemorate two members of the Vilionis family, children of Domenico, an Italian trader thought to be from Genoa.¹¹ Katerina Vilionis, who died in 1342, has a stone with scenes from the life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, crowned by a seated Virgin and Child, the

first medieval Marian image to survive in China. [See FIG. 10-1 Madonna of Yangzhou detail, and FIG. 10-4]

Katerina's brother, Antonio, who died in 1344, is commemorated with a stone depicting scenes from the life of St. Anthony, and a Last Judgment, also the first of its kind to be excavated in modern times.²² [FIG. 10-5 Antonio's stone] The stone commemorating Antonio's death has two separate scenes. To the left is a seated St. Anthony Abbot, identifiable by his *tau* cross and a tiny demon kneeling by his side. In a possible conflation with the legend of the Franciscan St. Anthony of Padua, a vision of the Virgin and Child appears in front of Anthony Abbot (as in Anthony of Padua's legend). Behind the Virgin are six tiny bodies being freed from their graves on Judgment Day: they are raising their coffin lids or kneeling in front of an enthroned Christ in Majesty, flanked by two archangels and two trumpet-blowing angels. [FIG. 10-6] These images are obviously based on western prototypes from an illuminated *Legends of the Saints* (*Legenda Aurea*), and possibly even Psalter illuminations. [FIG. 10-7 Psalter]

Katerina's Stele and Its Marian Imagery

Katerina's stone is crowned by a seated Virgin and Child of the *Sedes Sapientiae* type favored by the Franciscans. [see FIG. 10-1 Yangzhou Madonna] Below Mary are four angels and in the tier below them are scenes from the martyrdom of St. Catherine of Alexandria: to the left is a semi-nude Catherine being menaced by two wheels and to the immediate right of this image is the actual moment of beheading of the saint by a soldier. At Catherine's feet in both scenes are two witnesses to her martyrdom, slain while her faith prevailed. Above the soldier are two of the angels previously mentioned, who lower the swathed body of Catherine into her grave on Mount Sinai. [Compare FIGS. 10-8 and 10-9] All of these figures can be seen as echoes of medieval prototypes found in illuminated *Legenda Aurea*, a copy of which, it should be remembered, was requested by Fra Giovanni in his first letter back to his order.

To the far right and below the feet of the soldier kneels a monk-like figure holding an infant. [FIG. 10-10 Franciscan with Infant] This is a relatively unusual



Fig. 10-5 Gravestone of Antonio Vilionis, 1344, Yangzhou, Carved stone rubbing

Antonio's marker and inscription is virtually identical to his sister Katerina's: *In the name of the Lord, amen: Here lies Antonio son of the late Sir Domenico de Vilionis. [He] departed in the year of our Lord 1344 in the month of November.* The marker is slightly smaller than Katerina's and is broken in two, but its decorative border is complete.



Fig. 10-6 *Christ in Majesty*, detail of gravestone of Antonio Vilionis, 1344, Yangzhou. Carved stone rubbing

The local stonecarver relied on a European prototype for his interpretation of this scene on Antonio's stone.

depiction, but not without precedent. Christ holds the departed soul of his mother, Mary, also depicted as a child, in the *Dormition of the Virgin* mosaic in Sta. Maria Maggiore in Rome, a church with strong Franciscan bonds [FIG. 10-11 of Christ with Infant].¹³ Father Rouleau observes: "In its innocent nakedness the infant symbolizes the immortal soul of the deceased, now offered back to its Creator. But who is the man on his knees who offers the soul to God?...I am convinced that we have here the delineation of a Franciscan friar, a representative of the 'pilgrims for Christ' established at [Yangzhou]. One naturally assumes that Katerina and the rest of her family were parishioners of the local church.... In any event, it must have been the friars who ministered to Katerina on her deathbed, and who consigned her mortal remains to the grave. In a very real sense, then, they could be said to have offered her soul to God, and it would be by no means presumptuous to signify the fact in the unobtrusive figure holding the soul-infant in his uplifted hands. The discovery of his presence there centuries later leads me to regard the [Yangzhou] tombstone as a graphic testimony...to a period of collective missionary endeavor in great part lost to us."¹⁴

Regional Chinese Motifs on the Stele

While the tombstone is unmistakably a Latin Christian monument, several motifs point to its non-European genesis. For example, the infant-soul depiction, while Christian, has Buddhist and other cross-cultural resonance: in the caves at Dunhuang, Guanyin is shown leading souls to Amitabha's Paradise;¹⁵ and specifically, souls depicted as infants are found in Tangut Buddhist art as well.¹⁶ In another example of visual ambiguity, the figure of Catherine being tortured and beheaded strongly resembles depictions of souls being tormented in the Buddhist version of Hell.¹⁷ [FIG. 10-12 *Martyrdom* and FIG. 10-13 *sutra illustration*]

Even more intriguing, the archaeological evidence of the Yangzhou gravestone of Katerina Vilionis reveals that, by 1342, the image of Mary, so clearly a Virgin of Humility, was already incorporating several iconographic nuances from the locally-worshipped folk-

goddess Guanyin. [FIG. 10-1 Yangzhou Madonna] In fact, it is instructive to view the Yangzhou Madonna as a transitional image in the evolution of Guanyin into a Chinese folk goddess: the enlarged halo around Mary's head suggests the moon, as in traditional depictions of Water and Moon Guanyin.¹⁸ [FIG. 10-14]. She is seated on a throne and draped in familiar Water and Moon Guanyin fashion [FIG. 10-15], but, in Franciscan tradition, she holds the Child on her lap. By the middle of the fourteenth century in Yangzhou, the carver of the Virgin was already using regional folk attributes of Guanyin to enhance this Franciscan image.

The Evolution of the Image of Guanyin: Male *Bodhisattva* to Child-giving Goddess

Guanyin did not start her folk life in China as a female. In the Buddhist pantheon, the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara was initially depicted in India and China as masculine. Some of the earliest depictions in China, in the tenth-century Dunhuang Caves, show Guanyin as fully male with a mustache. Slowly over the following centuries, this manly *bodhisattva* began to metamorphose into a gender-neutral then feminine deity called Guanyin, an abbreviated form of Guanshiyin, or "the Bodhisattva who Hears the Cries of the World." Tales of Guanyin in female form were brought to Hangzhou and the coast in the 12th century.¹⁹ Spurred by miraculous images, and visions by the faithful, Guanyin had assumed female qualities by 1276, when she was seen in a wondrous vision on the island of Putuo off the coast of Zhejiang province.²⁰ This island, one hundred miles from the city of Hangzhou, became a pilgrimage destination, and Guanyin's popularity as a goddess particularly beloved by women was assured.²¹ Her Buddhist identity was linked to "the World of the Womb-Matrix," so, to complete her transformation to a female deity, "Chinese popular religion appropriated her from Buddhism and, taking the word 'womb' literally, turned her into a goddess who grants children, and thus, into Child-giving Guanyin."²²



Fig. 10-7 *Christ in Majesty*, detail from Psalter, ca. 1280. Private Collection, Cologne. RBA c 8870

The Franciscans carried illuminated psalters, missals, and legends of the saints to China with them as teaching aids. The carvings on both Yangzhou gravestones rely heavily on western illuminations.

With the arrival of the Franciscans in the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century, and their devotion to the Virgin in both ideology and iconography, a new set of influences entered the area, reinforcing the gender change that was already manifesting itself in local depictions of the goddess. Christian images of the Virgin holding the Child, illuminated in missals and breviaries and in small carved ivory devotional objects, undoubtedly served as prototypes for the local painters and presumably carvers who decorated the Latin churches in Beijing and on the south sea coast.²³ (See Chapter III)



Fig. 10-8 *Angels Carrying St. Catherine to Mount Sinai*, detail of gravestone of Katerina Vilionis, 1342, Yangzhou. Carved stone rubbing.

It is clear that the Chinese carver of Katerina's stone relied on European sources for his imagery, although certain local artistic conventions are clearly identifiable, for example, in the treatment of the "legs" of the angels. Compare with FIG. 10-9

The Artistic Legacy of the Franciscans in China: The Madonna of Humility and the Child-giving Guanyin

From the beginning of the mission, it must have been apparent that the Virgin of Humility and the locally-worshiped Guanyin had iconography that overlapped, and most likely this worked to the Franciscans' advantage in terms of converts. At their most basic, Guanyin and Mary certainly shared the core cultural values of filial piety and feminine chastity. What remains to be seen, however, is whether Guanyin took on some of the aspects of Mary that were introduced by the Franciscans. Circumstantial evidence is strong that she did: images of Mary were introduced in the fourteenth century, holding a male child, while Guanyin was almost always depicted with other attributes; by the fifteenth-century, Guanyin was also holding a male child. Given the history and the location of the Franciscan mission, and the iconographic prototypes it introduced to the coast of China before 1368, I concur with Chun-fang Yu in her conclusion: "However, prior to the Ming, the depiction of Guanyin, even in feminine forms, seldom includ-

ed a male child held either in her arms or placed on her lap. The religious basis for this iconography came from Buddhist scriptures, but its artistic rendering may have been influenced by the iconography of the Virgin."²⁴

In addition to the boy,²⁵ other attributes of Guanyin were the moon, a vase with pure water, and a white parrot (a folk symbol of filial devotion) carrying prayer beads in his mouth. Similarities to the Madonna of the Revelation, with her crescent moon, or to the Virgin depicted with the white Dove of the Holy Spirit, must have been immediately apparent.²⁶ In one of her stories, Guanyin led twelve people, some good and some bad, to enlightenment. She could take many forms: that of a beautiful young woman, an old beggar woman, even a monk.²⁷

The sheer number of converted Christians (if the reports of the Franciscans are to be believed), added to a local population known for its skilled craftsmen (and the availability of ivory during the Yuan period; see Chapter V), could certainly have encouraged a



Fig. 10-9 Angels Carrying St. Catherine to Mount Sinai, detail, ca. 1400, Jean Pol and Herman de Limbourg, from the *Belles Heures de Jean, Duc de Berry*. The Cloisters, New York, 54.1.1, fol. 20r

While not as skillfully decorated as this example, similar illuminations clearly were the iconographic models for the carvers of the Yangzhou gravestones, who were serving a population of Latin Christian traders settled in China.

fourteenth-century regional trade in Marian-like images intended for personal devotion. In any case, the evolution of Guanyin from male *bodhisattva* into a female “manifestation of the compassionate *bodhisattva* that appealed especially to women,”²⁸ had sufficiently occurred in the coastal cities during the fourteenth century that Marignolli observed the worship of Guanyin (he does not mention her holding an infant) in Hangzhou in 1345, already mistaking this venerated image for that of the Virgin: *...Also, all the philosophers and astrologers of Babylon and Egypt, and Chaldea calculated that in the conjunction of Mercury with Saturn, a girl should be born, who was a virgin, without knowledge of men, who should bear a son in the Land of Israel. And the image of this Virgin is kept in great state in a temple in Kampsay [Hangzhou], and on the first appearance of the moon in the first month (that is February, which is the first month among the Cathayers), a New Year's feast is celebrated with great magnificence, and with illumination kept up all the night.*²⁹

Was Latin Christianity “Hidden in Plain Sight” in Ming China?

Somewhere between 1400 and 1600, the Child-giving Guanyin came into prominence as an image of veneration on the southern coast of China. If we are correct in assigning this new image to Franciscan influence, can we also see it as a lasting vestige of early Latin Christianity in China? What happened to the multitude of converts that Fra Giovanni and others claimed for Rome, when the Ming dynasty took control in 1368?

For one, we must conclude that no huge cataclysm took place in terms of Chinese Christianity during the change from the Yuan to the Ming dynasty, but that the Christian communities founded by the Franciscans probably became very discreet in the outward manifestations of their faith. This was a period of intense anti-foreign feeling, when non-Chinese graveyards were despoiled and their stones incorporated into city walls, as they were in Yangzhou and Quanzhou. A recent study suggests that Christian



Fig. 10-10 *Franciscan Holding an Infant Soul*, detail of gravestone of Katerina Villonis, 1342, Yangzhou

Father Rouleau observed: "In any event, it must have been the friars who ministered to Katerina on her deathbed, and who consigned her soul to God. In a very real sense, then, they could be said to have offered her soul to God."

worship, instead of dying out under this pressure, simply became more circumspect in its visible forms of worship.³⁰ Bernward Willeke uncovered evidence that some fifteenth-century Christians migrated from the coast or other cities to smaller communities, in order to worship quietly as they wished. About a community in Shandong province, he quotes Wenceslas Ronflet: "The oldest Christian community of the prefecture...should be dated from the fifteenth century. It has a funeral stele which was erected in 1487 [which] states that the Liu family came from Nanjing. One of the emperors of the Ming dynasty had taken a daughter of these Liu's as a concubine. They lived on imperial estates in...Shanxi, and emigrated [to the province] in 1404...where they founded the [present] village...."³¹ Willeke cites three other Christian villages in the area that claim to have early fifteenth-century roots and says: "if this is true that

these communities have been Catholic for over five hundred years, they must be descendants from Catholics baptized by the early Franciscans during the Yuan dynasty."³²

Another Christian group that may have found migration to be beneficial to its health was the large number of Alans that had served the Mongol army. One opinion has the Alans, the military backbone of the Mongol regime, removing themselves to the periphery of China – to the Kipchak capital of Sarai – where they would have been served by Latin Christian missionaries to the province of "Vicaria Aquilonis." The missionary needs of this province were specifically addressed in two papal bulls (December 30, 1371 and November 8, 1392), which sent Franciscans to the area; the first group with thirteen friars; the second with twenty-six.³³ Thus, a large Franciscan presence was almost certainly moved to the periphery of China, possibly to leave the smaller groups that chose not to go without continuing leadership.

In fact, by focusing on the periphery of China, the Holy See may have contributed to the demise of Christianity in China proper. Willeke cites a surprising European source for this conjecture: "In 1949 Richard Henning called attention to the discovery of an ancient manuscript dated 1404, *Libellus de Notitia Orbis*, found by Dr. Anton Kern in the university library of Graz. Its author is a certain Johannes III Galonifontibus, a French Dominican, who was then archbishop of Soltaniyeh in the Near East.... The manuscript contains important information about the Catholic church in early Ming times."³⁴ He quotes Johannes's report about an hitherto unknown successor to Fra Giovanni da Montecorvino and the existence of Latin Christians in China in the early fifteenth century: *In that country there was an archbishop of Kambalech [Beijing] of the order of Friars Minor, a venerable and saintly man named Charles of France, whose acquaintance I made in my younger years. This man lived in those regions and had done much for the spread of and glorification of the faith. Since his death, many years ago, no one has gone into those regions. As a consequence I myself have been asked repeatedly and I would go there, but I have waited for the consent of the Holy See. If it is pleasing*

to the Most High, I shall move into those parts because we have there a good number of Catholics.³⁵

While the change in dynasties did not bring about an immediate religious persecution, it did make it difficult for the faith to be renewed from the outside. The Ming dynasty undoubtedly had stringent domestic policies that closed off all foreign trade and contact, but it also appears that Tamerlane's rise in northern Persia cut off most of the overland routes to China (and ultimately the bishopric of Vicaria Aquilonis as well). According to Abu-Lughod: "From [the city of] Samarkand, Tamerlane's troops set out in all directions to re-gather the fragmented pieces of the empire over which the former *Pax Mongolica* had been established. However, whereas the unity achieved under [Chinggis Khan] and his immediate successors brought relative peace to his realms and encouraged travel and trade, the unity so brutally wrested by Tamerlane had the opposite effect. It severed the trans-Asian land routes, forcing commerce into increasingly narrow channels that had to pass through only a few land bottlenecks before spreading out into the Indian Ocean."³⁶

If these sources are correct, Latin Christianity might have hidden discreetly in the coastal cities and elsewhere, well into the early sixteenth century. It was slowly contracting from attrition, and suffering from lack of renewal. As Habig points out: "It is not correct to say, therefore, that the early Franciscan missions of China came to an abrupt end with the accession of the Ming dynasty. There was a gradual decline which finally resulted in the cessation of missionary work; and the principal reason for this was the lack of new recruits to take the place of the older missionaries when they died."³⁷ Very likely Latin Christians persisted in ever-smaller groups, as Nestorian enclaves did, until an official persecution caused by Muslim unrest (ca. 1543) violently ended all foreign-based religions in China.³⁸

The Arrival of the Jesuits and Their Reports of Existing Christian Images Being Worshipped

In the city of Cantao [Guangzhou] in the midst of the river...is a little Isle; in which is a monastery of their priests; and within this



Fig. 10-11 Christ Holding the Infant Soul of Mary, detail of Dormition of the Virgin, Jacopo Torriti, Sta. Maria Maggiore, Rome.

Scenes depicting the soul as an innocent infant are rare, but this mosaic has a prominent spot in the basilica of Sta. Maria Maggiore, favorite church of the Franciscan Nicholas IV, who commissioned Torriti's mosaics of the Virgin in the early 1290s.

monastery I saw an oratory high from the ground...in which a woman was very well-made with a child about her neck, and it had a lamp burning before it. I suspected that to be some show of Christianity, and asked some of the laymen and some of the idol priests what that woman signified, but none could tell me nor give me any reason of it. It might well be the image of Our Lady, made by the ancient Christians, that Saint Thomas left there or by their occasion made, but the conclusion is that all is forgotten.³⁹

Gaspar da Cruz, a Dominican in China in 1556

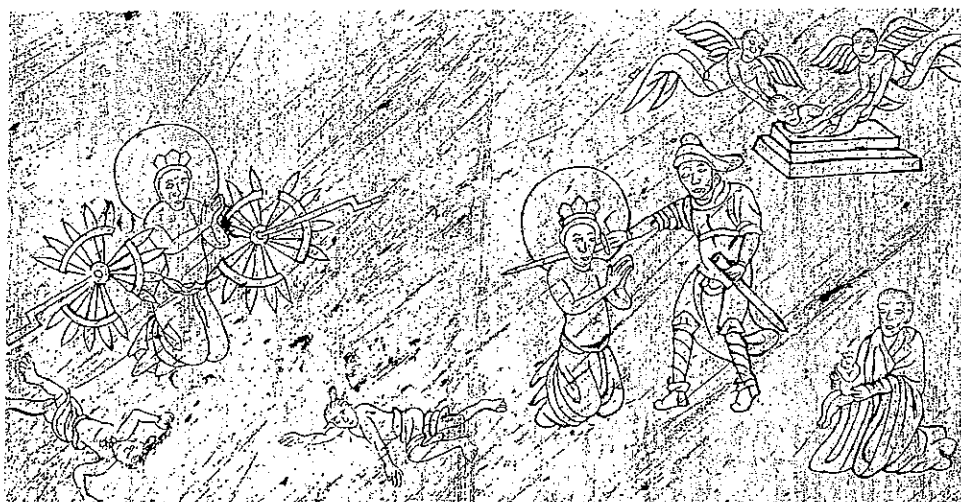


Fig. 10-12 *Martyrdom of St. Catherine*, detail of gravestone of Katerina Vilionis, 1342, Yangzhou. Carved stone rubbing

The martyrdom scenes on Katerina's stone vary the most widely from their European counterparts, relying heavily on eastern sources, similar to this Buddhist sutra illumination of sinners facing execution in Hell. Compare with FIG. 10-13

Gaspar da Cruz arrived in China just a decade or so after the brutal religious persecution of 1543, so it is not too surprising that the inhabitants were reluctant to discuss the source or origin of the statue he mistook as the Virgin. Yet, when the Dominicans and Jesuits arrived on the southern coast of China in the middle of the 16th century, they unknowingly landed in the precise area where Latin Christianity had flourished under the devoted care of the Franciscans two centuries before.⁴⁰ And the new missionaries consistently reported that local images, already in place and being venerated when they arrived, strongly resembled the Virgin.

What they saw, however, was not the Christian Virgin and Child; these were images of Guanyin, specifically, the White-Robed Guanyin (*baiyi*) and her variant, the Child-giving Guanyin (*songzi*).⁴¹ By the time that Gaspar da Cruz saw the image, the Virgin had been seamlessly folded into the folk goddess. Gaspar instinctively recognized the statue's Christian origin, but he did not connect this variation of the Virgin

with the Franciscans, since the historical correlation to the early mission to China had been lost in Europe by his time. And due to the understandable reticence of the local populace, no one was willing to discuss with a foreign stranger the image's connection to Christianity (if they even recognized it as such by this time), since the religious basis was still proscribed.

Relics of Christianity Found by the Jesuits

But material vestiges of the Franciscan era, such as the Mary/Guanyin images and crosses, were found in surprising number by the first Jesuits to visit China. Martino Martini ca. 1655, stated: *Many clear traces of Christians have been found in this city Zaitun [Quanzhou] and in the very walls not a few stones marked with the sign of the cross of salvation; and also images of the most holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, with angels prostrate on the ground.*⁴²

Antonius a S. Maria, a missionary in China between 1633-1669, wrote an account of a shrine he had seen:



Fig. 10-13 The Execution of Sinners in Hell, from chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra, Gansu province, late 9th-early 10th c., Tang dynasty

The Buddhist version of Hell, forcibly depicted in many sutra illuminations, has many intriguing similarities to western depictions of the same subject. Certainly St. Catherine's gory death as a martyr lent itself to the Chinese carver's choice of a non-western iconographic source for the violent imagery on the Yangzhou stone.

On the seashore of the province of Fujian on a hill near [Fo nin cheu] I entered an old temple which seemed to be very ancient, and of three statues which were set together above the chief altar one of them was holding on the palm of the hand (just in the way in which the image of the Savior is usually carved or painted) a beautiful cross set on a sort of little globe, which I removed and took away with me. And on the side altar ... was another image of a woman with a mantle on her head spread out over her arms, and below to the right and left several little figures as of girls with hands clasped, with faces and eyes raised to the face of that woman... who was spreading her cloak over them in the way in which the image of the Mother of Mercy, the Blessed Mother Virgin Mary, is usually painted. And one of the... little figures had another perfectly made little gilt cross in one hand.

Antonius continues: *In the church of the Minor Brothers [n.b., est. in the 17th c.] in the city of [Zin*

Cheu] in the province of [Shandong] are two images, one of the Savior and the other of the B.V. Mary, very old but yet beautiful, painted on the same piece of linen, which Brother Bernardus... told me that Brother Didacus... had received from a bonze [term for Buddhist priest] who said that they had been in his temple from ancient days, though he did not know for how long....⁴³ It is clear from these descriptions that some material relics of Christianity, such as crosses, bibles, painted objects of devotion, had been privately preserved by Chinese Christian families, and had been handed down over generations.⁴⁴ When Matteo Ricci and his followers arrived in 1583, these relics were still a cause of some puzzlement – Ricci went to his grave without the knowledge that Beijing already had been a Franciscan archbishopric several centuries before his arrival.⁴⁵ Ricci and others, however, set about documenting and collecting the Christian remnants they found. Father Philippe Couplet brought back a Franciscan bible from the late 13th century [See this book's Conclusion], which he found in the collection of a family that lived outside

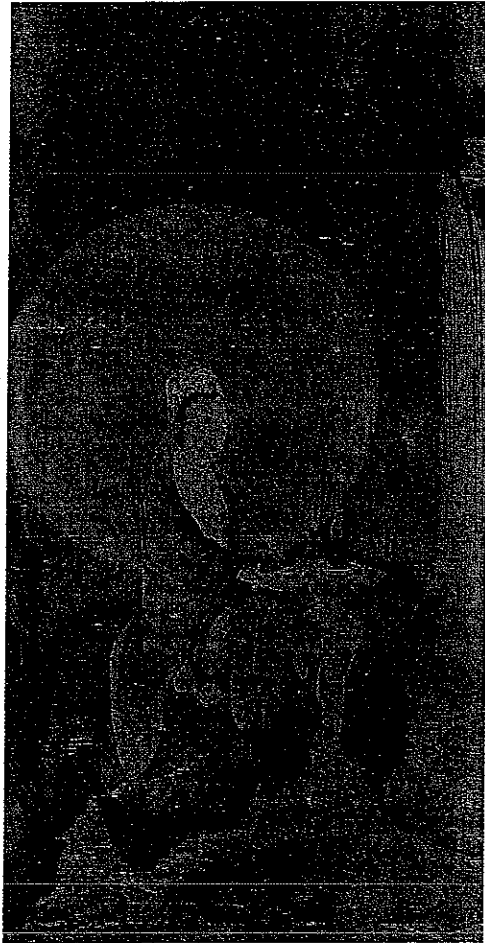


Fig. 10-14 Water and Moon Guanyin, late 13th-early 14th c. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, 49-60

Many of Mary's attributes were already shared by Guanyin when the Franciscans arrived in China. *Water and Moon Guanyin* shows the seated goddess, with her large, halo-like moon and a vase for holding purifying water.

Nanjing. These items were considered mere curiosities and quickly found their way onto the back shelves of libraries and archives in Europe.⁴⁶

Ming Craftsmen And Their Skill With Ivory

With the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries and traders from Europe, a new era in Christian objects being crafted for export began. The Portuguese first re-established contact with China in 1513, although they were expelled for illegal trading in 1521-22. For the next thirty years they continued smuggling and illicit trading activities up and down the coast of Guangdong, Fujian, and Zhejiang provinces. In the 1550s, the Portuguese missionaries arrived. They required images for their churches, and ivories were available from Goa, in India, and were highly portable. "Colonial carvings were need to equip churches and hospices, to fire the hearts of Europeans, native Christians, and potential converts alike." As in Fra Giovanni's time, with his bible of the poor, the later missionaries found that "Church decoration played its part in the evangelical campaign to spread Christianity across Asia."⁴⁷

Fernando Riguel, notary to the Philippine governor, described a trading encounter between a Chinese merchant fleet and Spaniards newly arrived on Luzon in 1574: *A year ago there came to the port of this city three ships from China.... Those which came here brought merchandise such as is used by the Chinese, and such as they bring here ordinarily.... [They brought] some fine ware and other articles, which they readily sold, since we who are here have plenty of money, and the Chinese need it. They were so delighted that they will surely return in six or seven months, and they will bring a great abundance of goods peculiar to their country, in order to arrange the price at which they can be sold — such as quicksilver, powder, pepper, fine cinnamon... tin, brass, silks in textiles of many kinds and in skeins... and a thousand other goods and trifles quite as many as the Flemings bring. Moreover they brought images of crucifixes and very curious seals made like ours.*⁴⁸

In 1590, referring to the crowds of Chinese craftsmen from Zhangzhou and Fujian who flocked to Luzon to serve the growing decorative market, Bishop Salazar wrote to the King of Spain: *The handicrafts*

pursued by the Spaniards have all died out, because people buy their clothes and shoes from the Sangleys [Chinese], who are very good craftsmen...and make everything at a very low cost.... They are so skillful and clever that as soon as they see any object made by Spanish workmen, they reproduce it with exactness. What arouses my wonder most is, when I arrived no Sangley knew how to paint anything [i.e. in the European fashion]; but now they have so perfected themselves in this art that they have produced marvelous work with both the brush and chisel, and I think that nothing more perfect could be produced than some of their ivory statues of the Child Jesus which I have seen.... The churches are beginning to be furnished with the images which the Sangleys made and which we greatly lacked before; and considering the ability displayed by these people in reproducing the images which come from Espana, I believe that soon we shall not even miss those made in Flanders.⁴⁹

Ivory Images of Mary Carved in Ming China for Export to Europe

Unknown to these contemporary reporters, the craftsmen and their goods came from areas of China already familiar with Christian imagery from Fra Giovanni's time. "Salazar's text thus implies that the ivories commissioned for colonial churches in the Philippines were actually made in Fujian.... Certainly a major ivory industry grew up to cater for Spanish needs, as attested by the number of such figures which still survive...."⁵⁰

Art historians have long connected the late Ming (ca. 1580-1644) ivory carvings of the Virgin Mary that were exported from the coastal cities of Fujian province – Zhangzhou, Fuzhou, Quanzhou – into Europe, with older European prototypes.⁵¹ Gillman and many others assume that the European missionaries commissioned copies of "the Gothic ivory images still circulating in Europe" and that these became the immediate source for a sudden and burgeoning trade in Christian images of Mary and the Christ Child that occurred after the reappearance of the Christians in China in the late sixteenth century.⁵²

But we already know that Franciscan-inspired images of the Virgin of Humility (such as the Yangzhou Madonna) still existed in China as late as 1350, and



Fig. 10-15 Child-giving Guanyin, ca. 1607, from the *Sancai tuhai*

The child became an attribute of Guanyin's by the 15th century. As one scholar has observed: "...Prior to the Ming, the depiction of Guanyin, even in feminine forms, seldom included a male child held either on her arms or placed on her lap. The religious basis for this iconography came from Buddhist scriptures, but its artistic rendering may have been influenced by the iconography of the Virgin."



Fig. 10-16 *Child-giving Guanyin*, Tang Yin (?), 1470-1524. The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago

This painting was attributed to the 15th c. painter Tang Yin before the painting itself was recognized to be a copy of the *Sta. Maria dei Populi* in Rome, a painting much venerated by the 14th c. Franciscans. (See FIG. 2-4) If Tang Yin actually painted it before the arrival of the Jesuits in the late 16th c., then the painting was probably created for a surviving Latin Christian community following the artistic canons of the Franciscan missionary era.

other images of Mary were found intact and still venerated by the earliest missionaries around 1550. [FIG. 10-16] In fact, a more compelling argument can be made that the vestigial survival of this Christian prototype – either as privately venerated objects of Christian devotion, or folded into images of the Child-giving Guanyin – became the immediate basis for the thriving commercial venture in Fujian province, when the Europeans expressed interest in exporting locally produced ivory figures of Mary to

Europe. As Chun-fang Yu observed: “Fujian, like Guangdong, was a coastal province that was visited by Christian missionaries as early as the thirteenth century, and on a larger scale beginning in the sixteenth century. Between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, Spanish traders and missionaries brought sculpture from both Spain and northern Europe to China and the Philippines. They also commissioned Chinese craftsmen to carve Christian images, most frequently the Virgin and Child. The artisans were natives of Fujian, coming predominantly from Zhangzhou, Fuzhou, and Quanzhou, the same cities that produced the images of the Child-giving Guanyin. Since the same artistic communities produced these religious images, it is not surprising that the Madonnas looked somewhat Chinese and the Guanyins looked almost ‘Gothic’.”²⁸ [FIG. 10-17, Ivory Guanyin/Madonna]

Did Ivory Devotional Objects Exist in China Before the Portuguese?

Arguing against the sudden, independent growth of the ivory industry to serve only the new European market are the observations of a Spanish friar, Martin de Rada, who visited Fujian province in 1575. Writing of the numerous little images that he found in place on the southern coast when he arrived, Friar Martin said in his *Relation*: *So great was the number of idols which we saw everywhere we went that they were beyond count, for each house had its own idols besides the multitudes which they have in temples and in special houses for them.*²⁴ Admittedly, he does not identify the material of these small devotional objects, and they could just as readily have been made of clay or wood as of ivory. But his report underscores that regional examples of statuary already existed on a wide scale by 1575. Friar Martin certainly documents that small devotional items were already an integral part of ordinary coastal life in China, before the crafter’s skill in ivory-carving was reportedly pre-empted exclusively for export.

I suggest that some of the ivory statues of Mary/Guanyin that have been dated to the Ming period may actually prove to be of late Yuan origin, since their dating has been based primarily on stylistic analysis and conventional scholarship, which is fre-

quently unaware of the earlier Franciscan presence. One scholar has already noted that: "Surprisingly few ivory or bone carvings, attributed to the Song or Yuan period, have been convincingly identified. This is very much ...contrary to the vast quantity of literary and historical records on the import and use of ivory. Both Song and Yuan courts maintained special workshops for ivory, but the finds from archaeological excavations so far has been very disappointing."⁵⁵ Given the problems with using carbon-dating to establish the age of individual carvings (this method not only potentially disfigures the statue, but it can only date the ivory within the time-frame when it was part of the living animal, not specifically when it was originally carved), one scholar observes: "As datable ivory figures are so scarce, the dating of individual pieces... has inevitably rested on personal judgment."⁵⁶ It would prove fruitful to re-examine the entire corpus of Mary/Guanyin figures in light of the Franciscan presence in China before 1368, to see if a different chronology for these figures might be derived.

Guanyin and Mary

Archaeological evidence suggests that Franciscan-introduced images of the Virgin were already being adapted to Chinese artistic canons by the mid-fourteenth century. Certainly, the close resemblance of the folk goddess Guanyin to the Virgin Mary has been remarked upon since the earliest Jesuits arrived in China in the mid-sixteenth century.⁵⁷ Usually dismissed in the west as coincidence, or as a variation of a universal archetype of motherhood and purity combined, it still remains that a missing visual prototype for the common image – the Franciscan Madonna of Humility – undoubtedly was carried to the shores of China in the fourteenth century. Additional evidence suggests that Christianity went underground in these same areas during the Ming era, and I propose that images of the Madonna and Child during that time conflated into images of the Child-giving Guanyin. When missionaries and traders arrived in the sixteenth century, the craftsmen of the coastal area quickly and easily adapted a well-known local image to conform with Christian images brought by the Portuguese, and a booming business in exporting Marian images to Europe was born.



Fig. 10-17 *Child-giving Guanyin*, ca. 1620, ivory carving. The Art Gallery, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Simon Kwan Collection.

When the Jesuits arrived on the southern coast of China the late 16th c., they were surprised to see images similar to the Madonna and Child being venerated. It is probable that the Virgin of Humility prototype introduced by the Franciscans into the coastal areas in the 14th c. was absorbed into devotional objects dedicated to the folk goddess Guanyin, producing over time a new variant of the goddess of mercy, the Child-giving Guanyin.