Document Study: Marco Polo & Ibn Battuta’s Travels

Map 1-1 Journeys of Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta

- Marco Polo’s travels
- Ibn Battuta’s travels
How would you describe Marco Polo’s impressions of the city? What did he notice? What surprised him?

- Impressed with size, wealth, & sophistication of the city
- Physical features, trades, markets, & the social relations within its neighborhoods
- Surprised by public amenities: pavilions on islands in lake & 3000 public baths; city could be supplied by its system of markets; lack of violence & no weapons among population; communal spirit in its neighborhoods
Why did Polo describe city: “finest & the noblest in world”?

“Hundred miles of compass,” suggesting that it was a huge

Impressive features:
12 thousand bridges of stone;
12 guilds, each with large numbers of workers & wealthy masters;
large number of wealthy merchants;
many beautiful palaces & mansions;
many Buddhist churches & monasteries.

Public facilities on islands in a lake, where weddings & other celebrations were staged, & 3,000 baths.

Large amount of silk in city.

10 principal markets; tax revenues were so vast that they were not easy to account for in writing. Various trades, & a system of royal justice.

Peaceful character & sense of community; lack of adulterous behavior between men & women.
What marks his account of the city as that of a **foreigner** & a **Christian**?

★ Marco Polo clearly appears to be an outsider & **Christian** when he describes Buddhist abbeys & churches as “abbeys and churches of the Idolaters” (p. 361)

★ Describes **eating of every kind of flesh**, including dogs & other unclean beasts, which he claims no Christian could be induced to eat.
What evidence of China’s engagement with a wider world does this account offer?

★ China’s engagement in large artisan & merchant classes in the city, & his account of how merchants from India & other foreign lands stored their wares in the city

★ Clear evidence in description of port Ganfu, 25 miles from city: “which is engaged in the traffic to and from India and other foreign parts, exporting and importing many kinds of wares, by which the city benefits” (p. 361)

★ Notes that wine & raisins were imported into the city from overseas.