

# THE POLO FAMILY

Merchants of Venice

# Outline

- ▣ Venice, trade and the Polo family
- ▣ What Europeans knew about the East
- ▣ Maffeo and Niccolo's first journey
- ▣ The Mongol Empire
- ▣ Second journey with Marco
- ▣ Marco Polo's book

# Travels and Sources

- ▣ Brothers Niccolo and Maffeo Polo arrived in Beijing in 1266
- ▣ Second journey with Niccolo's son Marco set out from Venice in 1271
- ▣ Returned to Venice 1296 after 25 years away
- ▣ Almost all we know is from Marco Polo's book of his travels

# Venice and Trade

- ▣ Maritime Republic
  - Also Genoa, Pisa, Amalfi
  - Commercial centre, trade with Asia and Levant
  - Provided ships for crusades
- ▣ Close links with Constantinople
  - Involved in sack of Constantinople by 4<sup>th</sup> crusade in 1204
- ▣ Wars with Genoa, defeat in 1298

# The Polo Family

- ▣ Venetian Domenico Polo recorded in 971 regarding prohibition of trade with Arabs
- ▣ Traded with Middle East, became very wealthy
- ▣ Brothers Niccolo and Maffeo had trading posts in Constantinople and Sudak (Crimea)
- ▣ Niccolo's son Marco born about 1254

# What Europe Knew About the East

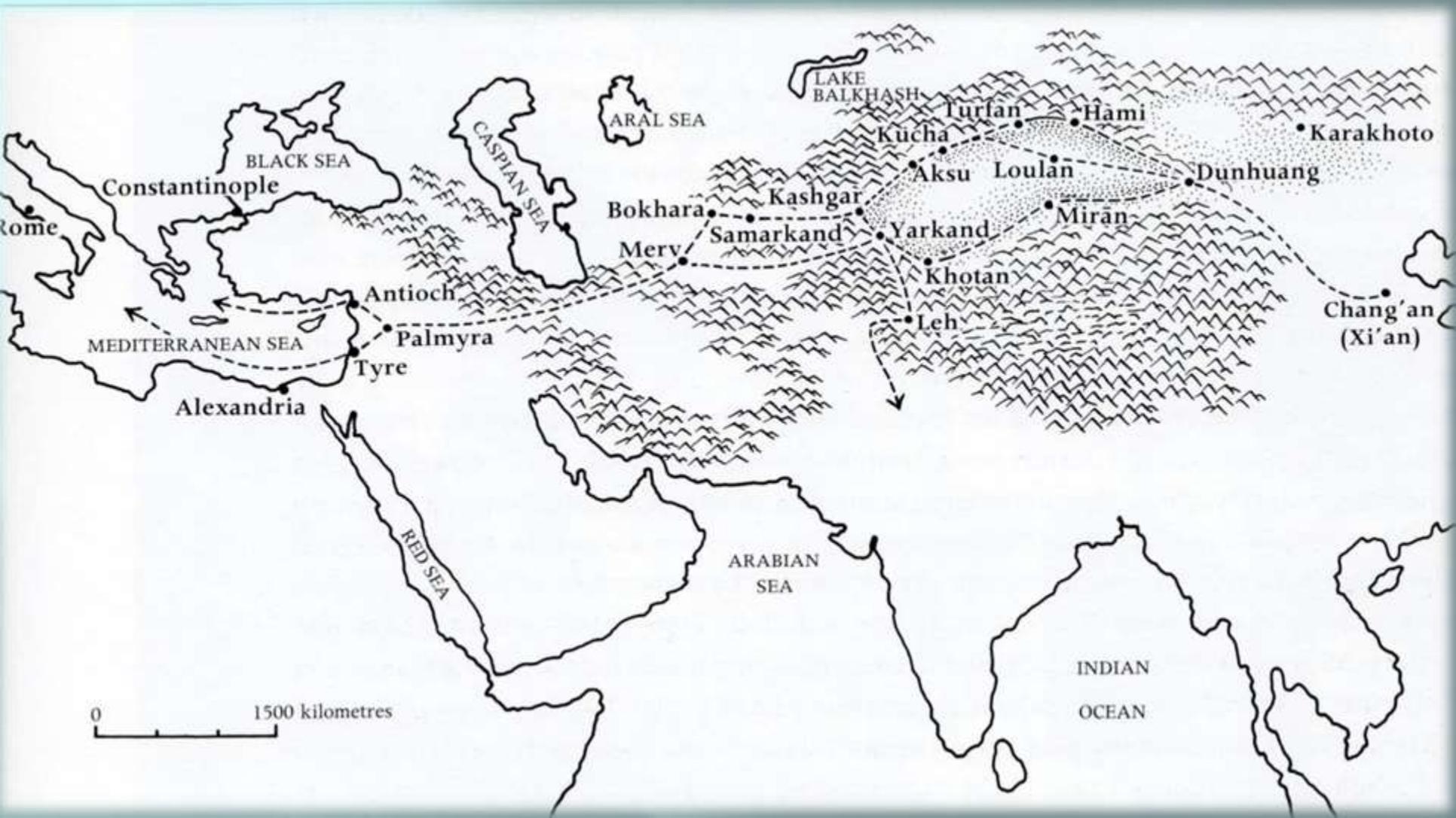
- ▣ Alexander the Great got to the Indus 325 BC
- ▣ Romans knew of “Ceres” the land of silk
- ▣ Legend of Prester John first recorded in 1122
- ▣ Diplomatic envoys from Papacy and European monarchs to Mongol Khan from about 1220.
  - John da Pian del Carpine Karakorum 1248
  - William of Rubruck Karakorum 1254
  - John of Montecorvino, arrived in China 1294

# Niccolo and Maffeo Journey

- ▣ Lived in Constantinople about 6 years. Rising political instability converted goods to jewels and money
- ▣ Left in 1259/1260 for Soldaia (Sudak) in Crimea, a Venetian trading post
- ▣ Then to Sarai capital of the Golden Horde, Stayed in Sarai about 1 year
- ▣ Unable to return to Crimea due to wars
- ▣ Went East to Bukhara, stayed 3 years trading. No information on route they took

# The Polos Leaving Venice

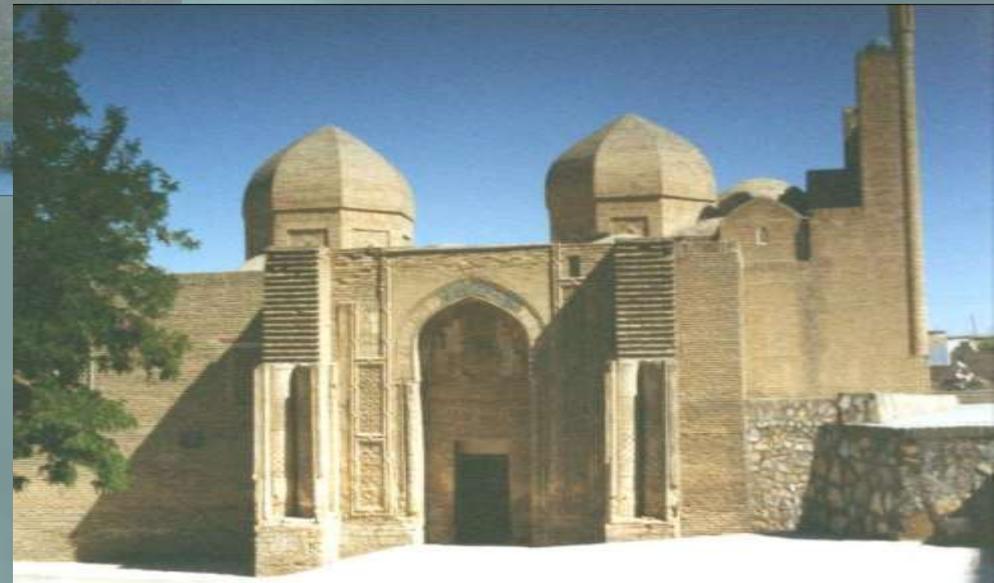




# Arriving in Bukhara



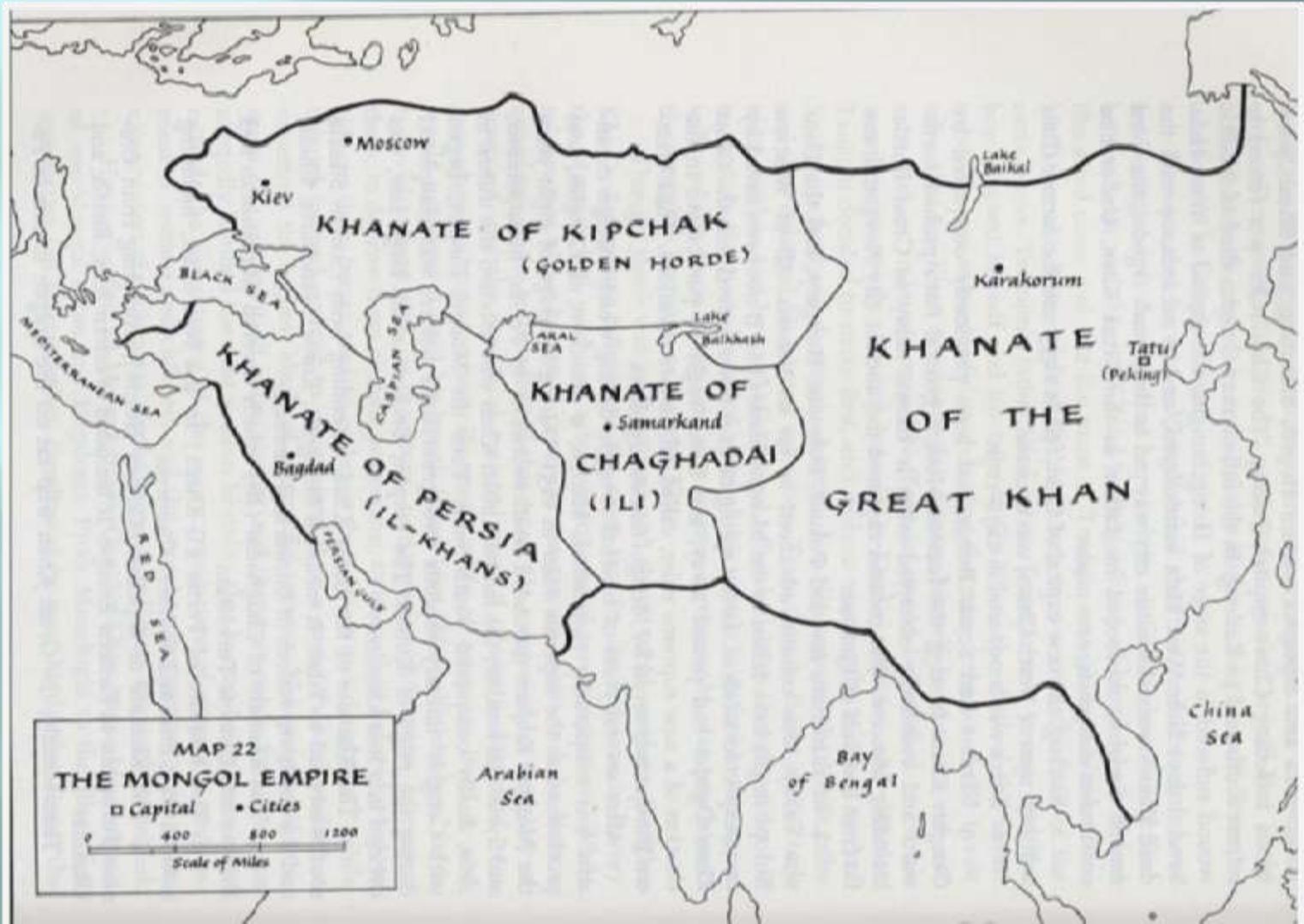
# Bukhara in 2000



# Family of Genghis Khan

- ▣ Genghis died 1227
- ▣ Jochi d 1227 Western lands; Golden Horde
  - Batu
  - Berke
- ▣ Chagatai d 1242 Central Asia
- ▣ \*Ogedei d 1241 Eastern Asia and China
  - \*Guyuk d 1248
- ▣ Tolui d 1232 Mongol homeland
  - \*Mongke d1259
  - \*Kublai d 1294 China Yuan dynasty
  - Hulagu d 1265 Persia Ilkhanate

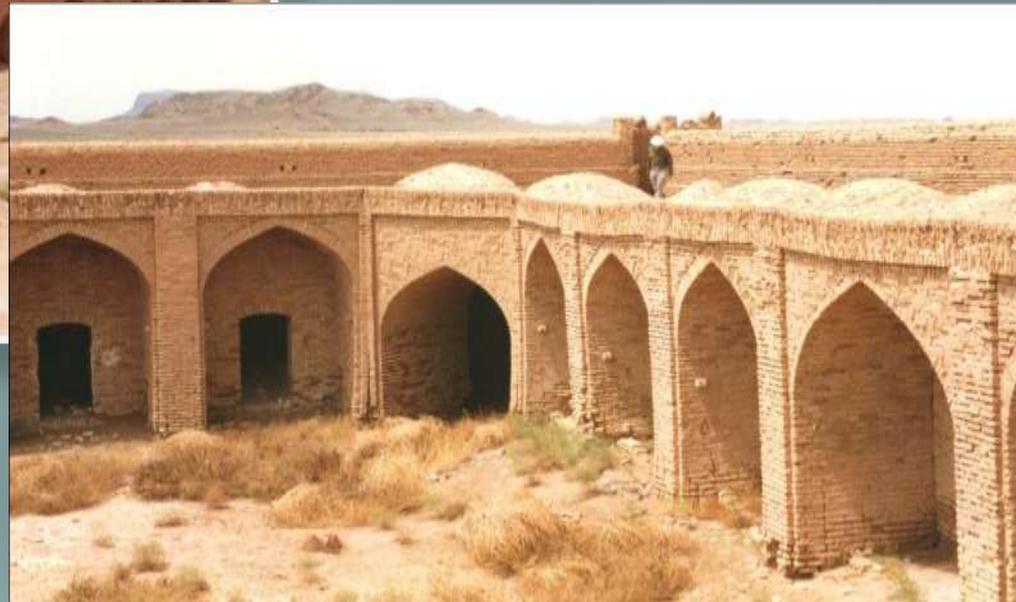
# Mongol Territories



# Into China

- ▣ Joined embassy from Hulagu to his brother Kublai the Great Khan
- ▣ Caravan travel along silk route
- ▣ Bukhara, Samarkand, Kashgar
- ▣ Northern route around Taklamakan . Turfan, Dunhuang and reached Dadu (Beijing) in 1266

# Caravanserai



# Traders 1890s



# Meeting Kublai Khan

- ▣ European legal and political systems
- ▣ Christianity and the Pope
- ▣ Request for 100 well educated Christians and oil from the lamp in Jerusalem
- ▣ Given a golden tablet (paiza) safe passage and use of horses and lodgings
- ▣ Took 3 years to travel from Beijing back to Venice arriving in April 1269
- ▣ No information in Marco's book on route taken

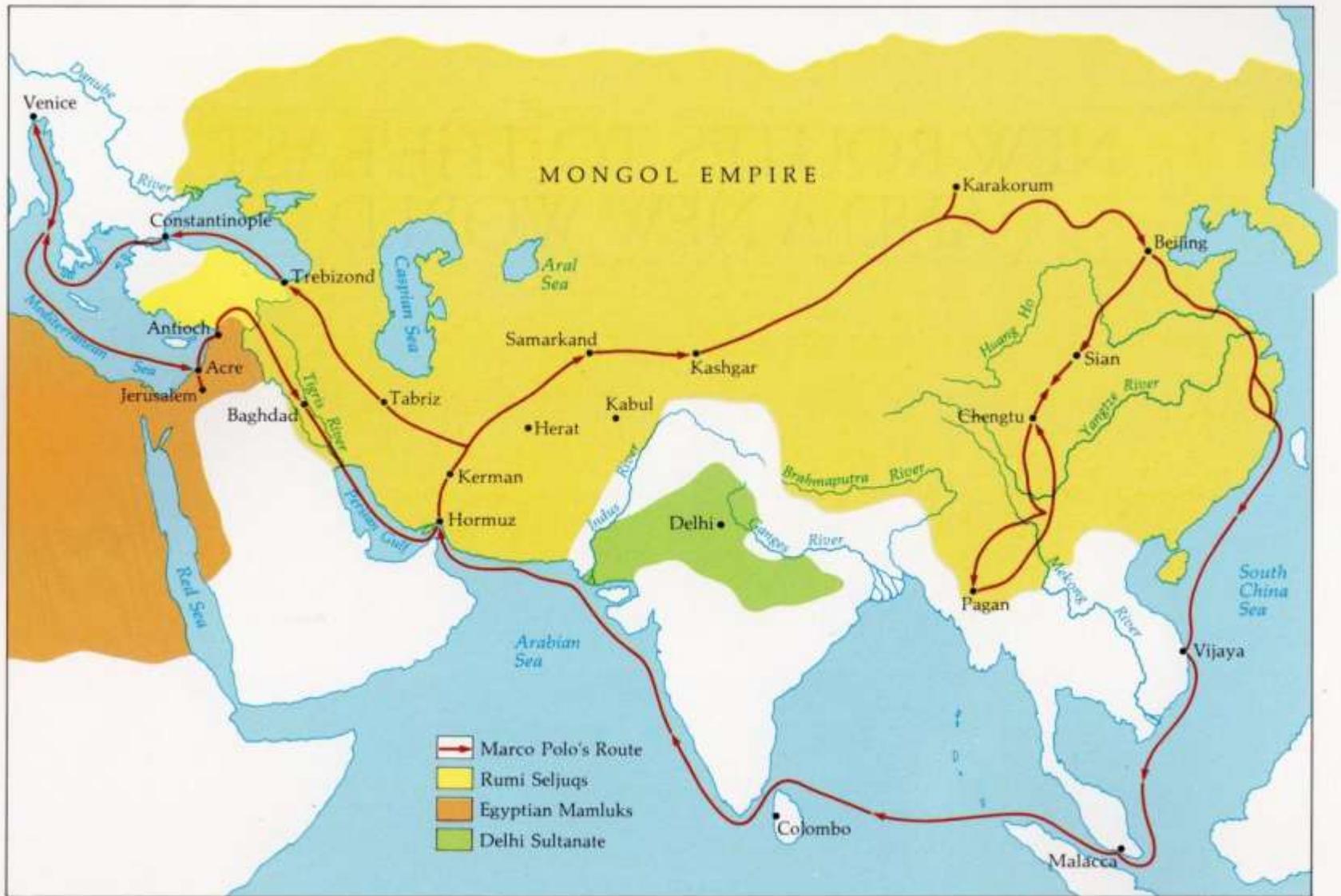
# Mongol Passport



**11.15** Mongolian passport of the thirteenth century, guaranteeing the holder a safe passage throughout the Mongol empire

# Second Journey to China

- ▣ Niccolo, Maffeo and Marco left Venice by sea for Acre in Sept 1271
- ▣ Detour to Jerusalem for holy oil and 2 priests
- ▣ Given letter for Kublai by Pope Gregory X
- ▣ Travelled N Turkey to Armenia then into Persia Marco gives no details of route
- ▣ S to port of Hormuz, summer 1272 possibly looking for ship to India, but return north to Kerman and on to Afghan border and the important ancient city of Balkh (near Kabul)



The Mongol Empire and Marco Polo's route.

# Mountains and Deserts

- ▣ Pamir, Karakorum and Hindu Kush mountain ranges meet, have to cross to get to China.
- ▣ 200km long Wakhan corridor between the mountains. May have crossed the Wakhjir pass 1600 ft, nearly 5000m
- ▣ To Kashgar, Marco gives short description
- ▣ Once over the mountain they are in Kublai's territory so can use their Mongol passport

# Wakan Corridor 2013

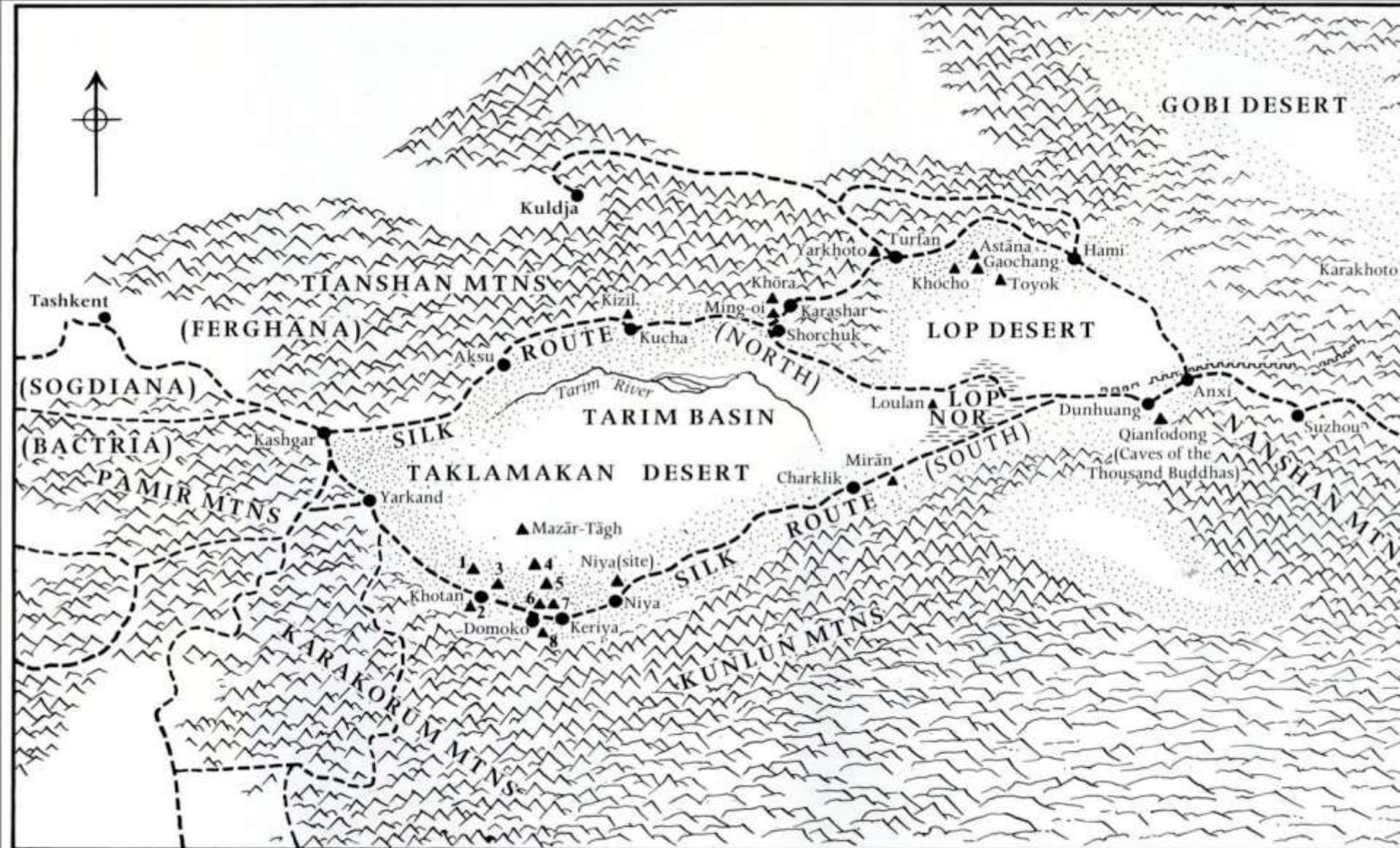


# Mountain Track 2013



# In Kublai Khan's Territory

- ▣ Tarim basin and Taklamakan desert used the southern route early 1275
- ▣ Arrive in Dunhuang, 1000km from Kashgar. No mention of Mogao Buddhist caves.
- ▣ Continue east possible along the line of the decaying great wall to Zhangye then to Datong
- ▣ Finally reach Shengdu (Xanadu) Kublai's summer capital in summer 1275
- ▣ Marco gives a detailed description of Shengdu



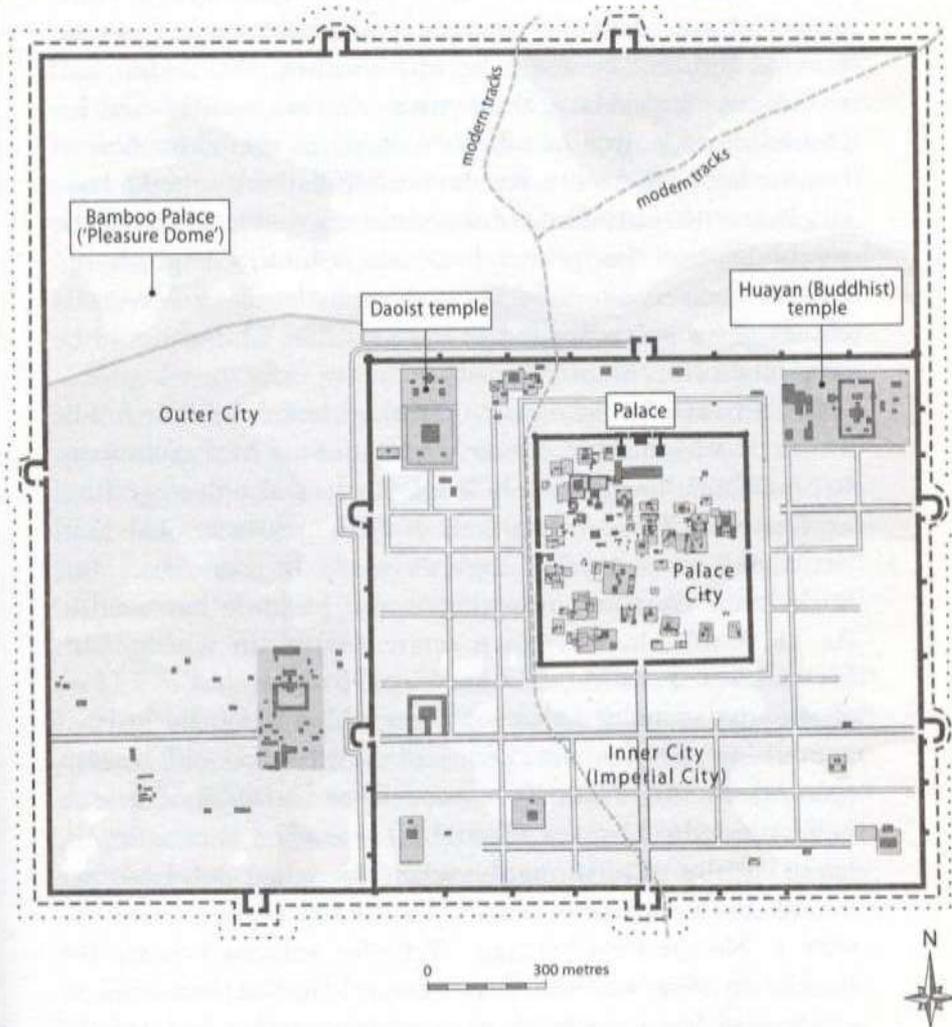
Map of Central Asia showing the principal archaeological sites



▲ archaeological sites

- |                |                     |
|----------------|---------------------|
| 1 Karasai      | 5 Farhād-bēg-yailai |
| 2 Yotkan       | 6 Khādalik          |
| 3 Rawak        | 7 Darabzan-dong     |
| 4 Dandān-oilik | 8 Kara-yantak       |

## Town Plan of Xanadu

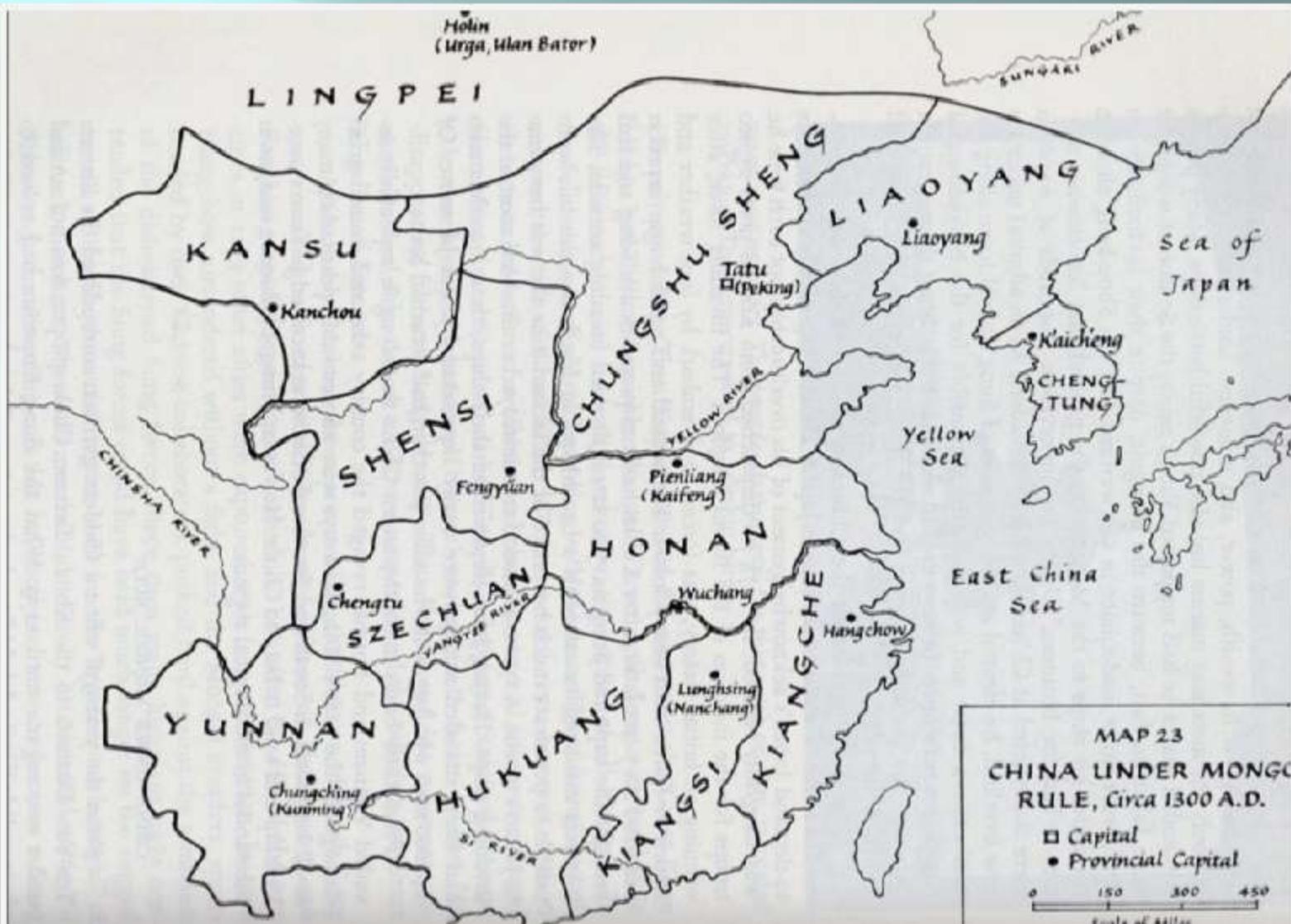


# Plan of Xanadu

# Marco's Travels in China

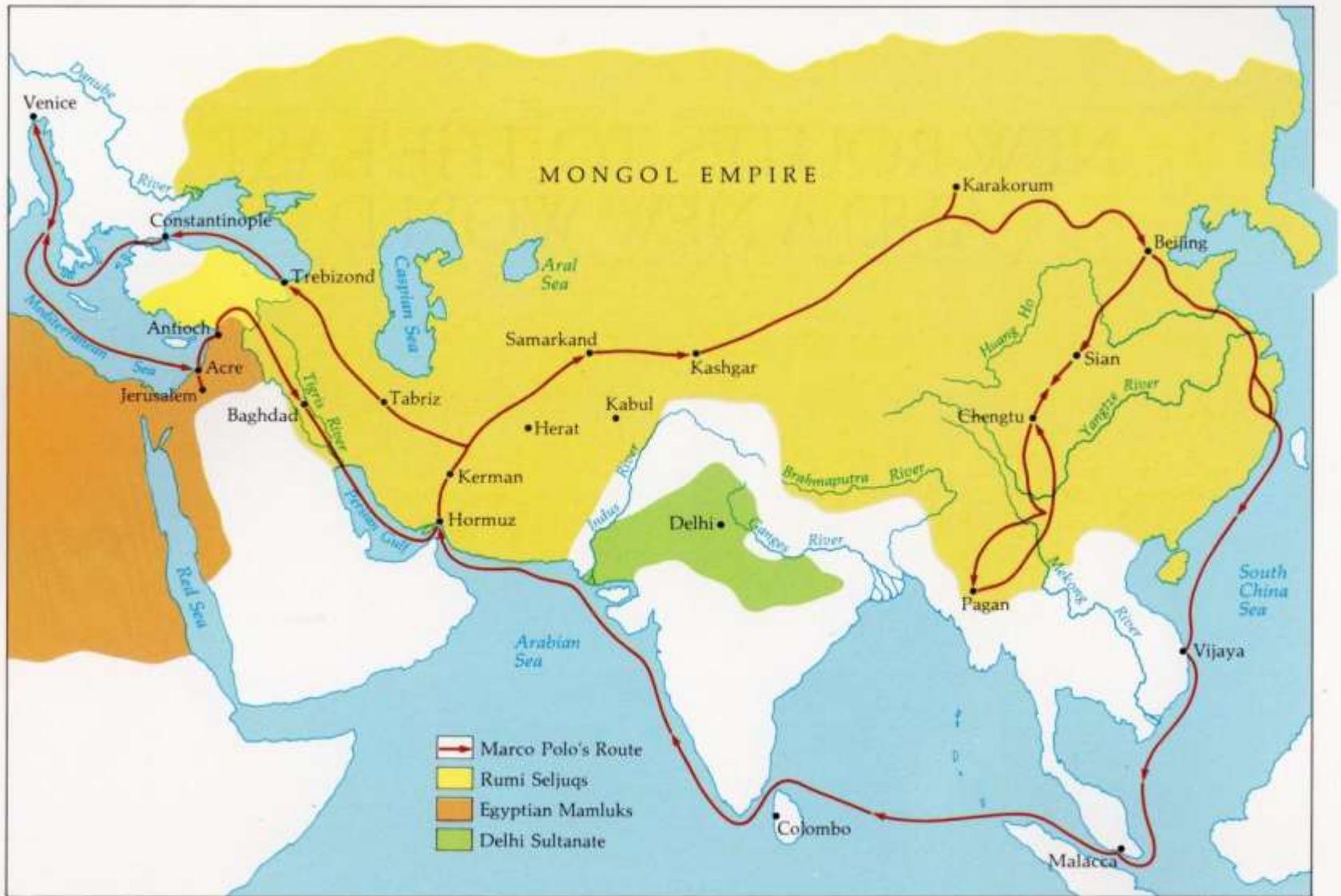
- ▣ Kublai used Marco as an independent reporter on events in his empire. 70 place names but no dates
- ▣ Several trips to Yunnan, SW China first between 1276-and 1280.
- ▣ Burma and Vietnam which KK wanted to conquer
- ▣ Travelled Grand Canal many times
- ▣ Chengdu and possibly into Tibet

# China in Yuan Dynasty



# Homeward Bound

- ▣ 17 years in China, KK refused requests to leave
- ▣ Embassy to escort Mongol Princess to Persia to marry Arghun. Leaves Beijing early 1291
- ▣ Grand Canal to Hangzhou then to port of Zaiton where navy is mustering for attack on Java
- ▣ Requisition 3 “mother ships” and 9 or 10 support vessels
- ▣ Sail down Chinese coast then to N Sumatra
- ▣ Marco records pygmies, giant nuts and unicorns



The Mongol Empire and Marco Polo's route.

# Persia and Home

- ▣ Andaman Islands, Sri Lanka to India
- ▣ Marco mentions tomb of St Thomas near Madras
- ▣ North to India west coast then to Hormuz in Persia
- ▣ Polos entertained by Il Khan, stayed 9 months
- ▣ Arghun had died, Cocachin marries son of the ruler
- ▣ Problems in Trebizond
- ▣ Reach Venice in 1296 after 25 years away

# Endings

- ▣ How to persuade friends and family they had returned
- ▣ Kublai died Feb 1294
- ▣ Marco died Jan 1324 aged 69 or 70
- ▣ Niccolo before 1300; Maffeo 1309
- ▣ Cocachin died of unknown causes age 26
- ▣ Columbus owned a heavily annotated copy of Marco's book
- ▣ Archaeologist Aurel Stein quoted Marco's book in his writings

# Marco Polo's Book

- ▣ Marco involved in war between Venice and Genoa, captured and imprisoned by Genoese
- ▣ Dictated to Rustichello who wrote it in Old French in 4 volumes
- ▣ His book gives information on trading towns, cities, goods and distances
- ▣ No mention of Marco in voluminous Chinese records
- ▣ Translated into many languages, several versions. Original lost centuries ago