

China as the Other in Odoric's Itinerarium

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Dinu Luca,

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Special issue ***New Work about the Journey and Its Portrayals***

Ed. I-Chun Wang

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Abstract: In his article "China as the Other in Odoric's *Itinerarium*" Dinu Luca discusses the various ways in which the otherness of China is approached and integrated in the fourteenth-century travel text associated with Franciscan friar Odoric of Pordenone. Luca explores the multiple ways in which the text can be examined in relation to Odoric, his travels, and his text. Luca takes vision as a unifying trope and explores the meanings it acquires (sight, concept, projection) as Odoric abandons the familiar space of wonder and confronts the otherness of China. Several well-known episodes are discussed and one particular exchange (known as "De reverentia magni Chanis") is read as Odoric's most significant attempt at incorporating the Other into the order of discourse and also as a means of bringing closure to the text.

Dinu LUCA

China as the Other in Odoric's *Itinerarium*

In this study, I discuss the fourteenth-century *Itinerarium* — associated with the name of Franciscan friar Odoric of Pordenone — as a text about the Other. I analyze the complicated process which resulted in the production of a "pious, marvelous, disorderly, and sometimes personal" text (Higgins, *Writing East* 105) known variously as *Itinerarium fratris Odorici*, *Diversae historiae*, *De rebus mirabilibus*, *De ritibus et condicionibus huius mundi*, *De mirabilibus orientalium Tartarorum*, *Peregrinatio*, *Descriptio*, as well as *Relatio* (see Andreose, "Forme" 82; Chiesa, "Per un riordino" 311; Daston and Park 25; Liščák, "Odoric" 66; Popeanga 52; Reichert, *Incontri* 181). I address aspects of the text with regard to its author, his travels, the text's travels, and travel itself. My approach includes the concept of "movement" in its various guises — such as mobility, mutability, or *mouvance* — as an essential feature of reading and studying travel texts. Further I also employ the concept of "vision" understood both as sight, concept, and projection.

Odoric was born probably in the 1280s, left for Asia around 1318 and travelled through Asia Minor and Persia to India and China, which he reached in 1323 (see Moule 275; Reichert, *Incontri* 133; O'Doherty 198; Standaert 75). He visited several major cities there — including Canton, Quanzhou, Hangzhou, Yangzhou, and Khanbaliq — and stayed in China until 1328, when he proceeded back to Italy, reputedly although unlikely via Tibet (see Laufer; Reichert, *Incontri* 103) and his exact return itinerary is almost impossible to reconstruct (see Andreose and Ménard xv). By 1329 or 1330 he was back in Italy and in May 1330, in Padua, dictated the *Itinerarium* to another Franciscan, Guglielmo da Solagna. Odoric died in early 1331 (for Odoric's biography, see, e.g., Andreose, *Libro*; Beazley; Bressan; Cameron; Cordier; Grousset; Moule; Popeanga; Sartori; Tilatti; Yule). Several biographers add information about Odoric's posthumous career as a *beatus* of the Roman Catholic Church and numerous hagiographies have been and keep on being written (see, e.g., Domenichelli; Melesi Fanti; Stival). One of the most recent of these texts, Giancarlo Stival's book, is associated with a commission aiming to advance Odoric's canonization (see also Ryan, "Missionary"; Liščák, "Christianity"). These studies fill in many blanks in Odoric's biography and interpret his travels from a missionary angle. Scholars also speculate occasionally on the propagandistic overtones that the *Itinerarium* is seen as acquiring in its final chapters in light of Odoric's travel to blessedness (see Chiesa, "Per un riordino" 315).

On the other hand, scholars both old and new sometimes spice things up by drawing conclusions about the author from his text (see, e.g., Koss 96-97). For example, for Henry Yule Odoric was "a man of inferior refinement, both morally and intellectually ... with a very strong taste for roving and seeing strange countries, but not much for preaching and asceticism" (Yule 2, 11; see also Espada, "Fray Odorico" 89; Reichert, *Incontri* 99). Henri Cordier mentions the mediocre abilities in science of this "simple soul," as well as his naivety and bonhomie (liii-iv). Giuliano Bertuccioli and Federico Masini pronounce the friar "exceptionally gifted" (51) while Livarius Oliger, Robert Silverberg, and Igor de Rachewiltz find him much too gullible. Oscar Ronald Dathorne sees Odoric as lacking a sense of humor while Rosemary Tzanaki thinks that Odoric lacks not only humor but also humility and pronounces him "opinionated," "contemptuous," "self-aggrandizing," as well as "distinctly intolerant" (8, 9, 233). Mary B. Campbell makes similar statements on the friar's "offensive xenophobia" which is deemed responsible for a text filled with "fastidious shudders" present whenever the friar depicts strange peoples (156, 264) and Venceslas Bubenicek and Luigi Bressan argue to the contrary. Nigel Cameron, echoing several earlier — and oft-quoted — statements by Samuel Purchas or Thomas Astley describes the friar as a not particularly sagacious "tourist," "sensitive to female allure" and "a bit of a fraud" (107, 113, 115).

In post-structuralist times and after several decades in which many scholars have busied themselves inquiring into and often squabbling over the existence, presence, death, or resurrection of Odoric along or against the directions initially opened by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, defining an "author" (transcendent, unique, and supremely authoritative) in such strong terms and going on to implicitly or explicitly associate him/her with the "work" (majestic in its profound and immediate

connection to the emitter, stable, archetypal) is a hermeneutic move that seems difficult to support. Moreover, such correlation between author and work also appears to pose specific and significant problems in the case of medieval texts as Paul Zumthor's, Hans Robert Jauss's, or Bernard Cerquiglini's works suggest: controversy and counter-reactions notwithstanding (see, e.g., Busby), generically insecure (see Andreose, "Tra ricezione"; Reichert, *Incontri*) travel texts are even more subject to these issues (see Andreose, "Dalla voce" 125; Monaco, "Un'edizione" 28-29; O'Doherty 204). This is perhaps even truer in the case of the *Itinerarium*, whose textual mobility or mutability — its *mouvance* and *variance* to use Zumthor's and Cerquiglini's terms — was particularly unbridled: Marianne O'Doherty speaks of 117 manuscripts whose location is known. The languages of the manuscripts include the Latin of the original, as well as Italian, French, German, and Spanish. Many were produced from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century with the number of vernacular versions increasing in time. The text circulated widely and was read in religious, scholarly, and mercantile circles alike. In the process, what has been characterized as a "polysemous" (Andreose, "Forme" 77, "Tra ricezione" 6), "multi-form" (Andreose, "Fra Veneto" 82), and "multi-generic and multi-purpose" (O'Doherty 199) text adapted to new contexts and audiences, becoming "regrettably" popular (Trotter, "En Ensivant" 31), diluting much further its relationship to Odoric and mutating into a large variety of forms, both in terms of language and contents. This continuous mutation — or *rifunzionalizzazione* to use Alvisio Andreose's term ("Tra ricezione") — made it as O'Doherty puts it into "a widely-read, heavily-used, multi-functional, and above all, dynamic form" (201).

So dynamic a form that a full critical edition is still absent and the reconstruction of a genealogy for the Latin manuscripts appears to be, in spite of much advance made in recent years, a "rather complex" problem (Chiesa, "Per un riordino" 314) and "a still distant objective" (Andreose, "Dalla voce" 140). Accordingly, most reference seems to be made today to Anastasius Van den Wyngaert's 1929 *Sinica Franciscana*, with various critical editions by Yule (1866 and revised by Henri Cordier 1915), Cordier (1891), Lucio Monaco and Giulio Cesare Testa (1986), Monaco (1990), D.A. Trotter (1990), Andreose (2000), or Andreose and Ménard (2010) are also quoted frequently in scholarship. Fully aware of the significant differences in the textual tradition and also keeping in mind the degree to which these differences cover important structural variation, I follow here the English text as translated by Yule and included in the Yule-Cordier edition. Among other things, this means that a particularly fascinating type of textual travel — translation itself — needs to be left aside in the investigation I am attempting here (see Chiesa, "Scelta" for a discussion on translation related issues). Exploring the 1599 English rendition against the Latin original also printed by Richard Hakluyt in his *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* would demonstrate, for instance, the many ways in which Odoric's world of *mirabilia* had to be adapted linguistically to different sensibilities (see also Popeanga; Andreose and Ménard).

Instead, let us travel with Odoric to China. An entrance protocol sets the terms from the very beginning: an assertive "I," "friar Odoric of Friuli," who has heard and seen many marvels, claims membership among the "variety of persons" who have had something to say or write about the "customs and peculiarities of different parts of this world" (2, 97; all page references are made to the Yule-Cordier edition). This "I," in keeping with the common conventions of travel texts, is the main narrator of the story, but not the only one: several others make their presence known in the various redactions of the text and many even informs us about Odoric's death. During the story of the long voyage to Asia and back, this dominant "I" is present many times, particularly at the end and during the voyage to China (rather than in China proper). Thus, "Friar Odoric" the narrator ends many passages on the various locations, events, customs, or contexts he presents on his way to China with a statement on writing less than he could (see Koss 123-24). After the narrator reaches China, this barely happens. While the point about China as a kind of textual watershed is not made often, scholars note the use of this "declaration of silence" narrative device, which they explain in a variety of ways for example as Odoric's deferring the production of a fuller account for other times (e.g., Valtrová 180) or as the friar's wish to spare his readers the fear of the Other (e.g., Bubenicek 242). By emphasizing the presence of these textual formulas outside the context of China, I see them as indirect pointers to the exhaustiveness of the China-related passages and I also take them as signaling a certain teleological effect: I, friar Odoric, refrain from telling everything I could about my

travels to China because my actual purpose is telling you about China itself or about the Great Khan (see Dathorne 88; Rachewiltz 180).

This economical form of *écriture* (see Córdoba 510; Espada, "Fray Odorico" 89; Andreose, *Libro* 21; Andreose and Ménard xxiv) makes the first part of the *Itinerarium* little more than a sequence of concise episodes synthesizing the legs of the actual voyage undertaken by Odoric in what, with Zumthor ("The Medieval" 812), we could call a "symbolic appropriation" of otherness. If we ignore for the moment, in spite of its massive autodiegetic significance in the versions where it is present (see Andreose, "Forme" 74-76; O'Doherty 199), the long account of the martyrdom of four Franciscan missionaries at the hands of a local Indian ruler, the first part of the text reads much like a kaleidoscope of self-contained snapshots (see Popeanga 51), minimal sketches (or "slides," see Kappler 123) chained by minimal narrative ("I went," "I crossed," "I left," etc.) in what has been described as a stylistic staccato (see Edson 108). In keeping with what are said to be common conventions in medieval travel literature (see Pérez Priego 226-29; Lopes <<http://www2.fchsh.unl.pt/iem/medievalista/MEDIEVALISTA2/medievalista-viagens.htm>>; see also Heers with regard to Marco Polo's text), the traveler's vision encounters at first primarily cities and his eyes notice size, food, men, and women or various merchandise. These mundane observations are counterbalanced, in the logic of informative entertainment becoming typical for travelogues in the fourteenth century (Popeanga 45), by longer ethnographic comments which place local customs, religious or otherwise, within the confines of the manageable exotic. Otherness is never threatening, but appears domesticated and reduced by caricature or familiar references to Biblical or classical contexts and places, common tropes, and shared horizons — all part of a vision of the world both Odoric and his audience travel with (see Wittkower, "Marco Polo" 76; see Espada, "Marco Polo" for a different nuance on this point). A certain tone of detachment characterizes many scenes taking place in this "geographical and moral labyrinth" (Monaco, *Memoriale* 44), and, in spite of some scholars' arguments to the contrary (e.g., Palencia-Roth 42; Sobecki 341), personal judgments or involvement are rarely present emphatically and when they are, they do not seem to be particularly effective. In an exchange with the inhabitants of the island of "Dondin" or "Dandin," for instance, Odoric fails to convince the "idolaters" to give up on their beliefs and does not have the last word in the debate. While Andreose reads "a judgment of condemnation" in such statements and finds for them an "interpretive function" ("Forme" 72-73), the fact remains that the exchange ends with the friar admitting, on a resigned tone, failure in his persuasion efforts. A pronunciation appearing at the end of a famous exchange with regard to metempsychosis taking place in the city of Hangzhou (2, 200-04) is similar: the presence of such confessions of failed persuasion testifies probably not only to the irresistible attraction of the anecdote, but also to the problems of staging dialogue in a text that develops, the highly formulaic and literary episode of the martyrdom of the Franciscan friars (see Johnson) aside, like a long and self-confident monologue.

All this is not to say that the quality of the *mirabilia* is not entertaining in what can certainly be sometimes a "breathless account" (Higgins, "Shades" 206). In an irresistible passage, Odoric describes the edenic world on the island of "Lamori" (north-western tip of Sumatra) where almost everything is held in common, the naked inhabitants poke fun at the travelling friar for wearing clothes, and business involves selling to the Natives fat people, whose flesh delights local palates (2, 146-49). An earlier anecdote depicts the effects of heat on the private body parts of the male inhabitants of Hormuz and the desperate self-preservation measures taken by the locals in such detail that Yule (2, 112-13), unlike earlier translators like Hakluyt (4, 411), or Giovanni Battista Ramusio (4, 273) did not translate the passage. The grotesque and the aberrant in terms of corporeal practices in ritual contexts become — once the friar's travels take him away from a world of cities to one of countries and from India to the unknown lands of South-East Asia on his way to China — the focus of his vision: I take "focus" as a conceptualization of experience within expected patterns of excessive wonder — as it befits the margins of the world — rather than simple perception (Odoric often speaks of "hearing" and "seeing" in this order and relates not only what he sees, but a great deal of what he hears from others, as a good practitioner of "medieval (epistemological) consubstantiality" (Peleggi 19; see also Koss 102-04; Le Goff, "Medieval" 191). On the other hand, the text also illustrates Zumthor's statement that "from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, sight gradually replaces hearing in its

function as source of knowledge" ("Medieval" 817; for "wonder," see Bynum; Daston and Park; Greenblatt; Le Goff, "The Marvelous"; Wittkower, "Marvels").

All this changes significantly, albeit not suddenly, as the friar reaches China and engages on land on the way to Khanbaliq. A new mode of the text which Giorgio Melis takes to be more "sober and rational" and displaying a political dimension is articulated primarily around the trope of greatness, most often translated immediately into measurable bigness. Odoric constantly provides numbers and quantifies his experiences of the cities he visits in terms of size, value, or abundance. While everything is big and/or plentiful in China — from geese to cities, and from snakes to inhabitants — it is not nature that impresses the friar most (see Popeanga 58), but the power of the khan, which he seems to always read behind his experiences. As his travels bring him closer to Khanbaliq, Odoric does encounter *mirabilia*, like the hens with wool instead of feathers or the land of the pygmies, and does witness customs or rituals of the exotic. None of these, however, are structurally dominant elements — after all, in a passage (Yule 2, 176; see also Higgins, *Writing East* 143) placed strategically at the beginning of the China peregrinations and in which Odoric insists on the veracity of his words, he already declared "India" rather than China to be unmatched in terms of wonders. Therefore, now the friar selects things to see (and describe) in a manner different from before. Thus, the descriptive slowly acquires predominance over the narrative with longer and longer effusions on the magnificence of the cities visited setting the tone. The number of comparisons against European counterparts also increases significantly, conveying a sense of "superficial familiarity" (Phillips's phrase about Marco Polo [38]) which is articulated formulaically in hyperbolic expressions.

The above referred to textual turns ultimately converge into building the most extended descriptions in the text, all of which are dedicated to a world centered on the person of the Great Khan, his city, his palace, his court and its ceremonies, his travels, his empire of order and speedy communication, his ritual hunting and "the four grand feasts" he keeps during the year. Odoric's vision is particularly sharp when noticing decorations, coiffures, or ornaments and quick at seizing orderly pattern in the various ceremonies he describes in detail. We do not have, like in the first part of the *Itinerarium*, a kaleidoscopic succession of places with the de rigueur marvels dully noted by an "I" often fulfilling the role of a mere rhetorical device (see Popeanga 53) in a type of discourse that constantly refrains from all unnecessary expansion. Instead, we now witness a unitary spectacle of absolute power seen for multiple perspectives, for the khan was "the perfect embodiment of the ideal medieval ruler, holy man, and merchant prince" (Dathorne 90). In the economy of the text, this goes well beyond the anecdote and seems almost exuberant. So much so that we may fail to notice the obvious: the Great Khan himself (see Campbell's discussion [106-08] about the way he appears in Marco Polo's text), the source and destination of all communication— all ritual and all order, as well as, here, the center of all discourse, all description and all narration — is absent from the text. Odoric does refer to the khan, of course, but the khan receives no description proper and seems to be more of a role (see Bousquet-Labou erie 12), a symbolic figure (see Monaco, *Memoriale* 60-61) or a discursive function rather than a real being. In Odoric's vision of power, actual vision either investigates small details or offers large panoramas, but never focuses on what holds everything together.

It is perhaps such lack of focus that leads to a blurry final part of the *Itinerarium* — so blurry that a jumbled rearrangement of the whole into the logic of an itinerary involving going, staying, and coming back was attempted in the first printed version of the text (1513; see Monaco, "Un'edizione" 30; Monaco and Testa *passim*). A series of loosely connected (if at all) episodes begins abruptly after the remarkable tableau of imperial power, with *mirabilia* (the lamb-producing melons), anecdote (the rich man fed by fifty maidens), and ethnographically relevant travel description after the fashion we find in the first part of the book (with much less precise coordinates than in the case of the China-related passages) building up a texture difficult to disentangle. No obvious thread, apart perhaps from the geographical one, offers a way out, but even tracing the steps of the friar is no easy matter: familiar (albeit imprecise) references like "The land of Prester John" are followed by new terms like "Kansan" (i.e., Xi'an, with reference, suggests Yule [2, 246], to an area comprising the province of Shaanxi, a large part of Gansu and the whole of Sichuan or "Tibet," and then by a new reference to southern China; on Prester John, see, e.g., Wang <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss5/4>>).

While vision proper is still there — and Odoric proves to be as attentive and curious (see Reichert, "Odorico" 348) as ever — a vision of the Other and of the terms in which the Other needs to be approached is much less clear.

This changes gradually as a new mode takes over and the friar's travels seem to abandon this world and become explorations in allegory: vision becomes a series of visions (many of which are text-inspired or text-framed) building up into a travel of the soul rather than the feet. The beginning is provided by the disquieting presentation of a paradise ruled by a murderer — the famous "Old Man of the Mountain" (see Daftary, *The Isma'ilis* 19; see also Fleischhauer; Nowell) described in detail by Marco Polo (Benedetto 49-53; see also Daftary, *The Assassin* who thinks Odoric's passage originated almost completely from Polo's book). The passages are followed by an account of exorcisms performed by fellow Franciscans and culminates with a most striking narrative about Odoric's passage through a valley lying next to a "River of Delights." The scene happening in the "non-place" (Barbieri 45; for attempts at exact geographic identification see, e.g., Yule; Reichert, *Incontri*; De Biasio) described by the friar involves countless corpses, frightening drum music, a face of a man "very great and terrible" in the rock on one side of the valley, ascension on a hill of sand, and silver heaped up "as if had been fishes' scales" (Yule 2, 262-66). The cathartic experience can be of course read in terms of Christian symbolism: the valley as the "Valley of Judgment" and the river as a synecdoche for Earthly Paradise (see Barbieri 43; see also Westhoff 194-95), but also against the larger context of temptation, sin, *vanitas*, or redemption, as self-discovery, initiation, etc. (see Bousquet-Labou erie 11). On the other hand, by setting this passage against the whole of the *Itinerarium*, we may see it, as suggested by Andreose ("Forme" 78), as a glorification of Odoric, a form of *beatificazione in vita* (see Higgins, *Writing East* 207-08; Kappler 118; Monaco "Commento" 171) or, as put by Monaco in his index to the *Memoriale toscano* as a kind of auto-hagiography (165) which is perhaps "criminally self-congratulatory" (Campbell 159). The whole text, accordingly, becomes a double trajectory through the realm of the real as well as the symbolical, with scholars like Dathorne seeing for instance the pre-China "monstrous" leg of the trip figuring the necessary "travails" of any Christian on his way to salvation. At this point, one gets dizzyed by the plurality of readings that the text seems to be open to: these include, to name but a few, identifying political and Franciscan propaganda directions, exploring intratextual correspondences (i.e., the passage is sometimes projected against the story of the four Franciscan martyrs [see Barbieri 44]), investigating intertextual connections in a didactic-religious dimension: comparable episodes feature in Polo's (see Benedetto 67-68) and William of Rubruck's (see Jackson 166-67) narratives (see Popeanga 55-56), etc.

That one or several attempts at "guiding the readers" along one specific hermeneutic path or another have been made in the actual production of the written text seems beyond doubt: the whole textual history, to the degree that it has been explored, testifies to countless structural changes including for instance the erasure of entire episodes like the story of the martyrdom of the four Franciscans friars in India — one fifth of the text — an operation signaling the plurality of ways in which the intertwining between the marvelous and the miraculous needs to be approached — as well as their reworking and rearrangement in the order of narration in one edition or another (see the 1513 *Odorichus de rebus incognitis* reedited by Monaco and Testa). And yet, the differences of mode or, as I show, the differences of vision — from a vision of the Other based on actual vision and commonplace envisionings to a vision of power and ultimately to a set of hallucination-like visions — seem to be too strong to permit such coherent revisiting of the text's (and the friar's) trajectory.

Why such difference of vision? Why the detached observer with an attraction for wonder at first, the attentive viewer often doubled by the painter with broad strokes in China and then the protagonist of such an intimate journey of the soul? Also, why so much about the journey to China and China proper but so little of the return? A response should start from one of the observations already made above, namely that the lack of deep involvement one senses in the first part of the *Itinerarium* seems to suggest the presence of a teleology that makes China into the proper target of both travel and words. If we take into account the long hagiographic episode concerning the four friars martyred in India and Odoric's dangerous attempt to take their bones to China, the teleological effect is even further strengthened although, of course, the focus of the friar's efforts becomes different. The same teleological drive may perhaps also explain the irrelevance, once the target has been reached, of the

road back and hence the hazy description, the little sense of progression, the jumbled sequence of places, visions instead of vision, etc. On the other hand, in terms of the voyage proper, Odoric does treat Khanbaliq as the point of terminus in his itinerary and spends there a significant number of years. Notwithstanding his casual and "promptly forgotten" (Trotter, "En Ensivant" 34; see also Oliger 271; Espada, "Marco Polo" 202; Rachewiltz 183; Ryan, "Conversion" 157) explanation as to the aim of his exploits — "winning some harvest of souls" (Yule 2, 97), the *Itinerarium*, as well as the friar's itinerary do seem all in all very much China-oriented or Khanbaliq-oriented, palace-oriented, and khan-oriented.

Reviewing the sections which pertain to the journey through China, one notices the gradual way in which they come to articulate a different mode of the text based on tropes of greatness, much quantifiable detail and a massive dominance of the descriptive. Through the friar's descriptions, we get closer and closer to what seems to be the ultimate target of travel (and all discourse), which is the khan — a khan we do not really get to see, who escapes all description and who never interacts with Odoric. This failure of the friar (and of the text) to fix its center fully may explain why the addition of a new episode to the text, known as the "De reverentia magni Chanis" (see Chiesa, "Per un riordino"), is so significant. Absent in a number of redactions and showing substantial differences in terms of position, context, voice, development, phrasing, and structure in those in which it does feature (see Andreose, "Oralità"; Chiesa, "Per un riordino"), this episode — which also bears some semblance to a similar anecdote in Rubruck's *Itinerarium* (see Jackson; Reichert, *Incontri*; Watson) — is centered on the direct interaction between Odoric (accompanied by other friars and a bishop) and the khan. Common elements include the incantation of a Christian hymn, the khan's respectful reaction when presented the cross, the gift of fruit (most commonly identified as apples) the friars or Odoric himself present the khan with, and the khan's partaking of the fruit offered to him.

It is not difficult to sense the propagandistic overtones of the passage and the way the Franciscan agenda and/or the person of Odoric himself are given prominence. For example, the inclusion of such a section at the end of the text, after the intense scene taking place in the valley by the River of Delight, is obviously programmatic: the fact that it is also introduced in other redactions by another narrative voice, with Odoric referred to in the third person, further strengthens such a reading. And yet the episode, I argue, offers true closure. In the symbolic exchange between Odoric's party and the khan, it is always the friars who initiate contact and present the khan with something — a song, the cross, and the apples. The khan reacts by permitting closer and closer access to his person, summoning the friars, kissing the cross, and consuming the apple. All other connotations of a complex exchange involving food, religion or power aside (see Kjaer and Watson; Watson; Woolgar), it is obvious that through the khan's last action, the ultimate center of the trip and the ultimate target of Odoric's words is finally reached — and the ingestion of the apple also means incorporation into the order of discourse. And maybe, one is tempted to speculate, it is the same access to the core of the Other that prompts the dramatic re-exploration of the self in the valley of the epiphany.

Can we read so much behind an episode which seems to be included in the text, if at all, almost like an afterthought? Does its absence truly leave the text and the journey unfulfilled? In the Derridean logic of the supplement, we cannot truly answer such questions: were we to try it, however, we would still remain, whatever response we might put forth, with a remarkable exercise in vision behind which we can discover very familiar attempts at dealing with the Other.

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