Chapter 14

THE PRINTING OF THE UIGUR TURKS

The important position held by China's western borderland in the early history of block printing has already been noted. Some of the earliest literary references and the oldest prints that have been found come from the two far western provinces of Szechuan and Kansu, while printed books of the eleventh century have even been found across the border in Mongolia. Though the better preservation of documents in such places as Tun-huang and Kharakoto is chiefly due to the climate, yet one may assume also that most of the earliest printing centers were in the western part of China, and that from this part of the country the new art spread not only eastward but westward. The region where the greatest quantity and the greatest variety of early block prints has been found is the oasis of Turfan in what is now Chinese Turkestan.

This oasis of Turfan, some four hundred miles northwest of Tun-huang, is a strange depression in the earth's surface almost as deep as that of the Dead Sea, and surrounded on all sides except that toward China by high mountains. A people of Indo-European speech developed the first recorded civilization in the Turfan basin, going back to a period before the Christian Era. In the early centuries after Christ, Buddhism swept through the region, bringing in its train a highly developed literature and art. Manichean and Christian (Nestorian) missionaries began coming to the Turfan oasis about the fifth or sixth century and their influence soon rivaled, though it never displaced, that of the Buddhists, bringing into the country a considerable element of Persian and even Byzantine culture. In the seventh century the oasis was conquered by the Chinese and from that time on down to Mongol times Turfan was intermittently under Chinese control, though the hand of the Chinese overlords was rather lightly felt, and the country was left to develop its own peculiar institutions. More important was the conquest by a powerful Turkish tribe called the Uigurs in the eighth and ninth centuries, for these Uigurs soon made Iridi, near the modern Turfan, the capital of their empire, and adopted as their own the older civilization that they found.

From this time Turfan, located as it is in the very center of Asia, may be said to have been a focal point where culture streams of all Asia met, open on the south and west to the religious influences of India, Persia, and Syria, open on the east to the political hegemony of China, and on the north forming the cultural center of a loose empire that stretched far away over the nomad tribes of Mongolia and even Siberia. The Uigur civilization came to its height in the ninth and tenth centuries of our era, but Turfan remained an important cultural center until after its conquest by the Mongols under Jenghis Khan.

This Turfan basin was first excavated by the Prussian expeditions of Dr. Grünwedel and Dr. von Le Coq in the years 1902 to 1907. The results of these excavations, including a large quantity of woodcuts and block prints, were in the Ethnological Museum at Berlin until World War II, when they suffered loss by bombing.

It is the mingling of races and religions that gives to the Turfan discoveries their peculiar fascination. Chinese and swarthy Indians, Turks and blue-eyed, fair-haired mountaineers of Tocharian race, all stand out clearly in the wonderful wall frescoes, while the manner of portrayal is a blending of the art of Greco-Indian Gandhara with that of China, not to speak of considerable Persian or Iranian influence.

Nor is there less mingling in the domain of religion. Side by side stood the churches of the Christians and the temples where Buddhists and Manicheans seem to have worshipped together. All three religions flourished during the period before the Turkish conquest, and the conquest of the country by the Uigur Turks brought little change, except that Manicheism became the religion of the reigning house. Christianity was apparently always tolerated and Buddhism encouraged by the new overlords. Islam, though sweep-
ing over the lands directly to the west, left the older religions in the Turfan basin undisturbed until after Mongol times. Manicheism was the religion of the royal house, Buddhism that of the majority of the people, Nestorian Christianity that of the minority. The Confucian culture of the Chinese overlords made little impression.

Needless to say, Turfan was a polyglot community. Seventeen different languages are represented among the documents found by the Prussian expeditions, including Syriac, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese, and a few words of Greek, as well as the local Tocharian and Turkish. Some of these appear in as many as four or even five different alphabets. There seems to have been a mania for fitting new alphabets to the various languages of the oasis.

The religious impulse motivated all this literary, linguistic, and art activity. In the ruined monasteries and temples the ancient documents have been preserved: Christian scriptures, Manichean hymns and prayers, and Buddhist sûtras that form the bulk of all the manuscripts found.

In this melting pot of race, language, and religion, with its high valuation of literature and art, block printing early found itself at home. It has already been pointed out how Buddhism had a particular genius for replication, and some of the earlier, cruder manifestations of that genius as found in the Turfan monasteries have been described. It is a significant fact that all the block printing of Turfan so far found is Buddhist. Woodcuts and block prints were found in almost every site excavated in the Turfan region. Toquon at the western edge of the Turfan oasis is the most western point at which Central Asian block printing has been discovered.

The state of preservation of the Turfan texts is very different from that at Tun-huang. In contrast to the neatly piled rolls of an undisturbed sealed chamber, the Turfan manuscript treasures show signs not only of the natural destruction of the centuries, but of wanton destruction as well. In certain of these monasteries the floors were littered with papers, all either hacked to pieces, or else crushed by hand, piece by piece. In the monastery at Idikut, for instance, the floor was covered knee deep with this “waste paper.” One could have carried away many hundred pounds of it. In the midst of this deposit were the corpses of several Buddhist priests, evidently killed while the systematic destruction of their library was going on. Manichean documents were mingled with those of Buddhist origin, but, whether by design or by accident, they do not seem to have been so thoroughly destroyed. One box of this deposit examined at Berlin—a box that had remained packed away ever since it came from Turfan and from all appearances might have been the contents of a wastepaper basket in a modern Chinese schoolroom, plus a generous accumulation of dust—contained, among crumpled and torn manuscripts in Uigur, Sogdian, Chinese, and Sanskrit, a dozen very primitive Buddhist woodcuts, two printed texts in Uigur, a sheet of stamped Buddhás (hand-colored), a Chinese manuscript with a stamped Buddha at the top of each column, several bits of silk with Buddhist figures stencilled upon them, and a bit of printed silk.

Most of the printing of the Turfan region has had to be rescued from such crumpled deposits. But one notable exception is the monastery at Murtuk, in which a large proportion of the best block prints were found. This monastery seems to be of later date than most of the others. Perhaps its documents were produced after the persecuting zeal that destroyed the other libraries had spent itself. Murtuk as compared with other sites is remarkable for three things—a larger proportion of its documents is printed, its printing is better done, and its printing is far better preserved.

Of all the printed documents found in the Turfan region, not one is dated. Nor is the approximate dating easy, especially of the earlier pieces. With regard to the later ones, it is possible to speak with more clearness. There are four fragments in the Mongol language, also a beautiful large Sanskrit book in Lanta script, and a fragment containing the name of Jenghis Khan—all of which could not be earlier than the opening decades of the thirteenth century. Moreover, as it is known that the Uigur civilization did not long survive the drain on its man power caused by the Mongol wars, the date at which the Turfan documents come to an end cannot be much later than the close of the thirteenth century. It may therefore be said with a fair degree of certainty that a number of the
best printed pieces—and perhaps a very considerable number—belong to the thirteenth century and the opening years of the fourteenth, when Uigur printing came to its climax and ended. How far back of this the art goes can be only matter for conjecture. It may possibly go back as far as that at Tun-huang or further. It is certain that there is a large amount of very primitive printing and near-printing, which may indicate several centuries of development. Some would assign much of the printing in the Uigur language to an early date, because the Uigur civilization rose to its height during the ninth and tenth centuries. But all this is conjecture. Whatever may be the date at which Uigur printing began, there seems to have been continued progress both in quantity production and in quality. Late monasteries like Murtuk are much richer in block prints than the earlier ones, and the printing is better. It may then safely be said that there was during early Mongol times in the monasteries of the Turfan region a highly developed and widely extended printing industry, which had very likely been going on for several centuries.

Six languages are used in the Turfan block prints: Uigur, Chinese, Sanskrit, Tangut, Tibetan, and Mongol—the Uigur, Chinese, and Sanskrit prints predominating.

The Uigur books and fragments are in the Sogdian alphabet—an adaptation of Syriac that had penetrated into Central Asia early in the Christian Era and had been taken over from the people of Indo-European speech by the Uigur conquerors. The language is a pure Turkic, which, though not the direct ancestor of modern Turkish, presents a striking likeness to it. As the books are all translations of Buddhist sūtras, they contain many transliterations of Sanskrit names and words. Where this occurs, the Sanskrit original is printed in between the lines, much as English words are introduced in a modern Japanese text. The page numbers in Uigur books are as a rule in Chinese, as is also the title of the book, which appears at the side of many of the pages. These Buddhist printed books in a Turkish language with Sanskrit notes and Chinese page numbers, in a script brought from Syria, are in themselves an epitome of the eclectic character of the Uigur civilization.

Ch. 14 | THE PRINTING OF THE UIGUR TURKS

The Chinese books, of which there are many, are as a rule excellently printed in the large bold-faced style characteristic of the Sung era. They are better printed and easier to read than any modern Chinese block books. The Chinese books, like those in Uigur, are in the main translations of Sanskrit sūtras. Both the Uigur and the Chinese books are usually in the folded form, but there are also a few printed rolls, which may very likely indicate an early date.

The Sanskrit prints are of two kinds. The larger number are in an older script, which shows little change from that which was already in use in Central Asia several centuries before block printing began. A few Sanskrit prints are in the later Lantsa script, which was not in use before Mongol times. The most beautiful specimen of printing in the entire collection is a Sanskrit Diamond Sūtra in Lantsa script. Each page—some ten leaves have been found—is more than two feet long by six inches wide, with broad margins and beautiful clear print. The titles and page numbers on alternate pages are Sanskrit and Chinese. This Sanskrit edition is later than the Chinese editions of the same book found at Tun-huang; at Kharakho, and in Japan; and, judging from the script, it may be said with a fair degree of certainty to date from the thirteenth century. Apparently printed on both sides of the page, each sheet actually consists of two leaves pasted together with such nicety that the pasting can scarcely be detected.

This, like many of the Sanskrit printed books, retains the Indian form rather than the Chinese. It is a pūthi; that is, it is like the ancient books that were written on palm leaf in India, many long narrow sheets laid between two boards and bound through with a thong.

The printed books of Turfan afford an interesting study in the competition that was going on between different book forms—the roll, which was the earlier form both in China and in the West; the folded book, which under the influence of printing had gradually displaced the roll in China; and the Indian pūthi. The one form lacking is the stitched book, familiar in the West. This omission is interesting, as Christian and Manichean stitched books had begun to circulate in the Turfan region not so very long after their
first use in Syria in the fifth century. The stitched book reached China early in the Sung dynasty (about the eleventh century) and most of the printed books of that period from China that are now extant are stitched. Somehow the Buddhist never taken kindly to this form. In Turfan it was used in the main by Christians and Manicheans; in China it was the mark of Confucian and secular literature, and it came in time to be the usual form in the West. The Buddhists always preferred the folded book—or sometimes in Central Asia the Indian post. In fact a curious form frequently met among the Turfan printed books is a cross between the two—a folded book copied exactly from a manuscript post, with the old holes for the post thong copied in the printing.

The Tangut printing is not extensive. It is in a script only partially deciphered, ideographic, and evidently based on Chinese, yet differing radically from Chinese—one of man’s very few attempts within relatively modern times to create an ideographic script. It was the language of a powerful kingdom—racially akin to the Tibetans—which held sway in Kansu and adjacent territory during the two centuries before the Mongol conquest. This Tangut printing can therefore be dated with a fair degree of accuracy.  

The Tibetan prints, though not the oldest, are the crudest of those found at Turfan. They are mostly charms of two or three words each, contained in little clay Buddhas, which have to be broken in order to remove the printed charm.

There are just four fragments of Mongol printing. They are bits of sīras, printed in the Phags-pa script that was derived from Tibetan, and not in the more usual script that the Mongols took over from the Uighurs.  

The Turfan finds include also a large number of woodcuts and fragments of woodcuts, without text. These are apt to be on very thin paper and rather primitive in workmanship, though there are notable exceptions.

The discovery at Tun-huang of a font of Uighur wooden type belonging to early Mongol times naturally arouses the question whether any of the Turfan printing, especially that in the Uighur language, could have been done with movable type. This Uighur type will be more fully discussed in Chapter 22. All that can be said here is that there is no evidence of the use of type at Turfan. Nor is there evidence to the contrary. The difference between a block-printed book and one printed from such type as that found at Tun-huang would be difficult to detect.

The part played in the spread of printing by peoples of Turkish extraction is an interesting study. The tenth century was a great century for the Turks. During parts of this century, while the Turkish civilization of the Uigurs of Turfan was at its height, Turks of other tribes were ruling China, Egypt, and the Baghdad Caliphate. This vast territory under Turkish rule, stretching from the Pacific to beyond the Nile, did not in any sense constitute a single empire, and it is doubtful whether the Turkish emperors on the throne of China were even aware that men of their own race were ruling in Cairo and Baghdad. Yet it was Turkish individuals—adventurers—who had seized the power in all three lands and it was with Turkish armies that they held power. The founders of the three short-lived dynasties that ruled China from 923 to 951 were, like their contemporaries in the Moslem empires, Turkish mercenaries who became sufficiently strong to usurp power. The birthplace of these adventurers in China was in the region of Hami, not far from Turfan. The home of the rulers of Egypt and Mesopotamia was a thousand miles or so to the west across the mountains. Yet in language and racial affinity they were closely related.

The fact that the tenth century was a time in which block printing made such progress—the century of Féng Tào in China, of most of the block prints of Tun-huang, and possibly of the earliest prints both of Turfan and of Egypt—brings up the question whether there is any connection between the spread of block printing and the spread of the various branches of the Turkish race—an interesting subject for further study. The theory has even been advanced that block printing was primarily a Uigur or Central Asiatic invention. But the little Chinese page numbers on all the Turfan books, whether the language is Chinese, Sanskrit, or Uighur, are a sure indication of Chinese workmanship. Block printing comes from China. The fact that a larger number of early prints have
been found in Tun-huang and Turfan than in China proper is due to the climate.

The great significance of the printing of the Uigur Turks lies in the fact that the Uigur civilization was taken over in toto by the new Mongol empire. The conquest of the Uigur realm (A.D. 1206) was one of the first important achievements of Jenghis. From that time not only did the Uigurs form a large part of the Mongol army—they were also the Mongol brains. It was Uigurs who reduced the Mongol language to writing and applied to it their own alphabet. It was Uigurs who did such writing as was needed at the Mongol court. A Uigur was appointed by Jenghis as tutor to his sons “to instruct them in the language, laws, and customs of the Uigurs.” Under Jenghis’ grandsons, the accountants and chief officers of state in Persia and in Mesopotamia were Uigurs. As Turfan, drained of its manpower for the Mongol armies, dwindled in importance, its culture was transferred bodily to Karakorum, and became the basis of such culture as the Mongols possessed, until it was gradually displaced at the eastward end of the empire by the higher civilization of China and at the westward end by that of Islam. During the lightning campaigns of the Mongols that resulted in the conquest of China, Persia, Mesopotamia, and Russia, it was the culture of the Uigur Turks that followed the Mongol arms. And the Uigur Turks were a people who knew well how to print.

NOTES

1. This mingling is illustrated in the Buddhist monastery of Toyok near Turfan, which now through a curious confusion of faiths has become a point of pilgrimage for Moslems from India and Arabia. Among the papers found in this old monastery were an enormous number of Chinese Buddhist manuscripts, fragments of Indian manuscripts written on birch bark and on palm leaf, fragments in a still unknown Semitic script, several manuscripts in old Turkish runes, some Sogdian writings, Manichean writings in Turkish and Persian, Uigur writings in four different kinds of script, some Syrian fragments, some Manichean and Buddhist embroideries, and some beautiful Manichean miniatures. In the ruin of an old church near by are a large number of Christian texts in Syriac. No wonder the Moslems regard as sacred the place where so many peoples and faiths have met!

2. It is interesting to note that these six languages are exactly the same as those which Pelliot found in manuscript and printed remains in one of the later caves at Tun-huang. Furthermore a stone found at Tun-huang, dated 1348, contains parallel inscriptions in these same six languages. To this list may be added the well-known hexaglot inscription of 1345 in the archway at Chia-yung-kuan, a pass in the Great Wall north of Peking. Four of these languages (all except Mongol and Sanskrit) are mentioned by de Rubruquis as the languages used for writing at the Mongol court when he visited the Grand Khan in the middle of the thirteenth century.

3. The Tangut script was officially adopted in 1036; cf. Barach, 1933: 22–24. For brief description and historical sketch of the Tangut, see Cordier, 1920:II, 199–203.

4. “The Uigurs, an ancient Tatar people, have at all times been celebrated in Tartary. They have cultivated sciences and arts... They write like the Chinese from the top down; and were the first to use wooden blocks for printing.” De Guignes, 1756:581.

Chapter 15

ISLAM AS A BARRIER TO PRINTING

For several hundred years before block printing came into Europe, all East Asia was printing—from Nara to Turfan, Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, and Uigur Turks—and through most of this territory printing was being carried on on a large scale. But between the Far East that printed, and Europe where printing was unknown, lay the Moslem world that refused to put its literature in printed form. This barrier between the Far East, where all Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian literature was being spread abroad in printed form, and Europe where ancient manuscripts were being so laboriously copied by hand in the Christian monasteries, proved in the end to be not impenetrable, but for a time the isolation of Europe from the lands of the Far East was complete.

It is strange that such a literary, and such a religious, people as the Arabs refused to use this vehicle for the spreading abroad of religious thought. Paper they found in Central Asia—and with almost incredible quickness it displaced all other writing materials from Samarkand to Spain. But not so with printing. The reason for this prejudice is uncertain. It has been suggested that the Moslem suspected hog’s bristles in the brush used for cleaning the block, and that to touch the name of Allah with this brush seemed to him the height of blasphemy. It is more probable that mere conservatism was back of the prejudice. The Koran was given in written form, therefore the Koran must always be written. Whatever the reason may be, up to today the Koran has never been printed in any Moslem country except by block printing or lithography. (But note the exception in Chapter 18.) In 1727, when permission was asked by a Hungarian by the name of Ibrahim for the erection of a printing press at Constantinople, the Ulema under Sultan Ahmed III delivered a verdict that it was against the religion and honor of Islam to allow the printing of the Koran, because the Koran rested upon written tradition, and must in no other way be handed down. Permission to set up a press was finally given him on condition that the Koran should not be printed, and in 1729 a history of Egypt appeared. But it awakened such opposition that until the nineteenth century no more printing was attempted in Moslem lands, and even through the nineteenth century printing has had to fight against great odds. There was printing done in Syria in the sixteenth century by Syrian Christians. Printing had been done in Arabic in Italy before the end of the fifteenth century, and the Koran was printed at that time. Catherine II had the Koran block printed in Russia in 1787. But, so far as is known, with the exception of the abortive projects of 1714 and 1729 at Constantinople, the Islamic world (the Chinese part of it excepted) never printed a book till 1825, when the first press was set up in Cairo. In China, at least twenty books were printed between 1657 and 1825.

During all the early period of Chinese printing the Arabic world was in close touch both with China and with Chinese Turkestan, and before the period was over, intelligent Moslems could not have been wholly ignorant of the role that was being played by literary and religious printing in the lands to the east. The growth of intercourse across Asia during the T’ang dynasty has already been sketched. There were trade relations by sea, and relations of many sorts—largely hostile—in Turkestan. With Western Turkestan converted to Islam and under Arab rule, and Eastern Turkestan a part of the Chinese domain, there was naturally a constant interchange—in the course of which papermaking entered the Islamic world. This intercourse was somewhat retarded by political conditions in Central Asia during the Sung period, only to be renewed and greatly increased under the Mongol empire.

The extent of Arab penetration of China at this time is borne witness to by the fact that the province of Kansu, the main avenue of Arab trade, is still largely Moslem, and that the Moslems there, as they do all over China, have a large admixture of Arab blood. In fact, all large cities of China and many small ones have a consider-
able Moslem population, who trace their descent back to the inter-
marrige of Arab traders with Chinese women during this period of
Moslem penetration that reached its culmination during the Mongol
dynasty. Commerce came by sea as well as by land, the coast
cities of South China having been great Arab centers, and having
today also a large Moslem population.

This peaceful penetration of China by Arab trade is described
both by Chinese and by Arabic writers, especially by those of Mongol
times. Chao Ju-kua, who was a Chinese inspector of foreign com-
merce in the province of Fukien some time during the half century
before Marco Polo's visit, has left a detailed description, too hazy
for that of an eyewitness and evidently derived from Moslem traders,
of the various lands of the West from Baghdad to Spain. Ibn Batuta,
writing toward the end of the Mongol occupation, gives a wonderful
picture of how all China was in his day permeated with Arabs.
It is no longer a tale of marvelous things he tells. His description
sounds as if such a trip as his were an everyday occurrence. In one
city after another he is met by the Arab merchants and he notes that
they are always organized under a judge and a Sheikh-ul-Islam.
But most astonishing of all is the narrative where he tells of casually
meeting a man at a feast in Hangchow and discovering that he and
his new-found acquaintance came from neighboring cities in Mor-
occo, and that they had met a long time before in Delhi. The
narrative ends, "I met his brother later in the Soudan; how far
these brothers are separated, the one from the other." By the time
of Ibn Batuta the world was already growing smaller, and consider-
able information about China was part of the common knowledge
of those who gathered about the bazaars of Tabriz and Cairo and
Algiers.

Yet in spite of all this intercourse with the Far East, books in
Arabic were never printed. Whether, unrecorded and unheralded,
there was an obscure block printing activity—the making of charms
or playing cards—is another question and will be discussed later.
But as far as literature is concerned, the Arabs did not print. Rashid-
eddin, who was grand vizier of Persia during the Mongol period
at just the time when Tabriz was the great bridge between the East
and the West, and who wrote a clear account of Chinese printing
in his world history (see Chapter 17), seems never to have con-
templated having his history printed. Instead, he provided in his
will, and left funds for the purpose, that each year two full copies
of all his works should be made by hand, one in Arabic and one in
Persian, until gradually there should be a complete copy in the
mosque of every large city of the Moslem world.

Though Arab culture, which so profoundly influenced reawakened
Europe, knew of Chinese printing, the refusal of its literary
men to profit by the art made Islam on the whole a barrier rather
than a bridge for the transmission of block printing to Europe. The
story of the penetration of this barrier—by the Mongols from the
East, by the Crusaders from the West—and of the obscure forms of
printing that succeeded in spite of prejudice in finding lodgment
in Moslem soil, will be told in the next chapters.

NOTES

1. It is probable that an edition of Risahid had already appeared at Con-
stantinople in 1714 under similar auspices. These were the only two books
published.

2. We are indebted to Dr. Grabmann for the statement that, according
to Theobals Ambrosius (d. 1540) in the book Introductio in Chaldaeam
Lingua (Pavia, 1539), folio ii recto, 84 recto, 20 verso, the father of Alex-
sandro de Paganinis, who worked as printer in Venice between 1483 and 1490,
printed the Koran with movable type. Unfortunately no copy of this first
edition exist. This was without doubt the oldest Arabic printing in Europe.
At Fano, Arabic printing was done in 1514, and it seems probable that
in 1518 another edition of the Koran was printed in Italy.

3. A. Vissière, who contributed an essay on Chinese Moslem writings to
d'Ollone, 1911:307-419, lists nineteen books printed by Moslems in China
during the years in question and Pelliot, 1935:279, has added another, Chih
sheng shih-lu (Biography of Mohammed), dating from 1775-85. In an edict
of the Ch'ien-lung period, dated July 13, 1782, given in the Ta Ch'ing shih-lu,
Kao-tung reign 1158/22, is a reference to a Moslem from Yai-chou, Kuang-
tung, carrying twenty-one Arabic and several Chinese books, one of the latter
being the Tien fang chih sheng shih-lu nien-pu, which we take to be a
longer title for the same work. (This reference was furnished by Canon Claude L. Pickens, Jr., who has specialized in the Moslem impact on China.) Nothing is reported as to whether any of these books were printed.

4. For the English translation of Chao Ju-kua’s works, with valuable introduction and notes, see Hirth and Rockhill, 1911.

5. Yule, 1913/1611IV, i–166. Ferrand, 1914II, 433–33, has expressed doubts as to Ibn Batuta’s veracity, and Lauter, 1927:75, considers his account overvalued. Perhaps so, but it is worth noting that a Chinese scholar has come to Ibn Batuta’s defense. Chang Hsing-lang, 1938:612, shows, for example, that Shaikh Burhan-uddin of Zayton (see Yule, ibid., 120) is mentioned by name as Hsüeh pu-hu-han-ting in the Ch’iuan-chou Fu chih (edition of 1761) 75; further, the local history reports that he reached China in 1312–13, was asked to take charge of the mosque, and died in 1370.

Chapter 16
CONTACTS BETWEEN CHINA AND EUROPE
IN THE MONGOL EMPIRE

Medieval Europe knew almost as little of China as it did of America, for Islam was a barrier well-nigh as formidable as the Atlantic Ocean. It was in the early part of the thirteenth century that Jenghis Khan and his Mongol hordes broke through this barrier, and Europe and China stood for a short time face to face. For a century or more—the middle of the thirteenth century to the middle of the fourteenth—the contact between Europe and Eastern Asia was far closer than ever before and probably closer than at any subsequent period down nearly to the nineteenth century. To travelers from the West, Cathay was the land of marvels, of wealth, and of intellectual culture—a land to be looked up to. For one century, and one century only, the way was wide open. With the fall of the Mongols the curtain fell, only to be raised a century and a half later, after Europe had passed through the Renaissance.

In the year 1206 Jenghis received the submission of the Uigur kingdom and incorporated into his own rapidly expanding state the brains and the marvelously eclectic culture that had centered about the oasis of Turfan. One country after another was added to the ever-growing empire—parts of North China in 1215, Korea in the same year, Khwarezm (Russian Turkestan) in 1223, Persia in 1224, the balance of North China in 1234, Russia in 1240, Baghdad in 1258, and South China in 1279. Devastating raids were made into Poland, Hungary, Germany, Indochina, and Java and a great navy was sent against Japan. Almost the whole continent of Asia was under one rule, and with it was united much of European Russia. Roads were built and armies, mounted on fast horses, were continually passing to and fro. In their wake came trade—overland
trade between the lands of the Near East and those of the Far East over the Turkestan passes and the Mongolian deserts flourishing as they have never flourished before or since. China and Europe met: a China that for three centuries had been printing books; a Europe that was just waking up to the need for books. Just at the end of the period of Mongol domination the first primitive block prints appeared in Europe. No clear documentary evidence can be produced to show how block printing entered, but certain phases of the history of the Mongol period show points at which Europe was especially exposed to Far Eastern influence. Upon these different phases are based various hypotheses as to route of transfer—hypotheses which are not mutually exclusive, and which may show a variety of influences to which the beginnings of block printing in Europe were due.

As already explained (Chapter 14), it was through the Uighur Turks that the Mongols first came in contact with civilization and with the art of printing. One of the first tasks of Jenghis after he had received the submission of the Uighurs was the conquest of the kingdom or empire of Tangut, which had established itself for some two hundred years in northwestern China and eastern Mongolia. The Tanguts were a people of Tibetan stock, but the population over whom they ruled was largely Chinese and Tatar. Like the Uighurs the Tanguts were printers, using the art largely for the duplication of Buddhist sūtras. Such sūtras in a peculiar ideographic character have been found at Ning-hsia, Tun-huang, and Turfan, but a number too have come from Kharakhoto, far out in what is now Mongolia, where they were discovered by the Russian expedition of Kotslov. Here Buddhism was the religion of the state, and block-printed sūtras, both in Chinese and in the Tangut language, were printed by imperial order. With these Chinese and Tangut sūtras were found two sūtras and some paper money in the language and the characters of the Mongols, showing how the conquerors took over the culture of the conquered.

Ch. 16] CONTACTS DURING THE MONGOL EMPIRE

As the Mongol hordes moved eastward they were constantly in touch with peoples who knew how to print, and as they adopted the culture of conquered lands, it was a culture based on printing that they adopted. As has already been pointed out in Chapter 10, printing in China had just reached its highest point of achievement at the time of the Mongol conquest, and during the period of Mongol control there was no diminution in the number of printed books produced. The Mongol rulers made it a point of honor to see that the ancient Chinese literature was printed not only in Chinese but in their own language as well.

After the conquest of North China, the Mongol armies turned westward, penetrating Persia and Russia and even Hungary and Poland. In the invasions of Hungary and Poland, Mongol domination came nearest to the heart of Europe. The great campaign against Poland took place in 1241, immediately after the conquest of Russia. Cracow and other neighboring cities were burned, Silesia was invaded, and a combined German and Polish army was defeated at Liegnitz in German Silesia. So great was the panic throughout Germany that the herring fisheries on the Frisian coast were abandoned and, according to a contemporary chronicler, herring about the coast of England became so plentiful that they sold in the English market for half their usual price. Meanwhile Hungary was invaded, Budapest burned, and the whole country ravaged, even a number of cities along the Adriatic coast being sacked. Fortunately for Europe, the death of the Grand Khan Ogatai recalled the Mongol armies. They occupied Hungary only a year, Poland a still shorter time. A second invasion of Poland took place in 1259, a second invasion of Hungary in 1285. In these invasions the capitals of the two countries were again burned, but in neither case was the occupation of long duration.

In these campaigns the Mongol armies came very close to those places where the earliest block printing activities of Europe during the next century were carried on—Venice, Prague, and the cities
of Bavaria. Did they leave in their wake anything that suggested the art? The fact that the earlier and more important campaigns were fought before the Mongols had attained a high degree of civilization, and that all the campaigns were little more than raids without much opportunity for cultural mingling with the people of the land, suggests a negative reply. The communication of such objects as printed charms or playing cards is not impossible, however, and more important printed matter, such as religious pictures, may have been in the hands of Uighurs who accompanied the Mongol armies.

The influence of the Mongol occupation of Russia was far different. Russia was invaded in 1223, conquered in the campaigns of 1236-40, and held in Mongol hands for more than two hundred years. While Russia was never as directly controlled as were China and Central Asia and Russian princes had considerable autonomy, circumstances made necessary a large amount of travel between Moscow and the court of the Grand Khan. Every Russian nobleman of the higher ranks was compelled to go to Karakorum for investiture, at least during the early part of the occupation, and many internal disputes had to be referred to the Grand Khan for decision.

Throughout Mongol times the market of Nizhni Novgorod, east of Moscow, was a distributing center for articles from the Far East entering Europe, and here the caravans of China and Turkestan came in contact with the river-borne traffic of the cities of the Hanseatic league. One section of Novgorod is still called the "Cathay Section," and an important street of Moscow "Cathay Town" (i.e., Kitay Gorod).

While the hypothesis of Russian agency rests on the main circumstantial evidence provided by the general history of the period, there are in addition certain clues, a further investigation of which may lead toward more direct evidence.

The seal cutter of the Grand Khan Kouyouk (1246-51) is known to have been a Russian by the name of Cosmas, a fact of importance in consideration of the close connection that existed between seal cutting and block printing.

Furthermore, de Rubruquis states that the currency of Russia under the Mongols consisted of bits of leather or fur "marked with colors." Whether by this is indicated a stamping process or anything allied to printing—after the analogy of the printing of paper money that was going on in the other parts of the empire—is uncertain, but in any case the paper money of China and Central Asia, parts of the same empire and closely connected by trade routes, could not have been unknown in Russia.

The statement that printing came into Europe from China by way of Russia is first made by the historian Jovius in 1546, just a century after Gutenberg, in what is apparently the earliest reference to Chinese printing in European literature. Jovius' statement is:

There are there [at Canton] printers who print according to our own method books containing histories and rites... Pope Leo has very graciously showed me a volume of this sort, given as a present with an elephant by the king of Portugal. So that from this we can easily believe that examples of this kind, before the Portuguese had reached India, came to us through the Scythians and Muscovites as an incomparable aid to letters.

John of Plano Carpini was sent by Pope Innocent IV in March, 1245, on an embassy to the court of the Grand Khan. He went by Prague and Kiev to Mongolia, where he presented his letter and received his reply. This reply—the original—was discovered by accident in the year 1920 in the archives of the Vatican. It is written in Uighur and Persian and contains in lieu of his signature the seal of the Grand Khan Kouyouk (grandson of Jenghis). This is the first recorded appearance in Europe of an impression from a seal based on those in use in China and impressed with ink upon paper. The seal was without doubt made by Cosmas, the Russian seal cutter, of whom Plano Carpini tells. This letter, written in the Persian and Uighur languages, sealed with a Mongol seal of Chinese style
that had been cut by a Russian seal cutter, and sent by the hand of an Italian monk to the Pope, is a typical example of the cosmopolitan character of the Mongol Empire, bridging the gap between the East and the West.

In 1248 and 1253 two embassies were sent by Saint Louis of France, then in Cyprus on a crusade, to the court of the Grand Khan. The leader of the second of these embassies, William de Rubruquis, in his description of the journey tells of the number of Europeans whom he met at the Mongol capital. Among the prisoners who had been brought from Belgrade and from Hungary and who were still living at Karakorum were the nephew of the Norman bishop of Belleville near Rouen; a French woman from Metz named Paquette who was married to a Russian; an Englishman named Basil; and a Paris jeweler, Guillaume Boucher, who was serving as goldsmith to the Khan. Other Westerners at Karakorum in the narrative of de Rubruquis were a Christian from Damascus and an Armenian bishop. The knight Baldwin of Constantinople had just left the court with another Knight Templar. All this indicates that even at the beginning of the Mongol régime the men who wrote books were not the only people who went back and forth between the Mongol court and Europe.

De Rubruquis, while not describing printing, is the first European writer to mention printed paper money. In the same section in which he mentions the leather money of Russia, he says, "The ordinary money of Cathay is made of cotton paper," as large as a hand, upon which they imprint certain lines like the seal of Mangu (imprimint lineas sicut sigillum Mangu)."

Marco Polo was the one traveler in Central Asia and China who wrote such a clear account of his travels as to make a deep impression on Europe. For this reason a great variety of things that have come from China to Europe have been credited to him, and block printing is no exception. The story is that a certain Pamphlio Castaldi of Feltre, a block printer at the end of the fourteenth century, had learned the art from seeing some pieces of wood that Marco Polo brought back to Venice and that had served for the printing of Chinese books. The story, while not inherently impossible, rests on insufficient foundation. It is a strange fact that Marco Polo's detailed description of China never mentions printing, except in the passage already quoted in Chapter 11 on paper money, and there his interest is not in the printing but in the money. If the tradition mentioned above is in any way founded on fact, it is more likely that the blocks seen by Castaldi were brought from China by one of the many nameless travelers who came back to Italy from the Khan's dominions during the half century or more after Marco Polo's return, rather than by Marco himself.

The men of education in mediaeval Europe— the men interested in books— were primarily priests and monks. If the bulk of all scientific study of the life, customs, and history of China in later times up to the beginning of the nineteenth century was done by Roman Catholic missionaries, the same must have been still more true in a day when the laity were largely uneducated.

The first missionary sent by the Pope to China, John of Monte Corvino, arrived in Cambaluc about 1294, just after Marco Polo left for Europe. He remained at Cambaluc as head of the mission till his death in 1328. In 1305 he wrote home that he had already baptized six thousand converts, that he had built a church in Cambaluc, that he had learned the Tatar language and had translated into this language the New Testament and the Psalter. The next year he wrote that he had built another church in Cambaluc on land presented by a resident Italian merchant, and that he had prepared six pictures, representing scenes from the Old and New Testaments, for the instruction of the ignorant, with explanation in Latin, Tuscian, and Persian letters.

In 1307 Pope Clement V raised John of Monte Corvino to the rank of archbishop, and sent seven Franciscans with the rank of bishop to assist him. Only three arrived; they worked for five years...
in Peking, living on a subsidy from the Khan, then moved to Fukien, where a strong mission was established and a church built with funds given by a local Armenian woman. There were missionaries of the Roman Church at the same time at Yang-chou and in Turkestan.\textsuperscript{12}

These missionaries, spending their lives in China, learning the language and mingling with the people, must have come in contact with printed literature at every turn. John of Monte Corvino in the first dozen years of his work, even before reinforcements had arrived, had already translated the New Testament and Psalter, and prepared pictures and text for the ignorant at just the time when in China it was the natural thing to have every important literary work printed. There is no question that the Chinese who were associated in the work of translation would have suggested that the translations and the pictures should be brought before the public in what to them was the usual and natural way. Whether the missionaries agreed and thus became the first European patrons of the art of printing, we have no means of knowing. That religious image prints, prepared, like the pictures of John of Monte Corvino, “for the ignorant,” began to appear in Europe some time within the half century after these early missionaries laid down their work, may not be altogether a coincidence.\textsuperscript{13}

As has already been mentioned, a Russian seal cutter, a Paris goldsmith, and a number of other Europeans were already in the middle of the thirteenth century at the court of the Grand Khan in Mongolia. Marco Polo tells of a German who assisted Kublai’s generals in the preparation of engines of war. But it was during the first half of the fourteenth century, after Marco Polo’s reports of Cathay’s wealth, that trade between Europe and China multiplied.\textsuperscript{14}

The extent of that trade can best be understood by a study of the zeal with which Columbus and his successors more than a century later were ready to brave untold hardships to rediscover the wealth of the “Indies” and find the Northwest Passage to Cathay. The traders of Mongol times were not men of letters and there are only a few data, largely furnished by missionaries, from which to form a picture of this early commerce. Andrew, bishop of Zayton in Fukien, wrote in 1326, quoting the opinion of Genoese merchants at that port about exchanges. Oddorio, missionary in China from 1333 to 1327, referred for confirmation of the wonders he related about Kin-say (Hangchow) to the many persons whom he had met at Venice since his return who had themselves been witnesses of these marvels. Marignolli, writing after his return from China in 1346, told of the fondaco or “factories” he found attached to the convents at Zayton for the accommodation of Christian merchants. But perhaps the best indication of the extent of European trade with China at this time is contained in a handbook prepared by Pegolotti in Florence in 1348.\textsuperscript{15} This book, which is a trade guide to the various ports of the world, devotes its first two chapters to Cathay, giving such information as a European merchant traveling in that country would need to know—about routes of travel, about imports and exports, about currency, weights, and measures, taxes and duties, etc. Like Marco Polo, the writer of this book describes Chinese paper money, even giving particulars about rates of exchange, but—like Marco Polo again—what interests the writer is not the printing but the value of the paper money.

There is no record to show that printing was brought from China to the West in the wake of trade, nor is it likely that merchants would have come as closely in contact with Chinese printing as would missionaries and translators. Yet the very fact that, during the half century before block printing appeared in Europe, large numbers of obscure men whose names have not been recorded in history were moving back and forth between China and Europe both by land and by sea, is not without significance. In a later period, when the way to Cathay had been rediscovered by Vasco da Gama, and trade had been re-established—some half century or more after Gutenberg—a Chinese printed book found its way very quickly to Portugal and was presented by the king of Portugal to the Pope. It is not an unlikely hypothesis that a specimen of Chinese printing or a report of Chinese printing, brought to Europe
during the earlier period when trade was more extensive, was one of the influences back of the great block printing activity that preceded the invention of type.

The one point at which Europe and Eastern Asia came together and mingled most fully was Persia. The significance in the history of printing of the interchange of ideas between East and West that took place in Persia, and especially in the great cosmopolitan center of Tabriz during the enlightened reign of Ghażan Khan and under other Mongol rulers, is so great that a special chapter must be devoted to this natural crossroads between the East and the West.

NOTES

1. For this statement of John of Plano Carpini, and for discussion of its implications, see Pelliot, 1922-23:27-28. An impression from this same seal, found in the archives of the Vatican, is reproduced (with translation) in the same article.

3. The currency of Russia in earlier times had been the furs of animals, especially the Siberian squirel, which were worth an exact weight of silver. It is generally believed by Russian writers that during Mongol times, under the influence of the paper money of the rest of the Mongol empire, the Russians began to use, instead of whole furs, small pieces of fur stamped by the government and redeemable in the stores of the government for whole skins. The matter is the subject of some debate. It is discussed with a full bibliography by von Ebengreuth, 1904:36.

3. The Latin is "typographus artifices." Bernard, 1945:2, thinks that this means "artisans de typographie" and not "syllographie."

4. "Quod maxime mirandum videatur, ibi [Canton] esse typographus artifices, qui libros historias et sacrorum ceremonias continentem, more nostre imprimunt: quorum longissima folia introitus quadrata serie complicatur. Duoque generis volumen a regis Lustianiae cum elephante dono missum Leo pontificis humanitatis obsidio excitatum, ut hic facile credamus eius artis exempla antequam Lustiani in Indian penetretur, per Sibicias et Moscos ad incomparabile litterarum praesidium ad nos pervenisse." Paulus Jovius (Paulo Giovio), 1558:161. This earliest European mention of Chinese printing has apparently not before been noticed except in an unpublished manuscript in St. Bride’s Library, London, by Richard Smith, written in 1670, in which Jovius’ view that printing was introduced from the "Indians of Cazilia" by means of "the Scythians and Muscovites" is rather unfavorably discussed. Jovius had been an ambassador to Moscow not long after the new Russian state had freed itself from Mongol domination, and has left a history of Russia as well as several books descriptive of that country. His statements concerning Russia therefore carry considerable weight. On the other hand, he quotes no authority and his statement may be only a conjecture based on his general knowledge of Russian history and of Chinese printing.

Note also that in 1562 Bunceq wrote a letter regarding the Chinese art of printing; see Sarton, 1942:562. Montaigne likewise was struck with astonishment over the fact that the Chinese for a thousand years ("mille ans auparavant") had enjoyed the printed page; see his Essais of 1588, cited by Bernard, 1945:13.

5. This letter from the Grand Khan to the Pope was discovered in the Archivio di Castello by P. Cyrille Karalevsky. It was identified and deciphered by Pelliot, and has been published by him, together with a facsimile of its seals. (Pelliot, 1922-23:30.) The seal impressions, like the Chinese seal impressions on the letters from the Persian Ilkhan (see Chapter 17, note 2) are 5½ inches square, but these are in Mongol, not Chinese. Pelliot (pp. 27-28) has given his reasons for concluding that these seal impressions were made from the seal described by Carpini and cut by the Russian seal cutter Cosmas. Some half dozen other letters from Mongol sovereigns (most of them from Ilkhan of Persia) have also been found in the Vatican archives, and are published in subsequent numbers of the same review.

6. A number of Chinese seals were dug up in Ireland about 1800 and are described in a paper read before the Belfast Literary Society by Edmund Getty in 1589, entitled, "Notices of Chinese Seals found in Ireland." Getty believes that they were brought to Ireland by early monks and date from the eighth or ninth century, but it is more probable that they were brought by Irish sailors at a much later date.

7. For a recent discussion of the Europeans at Karakorum, see Olshcki, 1946.

8. Here de Rubruquis seems to have erred. Pelliot, 1922-23:14, reports no cotton in the letter of 1246 to the Pope. Berthold Laufer points out that the paper money of the Yin and Ming was made of mulberry pulp. (See Cordier, 1926:70-72.) Vidal and Bouvier, 1925:161, also find no cotton in the paper of 1600, apparently made by the Chinese, which was used as a specially luxurious writing paper by the Persians of the sixteenth century and later.

9. De Rubruquis, Latin edition of D'Avesac, 1890 IV, 329. Additional interest attaches to the reports of De Rubruquis, on account of the fact that
Roger Bacon read his book and was personally acquainted with him after his return from Central Asia. (See Bridges, 1897:1, 353-66.)

10. It is Pauthier's edition of Marco Polo (G. Pauthier, Le livre de Marco Polo, p. 78) that has given currency to this story. Pauthier's statement is quoted from Octave Delpeyrre, Analyse des travaux de la Société Philobiblon à Londres, p. 23, which is in turn quoted from Curzon, 1860:235. On what Curzon based his statement is uncertain. It seems probable that it was an old Italian tradition. Yule, 1905:1, 138-41, scoffs at it but is quite ready to believe that Christian missionaries or traders from Europe may have brought home "black-books" from China during the fourteenth century.

11. The signification of "Turks" is uncertain. Moule, 1930:178, suggests that it appears to represent a Persian word applied contemptuously to Christians and people of other religions; hence, Mongol or "language of the isolators."

12. The later history of this first phase of Catholic missions in China is shrouded in mystery. On the death of Monte Corvino in 1328, Friar Nicholas of Paris was sent out from Avignon to succeed him, accompanied by twenty monks and six lay brothers. They left Avignon in 1333, and in 1338 are heard of at Almaligh in Eastern Turkestan. By this time Islam was rapidly gaining ground in Eastern Turkestan and the land route was becoming increasingly difficult. There is no record that they ever reached China. However, in 1338 Europeans arrived in China with letters written in 1336, and again in 1342 the Pope sent an embassy, headed by Marignolli, who after four years returned to Europe and wrote an account of his journey. After Marignolli's return in 1346 nothing further is known with certainty of the mission in China, though there are indications that the last missionaries in Puktean were martyred in 1352. From the Avignon end it is known that more missionaries were sent out. William of Prato was made archbishop of Cambaluc in 1370 and sixty clergy followed him. Francis of Podio was sent the next year as apostolic legate with twelve followers. The Vatican records show a full line of archbishops of Cambaluc through the next century. But, so far as is known, they went out into the darkness, never to be heard of again. The break up of the power of the Ilkhans of Persia and the renewed activity of the Turks closed both the land route and the water route between Europe and the Far East, while the fall of Mongol power in China in 1358 rendered China inhospitable to foreigners. For a century and a half the barrier between China and the West was seldom crossed. Columbus tried to reopen a route for intercourse in 1492; Vasco da Gama succeeded in 1498. But even after the discovery of this lengthy route around Africa, it was centuries before China and Europe came again so close together as they had been during the time of the Mongols.

13. Further exploration of libraries and archives in Italy may add evidence with regard to this hypothesis. In 1923, in the Laurentian Library in Florence there was discovered a Latin manuscript Bible that had been in use in China by missionaries of the Mongol period. Unfortunately none of the Chinese or
Chapter 17
PERSIA, CROSSROADS BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

From the days of Mohammed until the time of the Mongol conquests, the world of Europe and Asia was divided into three very distinct cultural areas—Christendom in the West, Islam in the center, and the Buddhist and Confucian domain in the East. In Persia during the Mongol régime the three for a time seemed almost to coalesce. Under the tolerant rule of the Ilkhans, Buddhist and Moslem, Christian and Jew succeeded each other in the highest positions of the state with surprising swiftness, while all races of the known world mingled in Tabriz, the cosmopolitan capital.

Persia was first overrun by Jenghis in 1221, and in 1231 was brought fully under Mongol domination. In 1258, Baghdad was taken by the great Mongol general, Hulagu, brother of Kublai, and Mesopotamia with much of Syria and Armenia was added to the Mongol domain. This brought the Mongol armies face to face with the Crusaders. Certain of the Mongol allies even proceeded as far as Palestine and sacked Bethlehem, the Crusaders’ chief shrine. But as a rule the Mongol Ilkhans (as Hulagu and his successors were called) were more or less allied with the Crusaders against their common enemy, the Saracens. Constant embassies were exchanged between Tabriz, the Mongol capital of Persia, and the later Crusading princes. In the letters that have been preserved, the Mongols with true diplomatic courtesy express their deep attachment to the Christian faith, and the replies of the Crusaders greet them as Christian brothers, as do also letters from James of Aragon and Edward II of England. A number of embassies were even sent to Europe by the Mongol rulers of Persia, bearing letters to the Pope, to the king of France, and to the king of England, and several such letters with their large vermilion seal impressions in Chinese char-
acters are still preserved. One of these letters written in 1305 by the Mongol ruler of Persia and now in the Paris archives, is nine feet long by eighteen inches wide and contains as many as five impressions of the Great Seal which the Ilkhan had received from his overlord in Peking. These various Chinese seal impressions which were impressed on letters from Mongol rulers, and which as a rule were nearly six inches square, were perhaps the nearest approach to block printing that Europe had yet seen.

In matters of religion the Mongols were always chameleons—taking their color from their surroundings. The extent of their contact with the Crusaders is indicated by certain phrases and expressions that they used. There is a letter from the Ilkhan Argon in which the Chinese date (the year of the Cock) is followed by the phrase, "In Christi nomine, Amen." The coins of the earlier Ilkhans are inscribed, "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," and curiously enough the first Modern Ilkhan, Ahmed Timur, kept the same inscription.

Nestorian Christians, especially those of Uigur race, were especially active in bringing about this close relationship between the Mongols of Persia and the princes of Christendom. One such Uigur Christian, Rabban Marcus, born near Peking, was appointed in 1281 patriarch-general of the Nestorian Church with Baghdad as his place of residence. His close friend, Rabban Sauma, another Christian of Uigur race from Peking, was entrusted by the Ilkhan Argon with an important mission to Europe, where as Mongol envoy he visited the Constantinople emperor, the Pope, the king of France, and the king of England.

The conquest of Baghdad by Hulagu took place at just the same time that the capital of the Mongol Empire under Hulagu's brother, Kublai, was being moved to Peking and the Imperial court was becoming altogether Chinese. Chinese influences soon made themselves strongly felt in Hulagu's dominions. A Chinese general was made the first governor of Baghdad, and Chinese engineers were employed to improve the irrigation of the Tigris-Euphrates basin. The Chinese quarter in Tabriz became an important section of this new capital of the Mongol domain.
With the fall of Baghdad, Tabriz soon took its place as the leading commercial center of Western Asia and so remained during the latter part of the period of the Crusades. Rashid-ed-din, a resident of Tabriz at the time, thus describes the city, "There were gathered there, under the eyes of the padishah of Islam, philosophers, astronomers, scholars, historians, of all religions, of all sects, people of Cathay, of Machin (South China), of India, of Kashmir, of Tibet, of the Uigur and other Turkish nations, Arabs and Franks," Friar Odoric, who visited his fellow Franciscans there in 1318, described the place as "a nobler city, and better for merchandise, than any which at this day existeth in the world." 

The first mention of a European settlement at Tabriz is in 1264, when the Venetian Pietro Viglioni died there. With the beginning of the next century, trade relations increased rapidly. There were treaties in 1305 and 1320 between Venice and the court of Tabriz, and the latter treaty gave to Venetians elaborate privileges with regard to residence and trade. By 1324, Venice had formed the practice of keeping a consul regularly at the Persian court, and Genoa soon followed her rival's example. By 1341, the Genoese community at Tabriz was presided over by a council of twenty-four members headed by the consul. Not only were the Italian republics thus represented, but embassies frequently arrived from other European states also, including France, England, Aragon, and the Papacy.

Tabriz is the only place in the Islamic world where there is a clear record of early block printing. In the year 1294 at this Mongol capital of Persia there was an issue of paper money with text in Chinese and Arabic. The treasury had been exhausted by the extravagance of Gaikhatu Khan (1294-95), and the paper money was issued at the suggestion of a financial officer named Izzudin Muszaffar. The notes, which ranged in value from half a dirham to ten dinars, were direct copies of Kuli's, even the Chinese characters being imitated as part of the device upon them. The Chinese word ch'iao was applied to them. Extensive preparations were made for the project, offices called ch'iao-khanahs were erected in the principal cities of the provinces, and a numerous staff appointed to carry out the details. There was an Arabic inscription on each

note to the effect that the notes were issued in the year 695 of the Moslem era (A.D. 1294). That all who issued false notes should be summarily punished, and that "when these auspicious notes were put in circulation, poverty would vanish, provisions become cheap, and rich and poor be equal." The prophecy was not fulfilled. After the constrained use of the new ch'iao for two or three days, Tabriz was in an uproar; the markets were closed; Izzudin, the minister who had proposed the issue, became the object of intense hatred and according to some accounts was murdered; and the whole project had to be abandoned.

This dramatic issue of a printing project a century and a half before Gutenberg in a great cosmopolitan community near the confines of Europe could not have gone unobserved in the commercial republics of Italy. It did not encourage any European issue of paper money, but it did bring bits of printed paper rather vividly to the attention of a large number of Europeans. Without doubt it brought some of these printed notes as curiosities to Italy—valueless as money, but very valuable to civilization if they got into the hands of someone of an inventive turn of mind. Furthermore, this issue of paper money indicated that there were artisans at hand in Tabriz who knew how to print. It seems not unlikely that other forms of printing were going on in the Chinese quarter of this cosmopolitan city, which formed the natural meeting ground of Europe and Asia, and perhaps not only in the Chinese quarter. What these forms were is at least suggested by the block prints of this period that have been found in Egypt and that are described in Chapter 18, and by what is known of the history of playing cards.

In the year 1295, just one year after the ill-fated issue of paper money at Tabriz, Ghazan Khan, the greatest of the Mongol rulers of Persia, came to the throne and had his court in that city. Under him the cosmopolitan character of the Persian dominion reached its highest point. He threw off his allegiance (which had already become nominal) to the court at Peking, and declared Islam the official religion of his empire. Yet by yearly embassies he maintained close relations with the Chinese court, and his relations with certain Christian princes in Europe were equally close. Ghazan was himself
a man of broad education, and is said to have been able to read eight languages, including Chinese, Uigur, Arabic, and Latin.

Soon after coming to the throne, Ghazan called as his prime minister Rashid-eddin, and entrusted to him the preparation of a history of the Mongol Empire, which was followed later by a history of the world, the first history so far as known that attempted to bring within the limits of one work the records of China, of the Near East, and of Europe. The world history begins, as is natural, with the Creation, and gives a vivid description hour by hour of the work accomplished by the Creator on Thursday of Creation week, in order that he might be ready to rest on the Moslem Sabbath. Turning to Europe, the book tells among other things of the contemporary wars that were going on between England and Scotland, and gives the information that even at that time there were no snakes in Ireland. But the part of Rashid’s work that touches our subject is the section on China. For there, embedded in a short sketch of Chinese history, is the following clear description of Chinese block printing. Having described the care with which the Chinese transcribe historical and other passages from their ancient books, he says:

Then, according to a custom which they have, they were wont and still continue to make copies from that book in such wise that no change or alteration can find its way into the text. And therefore when they desire that any book containing matter of value to them should be well written and should remain correct, authentic and unaltered, they order a skilful calligraphin to copy a page of that book on a tablet in a fair hand. Then all the men of learning carefully correct it, and inscribe their names on the back of the tablet. Then skilled and expert engravers are ordered to cut out the letters. And when they have thus taken a copy of all the pages of the book, numbering all (the blocks) consecutively, they place these tablets in sealed bags, like the dies in a mint, and entrust them to reliable persons appointed for this purpose, keeping them securely in offices specially set apart to this end on which they set a particular and definite seal. Then when anyone wants a copy of this book he goes before this committee and pays the dues and charges fixed by the Government. Then they bring out these tablets, impose them on leaves of paper like the dies used in minting gold, and deliver the sheets to him.

This is the earliest notice of Chinese printing, aside from the making of paper money, outside of East Asiatic sources. It is evident that Rashid had a reasonably reliable source of information and that the printing in which he was interested was the printing of books, especially historical records. Where he failed was in not grasping the importance of the new art as an economical means of disseminating literature and in seeing in it merely a means of authenticating the exact text—a characteristic of Chinese official printing that has already been noted, but which Rashid without doubt overemphasized and exaggerated. In spite of this overemphasis, Rashid’s description could not have failed to spread abroad the idea that books could be produced otherwise than by hand labor. Rashid’s history was a widely read book; many copies were transcribed, both in Arabic and Persian, and deposited in the libraries of mosques throughout the Moslem domain, and at least twenty-six early manuscripts are still preserved, in Persia, in India, and in the libraries of Europe. Furthermore, Rashid’s description seven years after it appeared was incorporated in another and still fuller world history, the so-called Garden of the Intelligent by Da’ud Al-Banâkiti, a history which carried cosmopolitanism and breadth of view even farther than that of Rashid. The world of Islam, even if it refused to print books, was not altogether unacquainted with the printing of China. It is not without significance that the paper money of 1294, Rashid’s description, and Banâkiti’s history all were issued from Tabriz during the quarter century when that city’s commercial prosperity and cosmopolitan character were at their height.

In this and the preceding chapter are suggested some of the points at which China and Europe met across the Mongol Empire—points at which Europe was exposed to the block printing activity of China and Central Asia. During the middle decades of the fourteenth century, the Mongol power in Persia, in China, and in Central Asia disintegrated and, some time within the next half century after that collapse of Mongol power, block printing made its ap-
pearance in Europe. No positive documentary evidence has yet been found to show that block printing entered Europe by any of the routes here described, or that European block printing came from the Far East at all. But strong circumstantial evidence leads to the conviction that either through Russia, through Europeans in China, through Persia, or through Egypt—perhaps through several or all of these routes—the influence of the block printing of China entered the European world during the time of the Mongol Empire and the years immediately following and had its part in bringing about the rise and gradual development of that activity which in turn paved the way for Gutenberg’s invention.

NOTES

8. Ghazan Khan in 1295 had proclaimed himself independent of the Peking court, but these seals indicate that even in 1305 the independence was not quite complete. At least the Great Seal was still derived from China.

2. The earlier of the two letters in the Paris archives from the Persian Ilkhan is dated 1289. The seal impressions, ½ inches square, are in red ink and consist of Chinese characters. The second letter with similar seals is dated 1305. A duplicate of this was sent to Edward II of England. (Yule, 1903:1, 444.)


4. Moule, 1930: Chap. 4. Two letters from the Nestorian patriarch Mar Yabhalla, a monk of the Puphe, date 1302 and 1304, have been found in the archives of the Vatican. The text is Arabic and the seals Unger. Among the unpublished works of Pelliot found subsequent to his death in 1915 was one entitled “Mar Yahbballaha, Rabban Guama et les princes Ounguitcités” (Montgomery, 1937). Cf. Hambis, 1946:79. “Montgomery” refers to the edition of Rabban Sauma’s diary which J. A. Montgomery prepared in 1927.

5. The name of this Chinese general was Kuo K’an (Mongol, Kaka Ilka). He commanded the right flank of the Mongol army in its advance on Baghdad and remained in charge of the city after its surrender. His life in Chinese has been preserved. See Bretschneider, 1883:i, 4.


8. For a fuller narrative of the relations between Venice and Persia during this period, see Howorth, 1888:iii, 613–33. It is evident that during a part of this time Venice maintained consuls at Tabriz and other Persian cities.

9. There is no literary record of the Egyptian block printing activity described in Chapter 18. We have only the prints themselves as evidence.

10. The word appears both in Chinese character (ch’as) and in Arabic transliteration. This character was first applied to paper money in the Sung dynasty, and is still the usual word used.

11. It has been calculated that 1304 was the very year that Marco Polo was in Tabriz. Malcolm has even suggested that Marco had something to do with proposing this issue of paper money. Yule, 1903:1, 428–29, note.


13. For the early history of paper money in Europe, see Chapter 21, note 7.

14. Ghazan had been governor of Khorassan in 1294 at the time of the issue of paper money. He refused to have any ch’as khanaks (paper money offers) opened in his province. Yule, 1903:1, 428–29, note.

15. Rashid-edin was made vizier about 1298. He started work on his Jami‘-i-Tawarikh or Great Universal History in 1300–01. The main part was completed in 1307 and then presented to Uljaytu, Ghazan’s successor, and finally completed in 1310–11. Dismissed as vizier in 1317, he was put to death by Uljaytu’s successor, Abu Said, on Sept. 13, 1318. For further details of his life and work, see Howorth, 1888:i, Preface; Browne, 1904:28; Browne, 1920:68–75; Yule, 1913:618; 1918:33.

16. Translation of Browne, 1920:102–2, from the Tarikh-i-Bandkati (see note 18, below) which took over this description from Rashid’s history. For translation of the same passage in French, made directly from Rashid, see Klапroth, 1834:171–33. This does not differ essentially from Browne’s.

17. For full list of these twenty-six MSS., see Browne, 1908:33–37.

18. Rawdatu Ullah-Abdul-Tawarikh-i-Akbar wa-l-Anbiy against the Mongols. The section on Europe has references to Portugal, Poland, Bohemia, England, Scotland, Ireland, Lombardy, Paris, and Cologne. See Browne, 1920:109–2. Apparently it was through Bandkati that Rashid’s description came to the attention of Gerard Meerman, who quoted from it in his Origenes Typographice in 1765.