



Marco Polo's Le Devisement du Monde (Gallica)

Simon Gaunt

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Le Devisement du Monde (1298), better though inaccurately known in English as Marco Polo's Travels, is one of only a handful of medieval texts that remain iconic today for European cultural history, and Marco Polo is one of only a handful of medieval writers who still enjoys instant name-recognition. Yet there is little awareness of the Devisement's complex history and development. This book examines the text from a fresh, literary viewpoint, drawing upon a range of different disciplines and approaches: philology, manuscript studies, narratology, cultural history, postcolonial studies and theory. It contains comparative readings of multiple versions of the text in French, Italian and Latin. Rather than offering a Eurocentric vision of the world grounded in a sense of the absolute alterity of the non-Christian world as is often asserted, the author shows how the Devisement expounds a sense of the relative nature of difference, crucially positioning Marco uncannily between two worlds (East and West), just as he is positioned awkwardly between two languages, French and Italian, and (in modern reception at least) awkwardly between two literary histories. The author also calls into question traditional accounts of the use of French outside France in the Middle Ages and offers a re-assessment of Marco Polo's position in the evolution of European travel writing. Simon Gaunt is Professor of French Language and Literature at King's College London.

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