

**Wartości poznawcze franciszkańskich wypraw do Azji Centralnej
i Zachodniej w XIII i XIV wieku**

**The value of knowledge gained from Franciscan expeditions to
Central and Eastern Asia in the 13th and 14th century**

SUMMARY

In the years 1245-1353 five consecutive friars of the Franciscan order, after braving huge distances and enormous difficulties on their way, managed to reach Central and Eastern Asia. The first of them, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, accompanied by Benedict the Pole of Wrocław, travelled in the years 1245-1241 and reached the seat of the Great Khan Güyük, near the Karakorum. A few years later (1252-1255), the next of the Franciscan monk, Willem Ruysbroek reached the same destination. Their accounts of Eastern Asia, the first to have come from that region since antiquity, preceded that of Marco Polo by fifty years and were of great value. The third Franciscan expedition to the Far East involved Giovanni de Montecorvino, whose lengthy and arduous sea voyage in the years 1290-1293 took him to Peking, where he stayed until his death in 1328; in Peking he engaged in fruitful missionary work but he also sent letters to Europe about the countries he had visited on his way to China. He was still alive when a fourth Franciscan, Odorico Matthei de Pordenone, embarked on a voyage to the Far East. In the years 1318-1330, he too reached Peking by sea, but then he travelled by land through the heart of Asia; on his trip he reached the seat of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa, the first European to do so. The expedition of fifth and last of the Franciscans, Giovanni dei Marignolli, lasted fifteen years and took him on a land route through the Gobi Desert to Peking, where he stayed a few years' stay and then went by sea to Mesopotamia, and from there returned by land and through the Mediterranean to Europe.

During their expeditions the Franciscans wrote letters, and after their return they gave written accounts of their travels. A great deal of information was contained in both the letters and the written accounts. The data gained from there can be divided into two groups. The main aim of the first two expeditions was to gain as much exhaustive and precise information as possible on a formidable enemy, the Mongols, and especially on their fighting tactics and ways of administering the territories they conquered. Such questions were answered, above all, by the accounts of Carpini, Benedict the Pole, and Ruysbroek (the accounts also carried all other kinds of information). The accounts of the three following Franciscans yielded a lot of information on China and the countries through which the monks had travelled on their way to Peking. The accounts talk of observations in the field of astronomy, physical geography, climatology, and botany. They bring information on the religious beliefs, cultures, languages and scripts of those countries visited by the monks and they also mention actually existing and mythical buildings and structures; in some of the accounts one can clearly observe a tendency to disprove geographical legends, which were widespread in the Middle Ages.