



*Marco Polo*

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## 46 KUBLAI KHAN'S GREAT PARK AT SHANGDU

*Under Mongol rule, China increased its contacts with the outside world. Many European merchants and adventurers traveled through China during this time. Perhaps the most famous of these travelers was Marco Polo, a young Venetian merchant. He recorded the highlights of his 17 years in China in a book titled Descriptions of the World. In the excerpt below, Polo describes Kublai Khan's magnificent palace and park at Shangdu, some 200 miles north of Beijing. As you read the excerpt, consider how Polo reacted to the opulence of Kublai Khan's palaces.*

**P**roceeding three days' journey in a north-easterly direction, you arrive at a city called [Shangdu], built by the Grand Khan Kublai, now reigning. In this he caused a palace to be erected, of marble and other handsome stones, admirable as well for the elegance of its design as for

the skill displayed in its execution. The halls and chambers are all gilt, and very handsome. It presents one front towards the interior of the city, and the other towards the wall; and from each extremity of the building runs another wall to such an extent as to enclose sixteen miles in circuit of the adjoining plain, to which there is no access but through the palace. Within the bounds of this royal park there are rich and beautiful meadows, watered by many rivulets, where a variety of animals of the deer and goat kind are pastured, to serve as food for the hawks and other birds employed in the chase, whose mews are also in the grounds. The number of these birds is upwards of two hundred; and the grand khan goes in person, at least once in the week, to inspect them. Frequently, when he rides about this enclosed forest, he has one or more small leopards carried on horseback, behind their keepers; and when he pleases to give direction for their being slipped, they instantly seize a stag, or goat, or fallow deer, which he gives to his hawks, and in this manner he amuses himself. In the centre of these grounds, where there is a beautiful grove of trees, he has built a royal pavilion, supported upon a colonnade of handsome pillars, gilt and varnished. Round each pillar a dragon, likewise gilt, entwines its tail, whilst its head sustains the projection of the roof, and its talons or claws are extended to the right and left along the entablature. The roof is of bamboo cane, likewise gilt, and so well varnished that no wet can injure it. The bamboos used for this purpose are three palms in circumference and ten fathoms in length, and being cut at the joints, are split into two equal parts, so as to form gutters, and with these (laid concave and convex) the pavilion is covered; but to secure the roof against the effect of wind, each of the bamboos is tied at the ends to the frame. The building is supported on every side (like a tent) by more than two hundred very strong silken cords, and otherwise, from the lightness of the materials, it would be liable to oversetting by the force of high winds. The whole is constructed with so much ingenuity of contrivance that all the parts may be taken asunder, removed, and again set up, at his majesty's pleasure. This spot he has selected for his recreation on account of the mild temperature and salubrity of the air, and he accordingly makes it his residence during three months of the year, namely, June, July, and August; and every year, on the twenty-eighth day of the moon, in the last of these months, it is his established custom to depart from thence.

### READING REVIEW

1. What in Marco Polo's description suggests that the park was strictly for the use of Kublai Khan?
2. Why did Kublai Khan select Shangdu for his summer residence?
3. How do you think Marco Polo felt about Kublai Khan's palace at Shangdu? Support your answer with evidence from the excerpt.