

Ejercicios resueltos > Write in your own words

The Travels of Marco Polo - In your own words

The Travels of Marco Polo was a book conceived in a prison cell in Genoa (Italy) in 1298. A few years earlier, in 1292, after a twenty-four year journey, Polo had returned to the West from Kublai Khan's Eastern empire. Polo's book was an account of this vast empire having a stage of civilization far more advanced than anything Europeans could imagine.

In medieval times Europe was plagued by inept and corrupt leaders, misguided Crusades, the Black Death, hunger and lack of hygiene. To this grim reality, Polo introduced Kublai Khan, a model statesman who presided wisely over a huge empire with fantastic cities, advanced technology and transportation systems. This was a place where everything that Europe did not have and greedily desired could be found. However, many people questioned the authenticity of Polo's accounts and even took them to be fairytales. But much of what Polo wrote, regarded with suspicion in medieval times, was confirmed by travellers of the 18th and 19th centuries, and most of the detail has since been corroborated by historians and geographers.

Fiction or not, Polo's book has captured readers for centuries. Although its author received little recognition in life, he was capable of comprehending cultures completely alien to his own. Today no one can fail to appreciate the book's celebration of the heterogeneity of nature, geography and, above all, people. Races are differentiated but not denigrated and the customs of different cultures are met with enthusiastic curiosity, not with the prejudice prevalent in Europe at that time.

In your own words and based on the ideas in the text, answer the following questions. (?)

a) Describe life in the Middle Ages for Europeans

According to the text, the Middle Ages were not a very prosperous period for Europeans, who had to undergo countless wars. Most of its leaders were unscrupulous and incompetent and the social conditions they lived in were not very favourable either. Europeans suffered health problems like the Black Death, hunger and poor hygienic conditions.

Ayuda: la respuesta la encontramos en el segundo párrafo donde se nos proporciona una imagen de la Edad Media en Europa: guerras, líderes incompetentes, hambre, falta de higiene y enfermedades como la peste hacía que los europeos mirasen al este y al imperio del Kubla Khan como un paraíso donde todo se podía conseguir.

Vocabulario: *according to:* según; *prosperous:* próspero; *undergo:* padecer; *countless:* incontables; *health:* salud; *Black Death:* la peste negra;

b) Why was Marco Polo's attitude to different cultures important?

Marco Polo's attitude was important because at the time prejudice towards foreign cultures was common in Europe and his accounts show how he praised the different races, places, nature and customs that he came across with.

Ayuda: la respuesta la encontramos en el tercer párrafo, que explica que al contrario de lo que era costumbre en la época, Marco Polo no escribió acerca de las culturas diferentes con las que se encontraba con la mente llena de prejuicios, sino que en sus relatos se aprecia cómo éstas le interesaban y le entusiasmaban.

Vocabulario: *towards:* hacia; *foreign:* extranjeras; *accounts:* relatos; *customs:* costumbres; *come across with:* encontrarse con