



Trade and Romance

Michael Murrin

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In *Trade and Romance*, Michael Murrin examines the complex relations between the expansion of trade in Asia and the production of heroic romance in Europe from the second half of the thirteenth century through the late seventeenth century. He shows how these tales of romance, ostensibly meant for the aristocracy, were important to the growing mercantile class as a way to gauge their own experiences in traveling to and trading in these exotic locales. Murrin also looks at the role that growing knowledge of geography played in the writing of the creative literature of the period, tracking how accurate, or inaccurate, these writers were in depicting far-flung destinations, from Iran and the Caspian Sea all the way to the Pacific.

With reference to an impressive range of major works in several languages—including the works of Marco Polo, Geoffrey Chaucer, Matteo Maria Boiardo, Luís de Camões, Fernão Mendes Pinto, Edmund Spenser, John Milton, and more—Murrin tracks numerous accounts by traders and merchants through the literature, first on the Silk Road, beginning in the mid-thirteenth century; then on the water route to India, Japan, and China via the Cape of Good Hope; and, finally, the overland route through Siberia to Beijing. All of these routes, originally used to exchange commodities, quickly became paths to knowledge as well, enabling information to pass, if sometimes vaguely and intermittently, between Europe and the Far East. These new tales of distant shores fired the imagination of Europe and made their way, with surprising accuracy, as Murrin shows, into the poetry of the period.

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