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Nilsson, Astrid M. H.

2018

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Nilsson, A. M. H. (2018). *The Fascination of Nature: Marginalia in a Renaissance Marco Polo Manuscript*. Abstract from International Congress of the International Association for Neo-Latin Studies (IANLS), Albacete, Spain.

Total number of authors:

1

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The Fascination of Nature: Marginalia in a Renaissance Marco Polo Manuscript

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During the Renaissance, the world known to the Europeans expanded through the explorations of among others Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama. The contemporary interest in the so to speak growing world can be traced in maps and in works of the era, but also in the interest in previous descriptions of faraway countries, such as Marco Polo's description of his travels from the late 1200s.

A manuscript copy of one of the Latin translations of Marco Polo's work was made in Rome in 1520 by the Swede and recent *theologiae doctor* Johannes Magnus (1488–1544), eventually archbishop of Uppsala in Sweden. It is found today in the collections of the Vatican Library (Ottob. Lat. 1875).

The manuscript is particularly interesting because Johannes Magnus has provided it with hundreds of marginal comments which reveal what fascinated him in the work. Nature is one such aspect, because he often remarks on the flora and fauna, as well as on the natural phenomena, of the realm of the Great Khan. The present paper studies Johannes as a commentator of Polo's work by analysing his marginal comments relating to nature and placing them against a Renaissance backdrop.