Marco Polo (c. 1254–1324)

Marco Polo was born in Venice, Italy, into a family of merchants. In 1271 Polo and his father and uncle set out for China. They journeyed across the Pamir Mountains and the Gobi Desert and, around 1275, arrived at the court of Kublai Khan, the Mongol emperor of China. Kublai Khan sent Polo on many fact-finding trips to the outer reaches of the Chinese Empire. Around 1292, the Polos began their return trip to Venice by sea and arrived at their destination in 1295. Soon Genoese forces—great rivals of the Venetians—captured Polo and put him in prison. There he wrote a book about his travels with the help of a fellow prisoner. Polo was soon released from prison and continued to work as a merchant. His book, which describes many of the riches of Asia, became very successful and inspired other Europeans to seek sea routes to China.

More About the Image: This image shows Marco Polo in a detail from a fresco in the Hall of the World Maps in Caprarola, Italy. Giovanni Antonio da Varese created the fresco around 1574.

1. **Drawing Inferences** Do you think Kublai Khan trusted Marco Polo? Explain.

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2. **Determining Cause and Effect** What impact do you think Marco Polo had on world trade?

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