When Frances Wood published her *Did Marco Polo Go to China?* in 1995, she reheated a long-cold controversy over the accuracy and authenticity of the book known variously as the *Description of the World*, or Marco Polo's *Travels*, or *Il Milione* [The Million]. This last, most disparaging, title was given to both his work and to Polo himself (‘Marco Million’) by his Venetian contemporaries, in view of his tendency to spout what they thought were patently absurd stories about revenues in Qubilai Khan’s Mongol empire (pp. xxiii–xiv, 7).

While Frances Wood’s challenge received much press and favourable reviews by scholars not working on the Mongol empire, it provoked three rejoinders by specialists in the Mongol and Yuan Chinese worlds. Igor de Rachewiltz published his ‘Marco Polo Went to China’ in the journal *Zentralasiatische Studien* vol. 27 (1997) (see also the addenda and corrigenda in vol. 28), and supplemented this with a longer version online under the title ‘Wood’s *Did Marco Polo Go to China?* A Critical Appraisal’. Independent scholar and sinologist Stephen Haw explored both what Marco Polo tells us about China and what China meant to him in his *Marco Polo’s China: A Venetian in the realm of Khubilai Khan* (2006). And now Professor Hans Ulrich Vogel, of Tübingen University, has published by far the weightiest contribution to this debate, *Marco Polo Was in China: New Evidence from currencies, salts and revenues*.

Readers in suspense as to the conclusion of the debate may take it as finally proven by these works beyond a reasonable doubt, that Marco Polo did indeed spend the years from 1274 or 1275 to 1294 in China. He went there first as a hostage for his father and uncle, served as one of the *keshigten* of Qubilai Qa’an, and was dispatched on at least two missions to remoter areas of the Mongols’ realm in China, before accompanying the lady Kökechin of the Baya’ud house from Taidu, the Mongol capital in north China, to her marriage with Ghazan,
then the Ilkhanate’s viceroy in Khurasan. From there he returned to Venice in 1295.

While Stephen Haw added particularly to our understanding of Marco Polo’s writings on Chinese botany and zoology, Professor Vogel’s specialty is the history of money and technology in China. Thus, as his subtitle announces, his work focuses on: 1) currencies, particularly paper money in the heartland of China and cowrie money in Yunnan; 2) salt production, first in Yunnan and then in the north China plain; and 3) the revenues in south China, first from the salt monopoly in the former Song dynasty capital of Xingzai (Polo’s Quinsai) or modern Hangzhou, then from the non-salt tax revenues of the same city, and finally from the customs duties of Çaiton (present-day Quanzhou). A final chapter addresses Polo’s statements about the number of kingdoms, provinces, cities and other administrative units in Mongol-era China.

In each chapter, as well as in an introductory chapter addressing the specific criticisms of Wood and other sceptics, Vogel adopts the following procedure. First he gives Polo’s text on the topic, then he gives with remarkable completeness everything else that can be found in Western (Islamic and Christian) sources from the Mongol era on the topic, and then he gives an authoritative account of what can be known about the topic from Chinese sources. In each case, the result of the description is to show not just that Polo’s account is corroborated by the Chinese sources, but, just as importantly, that it is vastly more detailed and accurate than what can be found in other Western sources, in Persian, Arabic, or European languages. His analysis thus disposes of the sceptics’ argument that Polo’s account was based, not on personal experience, but on material available in writing in the Middle East. Vogel’s exhaustive demonstration makes this assertion now completely untenable. And yes, the revenues of Hangzhou and Quanzhou were indeed in the millions.

Vogel does indeed deliver in abundance what his title promises, that is, decisive and irrefutable evidence that Polo’s time in China was more or less what he said it was. At times, indeed, the scholarly weaponry seems to be merely bouncing the rubble from the thoroughly demolished citadel of the sceptics’ case. It is all the more important, then, that his title not be taken as limiting the scope of work simply to Polo’s travels. Anyone interested in the Mongol-era China’s economy, finance and administration will find this book an invaluable treasure trove of information. The work on currency equivalencies, for example, will undoubtedly prove foundational for much future research on the fiscal systems of the Mongol empire and late imperial Eurasia generally.

Ironically, the least satisfying feature of the work is Professor Vogel’s handling of the text of Marco Polo itself. Although he commands all the relevant European languages, including Latin and Italian, for reasons I find completely