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Francesca FARIELLO, *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and their perception in the mirror of some Chinese sources: two examples*

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THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD AND THEIR PERCEPTION IN THE MIRROR OF SOME CHINESE SOURCES: TWO EXAMPLES

Francesca Fariello*

Keywords: Seven wonders, Cultural Heritage, Colossus of Rhodes, Lighthouse of Alexandria, Hellenistic World and China, Chinese reception of Hellenistic World.

Parole chiave: Sette meraviglie, Patrimonio culturale, Colosso di Rodi, Faro di Alessandria, Mondo ellenistico e Cina, Ricezione in Cina del mondo ellenistico.

Abstract:

The paper aims to illustrate some cases of the reception of Greek and Hellenistic cultural heritage, in particular, of two monuments considered part of the Seven Wonders of the ancient World: the Lighthouse of Alexandria and the Colossus of Rhodes, through a comparative analysis between Chinese sources and the “sources of the Chinese sources”: with special attention to the Greek and Roman sources, which constituted the first bibliography of Chinese narratives about the West.

Il contributo mira a illustrare alcuni casi di ricezione del patrimonio culturale greco ed ellenistico, in particolare, di due monumenti considerati parte delle Sette Meraviglie del mondo antico: il Faro di Alessandria e il Colosso di Rodi, attraverso un’analisi comparativa tra le fonti cinesi e le “fonti delle fonti cinesi”: con particolare attenzione alle fonti greche e romane, che costituiscono la prima bibliografia della tradizione narrativa dell’Occidente in lingua cinese.

In the contemporary and digital world, tangible and intangible cultural heritage is becoming more and more the focus of protection, conservation and promotion missions by organisations operating worldwide. Contemporary society is concerned about enhancement but, above all, seeks to preserve those works that can be considered mankind’s heritage, so that the traces of humanity stratified in world history will not become obliterated. In fact, cultural heritage is a kind of legacy, an inheritance of mankind, synonymous of collective cultural identity, which is transmitted through a message that, however ancient or modern, transits from a mediator of culture - i.e. a community with its tradition or an individual artist - to an individual or a collectivity. Even more so, if one considers that art is a constituent factor of the culture of a civilisation, then, it will be possible to detach oneself from the idea of the subsistence of any stage of immobility¹.

Since antiquity, human beings have questioned the need to preserve their deeds and works from the oblivion of time, cataloguing them in a top list that has often varied according to the compilers of such rankings. The basic criteria in cataloguing works, apart from their beauty and majesty, had to be the perfection and uniqueness of the artistic technique, the τέχνη with which they were made. These works had to be considered worthy of mention since they had to stimulate a sense of wonder, which in the ancient Greek world could generally be associated with the semantic expression θαυμάζω – to express a concept or even an attitude of great importance in ancient Greek culture – that also involved the sphere related to a feeling, associated with astonishment, the state of being amazed at unknown things and also surprised in front of what was beautiful, extraordinary, uncommon. We can in fact see a reflection of this just focusing on the expression “Seven Wonders” ἑπτὰ θεάματα – from θεάμα which means “something seen”, “vision”, “a special sight”; but this word is also strictly connected with the ancient Greek semantic manifestation of θαυμάζω.

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¹ JOSEFOVÁ 2014; FARIELLO 2021; FARIELLO 2023.

Even before there were records of the classification of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the first author of antiquity to have questioned the need to ensure that the deeds and works of man did not disappear into oblivion was Herodotus of Halicarnassus.

In the 5th century BC the historian, in the first book of his *Histories*, used an expression to refer to “a collection of great and marvelous deeds and monuments”, ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θαυμαστά:

“This is the exposition of the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, so that human events do not fade with time and the great and marvellous deeds, performed both by the Greeks and the barbarians, do not remain without fame...” (Herodotus, *Histories*, I, 1)

It has often been emphasised, however, that the way in which the historian appeals to his peculiar use of the term ἔργον somehow broadens the semantic field of the meaning of the works, in the horizon of the legacy of the man worthy of mention in terms not only of deeds but also of works, concrete achievements in the strict sense.

The ἔργον produces fame (χλέος), which must be preserved and which in turn justifies the effort of research: it is easy to recognise in such assumptions a mixture of epic reminiscences (e.g. Homer, *Iliad*, IX, 189; *Odyssey*, I, 338) and traveller’s pragmatism (choice of sites or monuments worth visiting, etc.), which well reflects that complex of epic and scientific observation that characterises Herodotus’ work more generally².

Thus, Herodotus refers to each and every human event worthy of remembrance and in particular those that, due to their greatness and excellence, arouse admiration or curiosity through the memorable or visible traces they have left behind. He is concerned with the construction of tangible and intangible cultural heritage – an *ante litteram* subdivision of contemporary UNESCO’s methodology of classification – and thus with actions and works of all kinds, from great monuments to the customs of peoples, original ideas, technical inventions, acts of great virtue, but also wars.

The vastness of such collections for the sake of memory in the service of posterity is an experiment in a foreshadowing approach to the writing of a global history: in fact it deals with great deeds “of both Greeks and barbarians”. As has often been emphasised in various doctoral seminars on the subject held by Luigi Gallo in 2024, one might discern a reflexive commitment on the part of Herodotus to strive to be as impartial as possible, in such a peculiar way “as if, in the face of human genius and the feeling of admiration it arouses, distinctions between peoples, states and civilisations lose weight”³.

Direct knowledge (ὄψις) was considered of primary importance, because it is closer to a truthful divulgence of facts than oral testimony (ἀκοή), which is nevertheless used as a secondary source in the *Histories*: both are the sources on which Herodotus relies. In fact, in the work there are both visual descriptions of the historian, sometimes proving accurate and precise, and others that are extremely inaccurate or even fanciful, or present strange omissions. This is why the historian’s methodology of appealing to evidence provided by the knowledge of others, collected orally or in written sources, is highlighted⁴.

In the geo-ethnographic *logos*, the writer’s and reader’s interest goes to physical and human nature, topography, rivers, flora and fauna, population, economy, tribal organisation, customs, cults and religious beliefs, mirabilia, and local and mythical history.

Herodotus takes the reader on a journey through unknown places with their mirabilia in the manner of his lyric predecessors, who had ventured to unknown horizons beyond the seas leading to the eastern world like the Argonauts and the Mediterranean periplus. The *Histories* with their accounts bring back the reader to the distant and exotic lands with their myths and mirabilia, the archaic epic of adventure, the narrative of nostalgia, and tales that populate works such as the *Odyssey*; but we find here an innovation characterised by a hint of new rigour and scepticism, typical of the historians’ approaches towards what they report indirectly from their sources. Herodotus leads the thread of the *logoi* through a wanderlust to discover new territories in the same way as ancient Greek seafarers who, as early as the late 8th century BC, went in search of new lands for the foundation of new *apoikiai*: under the banner of oracular responses, these enterprises were sacralised as initiation voyages into the unknown, in the hope of preserving the spark of the sacred fire of the motherland to transform it into a fireplace in memory of their own history and cultural tradition that would spill over into the new *ktisis* in unknown territories⁵.

The historian seems to give special attention to the θαύματα, the “wonders” that perhaps become constituent elements of the cultural identity of the countries he describes, precisely because they have many natural wonders or human inventions, such as Babylon and Egypt. The “marvels” that Herodotus describes are mainly found in the East: supernatural manifestations, miracles, prophecies, revelatory dreams, extraordinary adventures, twists of fate, and the customs of extraordinary men endowed with particular heroism, virtue and intelligence find their way into his accounts.

² ASHERI 1988, p. XVII.

³ ASHERI 1988, p. XVIII.

⁴ On Herodotus’ descriptions see NENCI 1955.

⁵ MALKIN 1987.

The walls of Babylon and the pyramids produce a sense of wonder in him. For Herodotus, everything that is unusual and strange, or exceptional from his point of view is wonderful⁶. He describes the city plan of Babylon as a work of unprecedented engineering – τὸ μὲν νυν μέγαθος τοσοῦτον ἐστὶ τοῦ ἄστεος τοῦ Βαβυλωνίου, ἐκεκόσμητο δὲ ὡς οὐδὲν ἄλλο πόλισμα τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν – compared to those known in his time to him and to his readers, that he considers to be totally involved in his account, as stressed by his use of “we”/“us”, ἡμεῖς:

a) the Gardens of Babylon (Herodotus, *Histories*, I, 178, 1-3)

Κύρος ἐπεῖτε τὰ πάντα τῆς ἡπείρου ὑποχείρια ἐποίησατο, Ἀσσυριοῖσι ἐπετίθετο. τῆς δὲ Ἀσσυρίας ἐστὶ μὲν κού και ἄλλα πολίσματα μεγάλα πολλά, τὸ δὲ ὀνομαστότατον και ἰσχυρότατον και ἔνθα σφι Νίνου ἀναστάτου γενομένης τὰ βασιλῆα κατεστήκει, ἦν Βαβυλῶν, εἴουσα τοιαύτη δὴ τις πόλις, κέεται ἐν πεδίῳ μεγάλῳ, μέγαθος εἴουσα μέτωπον ἑκάστον εἴκοσι και ἑκατὸν σταδίων, εἴουσης τετραγώνου: οὔτοι στάδιοι τῆς περιόδου τῆς πόλιος γίνονται συνάπαντες ὀγδώκοντα και τετρακόσιοι, τὸ μὲν νυν μέγαθος τοσοῦτον ἐστὶ τοῦ ἄστεος τοῦ Βαβυλωνίου, ἐκεκόσμητο δὲ ὡς οὐδὲν ἄλλο πόλισμα τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν. τάφρος μὲν πρώτῃ μιν βαθέα τε και εὐρέα και πλήρῃ ὕδατος περιθεῖ, μετὰ δὲ τείχος πενήκοντα μὲν πηχέων βασιλῆων ἐὸν τὸ εὖρος, ὕψος δὲ διηκοσίῳ πηχέων: ὁ δὲ βασιλῆος πῆχους τοῦ μετρίου ἐστὶ πῆχους μέζων τρισὶ δακτύλοισι.

When Cyrus had brought all the mainland under his sway, he attacked the Assyrians. There are in Assyria many other great cities; but the most famous and the strongest was Babylon, where the royal dwelling had been set after the destruction of Ninus. Babylon was a city such as I will now describe. It lies in a great plain, and is in shape a square, each side an hundred and twenty furlongs in length; thus four hundred and eighty furlongs make the complete circuit of the city. Such is the size of the city of Babylon; and it was planned like no other city where of we know. Round it runs first a fosse deep and wide and full of water, and then a wall of fifty royal cubits' thickness and two hundred cubits' height. The royal cubit is greater by three fingers' breadth than the common cubit⁷.

In the second book of his *Histories*, devoted to the customs, religion, geography and ancient history of Egypt, Herodotus mentions the Egyptian pyramids. In II, 148, 2, the historian remarks a sense of astonishment in front of the Egyptian pyramids, leading him to ponder the expense and the efforts incurred in their construction: he affirms that the cost and labor necessary for the building of all the Greek monuments could not even reach the expense incurred in the construction of the labyrinth above the lake of Meroe.

Through Herodotus' description, the pyramids seem to surpass in greatness and dimension not just one but a group of all the Greek monuments (II, 148, 3). The labyrinth was also one of the most admired monuments of the ancient World. It was built before Amenemhat III: ancient sources also gave attention to this wonder like Diod. I, 61; 66, 3-6; Strab. XVII, 1, 37, C 8,2; 1,42, C 8,13; Pl. *Nat Hist.* XXXVI, 13, 19⁸.

b) The Egyptian Pyramids (Herodotus, *Histories*, II, 148, 3-7)

ἦσαν μὲν νυν και αἱ πυραμίδες λόγου μέζονες, και πολλῶν ἐκάστη αὐτέων Ἑλληνικῶν ἔργων και μεγάλων ἀναξίτη, ὁ δὲ δὴ λαβύρινθος και τὰς πυραμίδας ὑπερβάλλει: τοῦ γὰρ 1 δωδεκα μὲν εἰσι αὐλαὶ κατάστεγοι, ἀντίτυλοι ἀλλήλησι, ἐξ μὲν πρὸς βορέω ἐξ δὲ πρὸς νότον τετραμμένοι, συνεχέες: τοίχος δὲ ἐξῶθεν ὁ αὐτὸς σφεας περιέρχει. οἰκήματα δ' ἔνεστι διπλά, τὰ μὲν ὑπόγαια τὰ δὲ μετέωρα ἐπ' ἐκείνοισι, τρισχίλια ἀριθμόν, πεντακοσίῳν και χιλίων ἐκάτερα. τὰ μὲν νυν μετέωρα τῶν οἰκημάτων αὐτοὶ τε ὠρώμεν διεξιόντες και αὐτοὶ θεησάμενοι λέγομεν, τὰ δὲ αὐτῶν ὑπόγαια λόγοισι ἐπυθανόμεθα: οἱ γὰρ ἐπεστεῶτες τῶν Αἰγυπτίων δεικνύναι αὐτὰ οὐδαμῶς ἠθέλον, φάμενοι θήκας αὐτόθι εἶναι τῶν τε ἀρχῆν τὸν λαβύρινθον τοῦτον οἰκοδομησαμένων βασιλέων και τῶν ἱρῶν κροκοδειλῶν. οὕτω τῶν μὲν κάτω πὲρ οἰκημάτων ἀκοῆ παραλαβόντες λέγομεν, τὰ δὲ ἄνω μέζονα ἀνθρωπῆων ἔργων αὐτοὶ ὠρώμεν: αἱ τε γὰρ διεξοδοὶ διὰ τῶν στεγέων και οἱ ἐλιγμοὶ διὰ τῶν αὐλέων ἐόντες ποικιλώτατοι θῶμα μυρίον παρέρχοντο ἐξ αὐλῆς τε ἐς τὰ οἰκήματα διεξιοῦσι και ἐκ τῶν οἰκημάτων ἐς παστάδας, ἐς στέγας τε ἄλλας ἐκ τῶν παστάδων και ἐς αὐλὰς ἄλλας ἐκ τῶν οἰκημάτων. ὀροφῆ δὲ πάντων τούτων λιθινῆ κατά περ οἱ τοῖχοι, οἱ δὲ τοῖχοι τύπων ἐγγεγλυμμένων πλέοι, αὐλὴ δὲ ἐκάστη περιστύλος λίθου λευκοῦ ἀρμοσμένου τὰ μάλιστα. τῆς δὲ γωνίης τελευτῶντος τοῦ λαβυρινθου ἔχεται πυραμὶς τεσσαρακοντόργυιος, ἐν τῇ ζῶα μεγάλα ἐγγεγλυπται: ὁδὸς δ' ἐς αὐτὴν ὑπὸ γῆν πεποιήται.

Though the pyramids were greater than words can tell, and each one of them a match for many great monuments built by Greeks, this maze surpasses even the pyramids. It has twelve roofed courts, with doors over against each other: six face the north and six the south, in two continuous lines, all within one outer wall. There are also double sets of chambers, three thousand altogether, fifteen hundred above and the same number underground. We ourselves viewed those that are above ground, and speak of what we have seen; of the underground chambers we were only told; the Egyptian wardens would by no means show them, these being, they said, the burial vaults of the kings who first built this labyrinth, and of the sacred crocodiles. Thus, we can only speak from hearsay of the lower

⁶ ASHERI 1988, pp. XXV-XXVI.

⁸ LLOYD 1989, p. 364.

⁷ Translation by GODLEY 1960.

chambers; the upper we saw for ourselves, and they are creations greater than human. The outlets of the chambers and the mazy passages hither and thither through the courts were an unending marvel to us as we passed from court to apartment and from apartment to colonnade, from colonnades again to more chambers and then into yet more courts. Over all this is a roof, made of stone like the walls, and the walls are covered with carved figures, and every court is set round with pillars of white stone most exactly fitted together. Hard by the corner where the labyrinth ends there stands a pyramid forty fathoms high, whereon great figures are carved. A passage has been made into this underground⁹.

From the expansion of the Hellenistic world after Alexander the Great's conquests in the 4th century BCE this attitude and desire of collecting a vast number of the works of the ancient world, considered worthy of preservation gained further impetus and different lists of the wonders emerged. The establishment of the Library and the Museum of Alexandria gave impulse to a new cultural atmosphere. So, during the Hellenistic Era the "Seven Wonders of the ancient World" became a kind of cultural legacy.

The oldest attestation of the Seven Wonders of the World is preserved in the *Palatine Anthology* - a collection of 68 Greek epigrams from the classical, Hellenistic and Byzantine periods, initiated by Antipater of Sidon (mid-2nd century BC). Here we find mentions of some ancient wonders (the Walls of Babylon, the Zeus of Olympia, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Colossus of Rhodes, the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, the Egyptian Pyramids and the Artemision of Ephesus):

(*Palatine Anthology*, IX, 58):

καὶ κραναᾶς Βαβυλῶνος ἐπίδρομον ἄρμασι τεῖχος
καὶ τὸν ἐπ' Ἀλφειῷ Ζᾶνα κατηρυγασάμην,
κάπων τ' αἰώρημα, καὶ Ἡέλιοιο κολοσσόν,
καὶ μέγαν αἰπεινᾶν πυραμίδων κάματον,
μνάμᾳ τε Μαιουσόλοιο πελώριον ἄλλ' ὅτ' ἔσειδον
Ἀρτέμιδος νεφέων ἄχρι θέοντα δόμον,
κείνα μὲν ἡμαῦρωτο † δεκηριδε νόσφιν Οὐλύμπου
ἄλιος οὐδέν πω τοῖον ἐπηγύασατο.

I have seen the Walls of rock-like Babylon that chariots can run upon, and the Zeus on the Alpheus, and the Hanging Gardens, and the great statue of the Sun, and the huge labour of the steep Pyramids, and the mighty Tomb of Mausolus; but when I looked at the house of Artemis soaring to the clouds, those others were dimmed, (†) apart from Olympus, the sun never yet looked upon its like¹⁰.

A second source is the list preserved in a papyrus fragment known as *Laterculi Alexandrini*, dated to the 2nd century BC. These *Laterculi* – lists of lists – preserve only three examples of the seven wonders (τὰ ἑπτὰ θεάματα): the Artemision of Ephesus, the Pyramids and the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus. They occupy the columns 6 to 12 of the roll, immediately after a dialogue between Alexander the Great and the wise men of India¹¹.

Another work that once was considered to be the first mention of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, entitled *Περὶ τῶν ἑπτὰ θεαμάτων*, traditionally ascribed to Philo of Byzantium (3rd century BC), is now attributed to an author of late antiquity¹².

In addition to these sources, mentions of the wonders were made by Greek historians such as Diodorus Siculus and Strabo and other Latin authors such as Pliny, Varro, up to Martial and Hyginus¹³.

My analysis will be mainly focused on the legacy of two monuments included in some early western classifications and sources on the Seven Wonders of the World in Ancient Time: the Lighthouse of Alexandria and the Colossus of Rhodes, because they constitute a privileged instrument of observation for the reception of the tangible cultural heritage of the Greek-Hellenistic world in Chinese tradition. Moreover, both are almost contemporary colossal works from the Hellenistic period and both are lighthouses, symbolising the encounter of various cultures within the Mediterranean Sea. However, as we shall see, in some cases Chinese reception of tangible cultural heritage of the Western world does not arise through direct routes of connection, so the process also involves the participation of other cultures.

Much has been written about the lighthouse of Alexandria and numerous theories have been postulated regarding its construction, which has generally been attributed to the architect Sostratos of Cnidus, son of Dexiphanes of

⁹ Translation by GODLEY 1960.

¹⁰ Translation by PATON 1915.

¹¹ Papyrus P. 13044 R; see the digital archive BerlPap-Berliner Papyrus Daterbank, <https://berlpap.smb.museum/00468/?lang=en>.

¹² For a critical edition of the work, see CONDELLO-FLORIDI 2023

(pp. 55-83 for a detailed analysis of the datation). In Pseudo-Philon's list of the Wonders, Alexandria Pharos is not included.

¹³ For a collection of chronologically ordered Greek and Latin wonders lists, see BRODERSEN 1992.

Cnidus, although the authorship of the work has also sometimes been questioned. It would seem that the architect had not only a great reputation but also an important political influence as *philos* of the ruler Ptolemy¹⁴.

Among the sources that provide us with details of the dedicatory inscription with the name of Sostratos of Knidos carved on the foundation of the monument, we find the testimony of Lucian, who recounts that the architect, having completed this grandiose work, would have engraved his name on the masonry and then covered it with plaster, and then would have engraved the name of the sovereign above it. Surely the architect's dedicatory inscription already emphasised its importance and prestige in the service of the sovereign Ptolemy, who would have made him his close collaborator: the construction of the lighthouse would not only have had the task of guiding sailors to the port of Alexandria, but of enhancing the fame and prestige of the kingdom's cultural capital with this monument that with its resplendent light attracted and guided peoples and goods to its port as they joined the Mediterranean routes. The engraved dedication would therefore have survived the oblivion of time as long as the monument continued to exist, to the disadvantage of the letters of the sovereign's name that would sooner or later collapse (Lucian, *Quomodo Historia Conscribenda Sit*, 62). Moreover, some scholiast to another work by the same Lucian claimed that the construction of the lighthouse in Alexandria had already been started in the time of Alexander the Great following his will. (schol. a *Icaromenippus*, 12).

Nevertheless, even if this tradition was actually widespread in antiquity, it was probably the result of an imaginative construction, since the sources that date the monument define the chronological span of its construction to when Pyrrhus became the ruler of Epirus, i.e. 282 BC (Suda s.v. Φάρος [Φ114 Alder]) while Eusebius would have dated it to 283/2 BC¹⁵; and in his work (*Histories*, XXII, 16, 9) Ammianus Marcellinus even places the construction of the Lighthouse of Alexandria under Cleopatra VII Philopator. However, for what is strictly of interest in the context of this analysis, which focuses mainly on the tradition of sources that dwell on the architectural structure of the monument, the testimonies analysed will be exclusively those of Strabo and Pliny.

The Lighthouse of Alexandria:

Strabo, *Geography*, XVII, 1, 6

τὰ μὲν οὖν καθ' ὅλου καὶ ἀνωτάτω περὶ τῆς Αἰγύπτου ταῦτα λέγομεν, τὰ καθ' ἕκαστα δὲ καὶ τὰς ἀρετὰς αὐτῆς νῦν διέξιμεν. ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ πλείστον τοῦ ἔργου τούτου καὶ τὸ κυριώτατον ἢ Ἀλεξάνδρεια ἐστὶ καὶ τὰ περὶ αὐτὴν, ἐντεῦθεν ἀρκτέον. ἐστὶ τοίνυν ἢ ἀπὸ Πηλουσίου παραλία πρὸς τὴν ἐσπέραν πλέουσι μέχρι μὲν τοῦ Κανωβικοῦ στόματος χιλίων πού καὶ τριακοσίων σταδίων, ὃ δὴ καὶ βᾶσιν τοῦ Δέλτα ἔφαμεν: ἐντεῦθεν δ' ἐπὶ Φάρον τὴν νῆσον ἄλλοι στάδιοι πεντήκοντα πρὸς τοῖς ἑκατόν. ἢ δὲ Φάρος νησίον ἐστὶ παράμικτες, προσεχέστατον τῆ ἠπείρῳ, λιμένα πρὸς αὐτὴν ποιοῦν ἀμφίστομον. ἡὼν γὰρ ἐστὶ κολπώδης, ἄκρας εἰς τὸ πέλαγος προβεβλημένη δῦο: τούτων δὲ μεταξὺ ἢ νῆσος ἴδρυται κλείουσα τὸν κόλπον, παραβέβληται γὰρ αὐτῷ κατὰ μήκος: τῶν δ' ἄκρων τῆς Φάρου τὸ μὲν ἑὼν μᾶλλον ἐστὶ προσεχὲς τῆ ἠπείρῳ καὶ τῆ κατ' αὐτὴν ἄκρα (καλεῖται δ' ἄκρα Λοχιάς), καὶ ποιεῖ τὸν λιμένα ἀρτίστομον: πρὸς δὲ τῆ στενότητι τοῦ μεταξὺ πόρου καὶ πέτραι εἰσὶν αἱ μὲν ὑφαλοὶ αἱ δὲ καὶ ἐξέχουσαι, τραχύνουσαι πᾶσαν ὥραν τὸ προσπίπτον ἐκ τοῦ πελάγους κλυδώνιον. ἐστὶ δὲ καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ τῆς νησίδος ἄκρον πέτρα περίκλυτος, ἔχουσα πύργον θαυμαστῶς κατεσκευασμένον λευκοῦ λίθου πολυώροφον, ὁμώνυμον τῆ νήσῳ: τοῦτον δ' ἀνέθηκε Σώστρατος Κνίδιος, φίλος τῶν βασιλέων, τῆς τῶν πλοιοζόμενων σωτηρίας χάριν, ὡς φησὶν ἢ ἐπιγραφή. ἀλιμένον γὰρ οὔσης καὶ ταπεινῆς τῆς ἑκατέρωθεν παραλίας, ἐχούσης δὲ καὶ χοιράδας καὶ βράχη τινὰ, ἔδει σημεῖον τινὸς ὑψηλοῦ καὶ λαμπροῦ τοῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ πελάγους προσπλέουσιν ὡστ' εὐστοχεῖν τῆς εἰσβολῆς τοῦ λιμένος, καὶ τὸ ἐσπέριον δὲ στόμα οὐκ εὐεῖσβολόν ἐστιν, οὐ μὴν τοσαύτης γε δεῖται προνοίας: ποιεῖ δὲ καὶ τοῦτο ἄλλον λιμένα τὸν τοῦ Εὐνόστου καλούμενον: πρόκειται δ' οὗτος τοῦ ὀρυκτοῦ καὶ κλειστοῦ λιμένος: ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ λεχθέντος πύργου τῆς Φάρου τὸν εἰσπλουν ἔχων ὁ μέγας ἐστὶ λιμὴν: οὗτοι δὲ συνεχεῖς ἐν βάθει ἐκείνῳ, τῷ ἑπτασταδίῳ καλούμενῳ χώματι διειργόμενοι ἀπ' αὐτοῦ παράκεινται: τὸ δὲ χώμα ἐστὶν ἀπὸ τῆς ἠπείρου γέφυρα ἐπὶ τὴν νῆσον κατὰ τὸ ἐσπέριον αὐτῆς μέρος ἐκτεταμένῃ, δῦο διάπλους ἀπολείπουσα μόνον εἰς τὸν Εὐνόστου λιμένα καὶ αὐτοὺς γεγεφυρωμένους: ἢ δ' οὐ γέφυρα μόνον ἐπὶ τὴν νῆσον τὸ ἔργον τοῦτο, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑδραγωγίον, ὅτε γε ὤκειτο: νῦν δ' ἠρήμωσεν αὐτὴν ὁ θεὸς Καῖσαρ ἐν τῷ πρὸς Ἀλεξάνδρεια πολέμῳ τεταγμένη μετὰ τῶν βασιλέων: ὀλίγοι δ' οἰκοῦσι πρὸς τῷ πύργῳ ναυτικοὶ ἄνδρες, ὁ γοῦν μέγας λιμὴν πρὸς τῷ κεκλείσθαι καλῶς τῷ τε χώματι καὶ τῆ φύσει ἀγκιβαθῆς τέ ἐστιν ὡστε τὴν μεγίστην ναῦν ἐπὶ κλίμακος ὀρμεῖν, καὶ εἰς πλείους σχίζεται λιμένας, οἱ μὲν οὖν πρότεροι τῶν Αἰγυπτίων βασιλεῖς ἀγαπῶντες οἷς εἶχον καὶ οὐ πάνυ ἐπεισάκτων δεόμενοι, διαβεβλημένοι πρὸς ἅπαντας τοὺς πλείοντας καὶ μάλιστα τοὺς Ἕλληνας (πορθηταὶ γὰρ ἦσαν καὶ ἐπιθυμηταὶ τῆς ἀλλοτρίας κατὰ σπάνιν γῆς), ἐπέστησαν φυλακὴν τῷ τόπῳ τούτῳ κελεύσαντες ἀπείργειν τοὺς προσιόντας: κατοικίαν δ' αὐτοῖς ἔδοσαν τὴν προσαγορευομένην Ρακῶτιν, ἢ νῦν μὲν τῆς Ἀλεξανδρέων πολέως ἐστὶ μέρος τὸ ὑπερκείμενον τῶν νεωρίων, τότε δὲ κώμη ὑπῆρχε: τὰ δὲ κύκλω τῆς κώμης βουκόλοις παρέδωσαν δυναμένοι καὶ αὐτοῖς κωλύειν τοὺς ἐξωθεν ἐπιόντας, ἐπελθῶν δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος, ἰδὼν τὴν εὐκαιρίαν ἐγὼν τειχίζει ἐπὶ τῷ λιμένι τὴν πόλιν: τῆς δ' ὕστερον ἐπηκολουθητικίας εὐδαιμονίας τῆ πόλει μνημονεύουσι τι σημεῖον κατὰ τὴν ὑπογραφὴν τοῦ κτισματος συμβάν: τῶν γὰρ ἀρχιτεκτόνων γῆ λευκὴ διασημαιομένων τὴν τοῦ περιβόλου γραμμὴν, ἐπιλιπούσης τῆς γῆς καὶ τοῦ βασιλέως ἐπιόντος, οἱ διοικηταὶ τῶν ἀλφίτων μέρος τῶν παρεσκευασμένων τοῖς ἐργάταις παρέσχον, δι' ὧν καὶ αἱ ὁδοὶ κατετεμήθησαν εἰς πλείους: τοῦτ' οὖν οἰωνίσθαι λέγονται πρὸς ἀγαθοῦ γεγονός.

¹⁴ MEEUS 2015, p.146.

¹⁵ MEEUS 2015, p.148.

Since Alexandria and its neighbourhood constitute the largest and most important part of this subject, I shall begin with them. The sea-coast, then, from Pelusium, as one sails towards the west, as far as the Canobic mouth, is about one thousand three hundred stadia—the “base” of the Delta, as I have called it; and thence to the island Pharos, one hundred and fifty stadia more. Pharos is an oblong isle, is very close to the mainland, and forms with it a harbour with two mouths; for the shore of the mainland forms a bay, since it thrusts two promontories into the open sea, and between these is situated the island, which closes the bay, for it lies lengthwise parallel to the shore.

Of the extremities of Pharos, the eastern one lies closer to the mainland and to the promontory opposite it (the promontory called Lochias), and thus makes the harbour narrow at the mouth; and in addition to the narrowness of the intervening passage there are no rocks, some under the water, and others projecting out of it, which at all hours roughen the waves that strike them from the open sea. And likewise, the extremity of the isle is a rock, which is washed all round by the sea and has upon it a tower that is admirably constructed of white marble with many stories and bears the same name as the island. This was an offering made by Sostratus of Cnidus, a friend of the kings, for the safety of mariners, as the inscription says: for since the coast was harbourless and low on either side, and also had reefs and shallows, those who were sailing from the open sea thither needed some lofty and conspicuous sign to enable them to direct their course aright to the entrance of the harbour. And the western mouth is also not easy to enter, although it does not require so much caution as the other. And it likewise forms a second harbour, that of Eunostus, as it is called, which lies in front of the closed harbour which was dug by the hand of man. For the harbour which affords the entrance on the side of the above-mentioned tower of Pharos is the Great Harbour, whereas these two lie continuous with that harbour in their innermost recess, being separated from it only by the embankment called the Heptastadium. The embankment forms a bridge extending from the mainland to the western portion of the island, and leaves open only two passages into the harbour of Eunostus, which are bridged over. However, this work formed not only a bridge to the island but also an aqueduct, at least when Pharos was inhabited. But in these present times it has been laid waste by the deified Caesar in his war against the Alexandrians, since it had sided with the kings. A few seamen, however, live near the tower. As for the Great Harbour, in addition to its being beautifully enclosed both by the embankment and by nature, it is not only so deep close to the shore that the largest ship can be moored at the steps, but also is cut up into several harbours. Now the earlier kings of the Egyptians, being content with what they had and not wanting foreign imports at all, and being prejudiced against all who sailed the seas, and particularly against the Greeks (for owing to scarcity of land of their own the Greeks were ravagers and coveters of that of others), set a guard over this region and ordered it to keep away any who should approach; as it is called, which as now that part of the city of the Alexandrians which lies above the ship-houses, but was at that time a village; and they gave over the parts round about the village to herdsmen, who likewise were able to prevent the approach of outsiders. But when Alexander visited the place and saw the advantages of the site, he resolved to fortify the city on the harbour. Writers record, as a sign of the good fortune that has since attended the city, an incident which occurred at the time of tracing the lines of the foundation: When the architects were marking the lines of the enclosure with chalk, the supply of chalk gave out; and when the king arrived, his stewards furnished a part of the barley-meal which had been prepared for the workmen, and by means of this the streets also, to a larger number than before, were laid out. This occurrence, then, they are said to have interpreted as a good omen¹⁶.

Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* XXXVI, 18, 83:

Magnificatur et alia turris a rege facta in insula Pharo portum optinente Alexandriae, quam constitisse DCCC talentis tradunt, magno animo, ne quid omittamus, Ptolemaei regis, quo in ea permiserit Sostrati Cnidi architecti structura ipsa nomen inscribi. usus eius nocturno navium cursu ignes ostendere ad praenuntianda vada portusque introitum, quales iam compluribus locis flagrant, sicut Ostiae ac Ravennae. periculum in continuatione ignium, ne sidus existimeretur, quoniam e longinquo similis flammaram aspectus est. hic idem architectus primus omnium pensilem ambulationem Cnidi fecisse traduntur.

Another towering structure built by the (Pharos) king is also extolled, namely the one that stands on Pharos, the island that commands the harbour at Alexandria. The tower is said to have cost 800 talents. We should not fail to mention the generous spirit shown by King Ptolemy, whereby he allowed the name of the architect, Sostratus of Cnidus, to be inscribed on the very fabric of the building. It serves, in connection with the movements of ships at night, to show a beacon so as to give warning of shoals and indicate the entrance to the harbour. Similar beacons now burn brightly in several places, for instance at Ostia and Ravenna. The danger lies in the uninterrupted burning of the beacon, in case it should be mistaken for a star, the appearance of the fire from a distance being similar. The same architect is said to have been the very first to build a promenade supported on piers: this he did at Cnidus. The object of it is, by the light of its fires at night, to give warning to ships, of the neighbouring shoals, and to point out to them the entrance of the harbour¹⁷.

¹⁶ Translation by JONES 1959.

¹⁷ Translation by HEICHHOLZ 1961. There are some other sources where we find a reference to the Pharos, starting from the *Epigrams*

by Posidippus of Pella (c. 310-c. 240 BC); but no iconographic evidence at all. See DE CALLATAÏ 2020, pp. 235-237.

The Colossus, on the Island of Rhodes, was a strategic point of contact for sea routes to the East. This monument was visible from the sea and welcomed sailors just like the lighthouse of Alexandria, which was the gateway for trade to the West. The importance of the island ensured that in the Hellenistic period it became even more central to hegemonic aims. On the East coasts of the Aegean Sea the harbour of Rhodes stood as an ὀμφαλός of the maritime routes that from Greece, from Phoenicia and the south-east, and from the Hellespont along the coast of Asia Minor connected the Mediterranean world with the East: the eyes of the colossus opened on the gates that connected the East with the West. This giant statue depicting Helios was built in twelve years (c. 280 BC), on the occasion of the resistance of the Rhodians to the siege of the Demetrius Poliorcetes in 305 BC¹⁸.

Chares, disciple of the famous sculptor Lysippus, constructed it at a cost of 300 talents, which were obtained from the sale of the material abandoned by King Demetrius when, tired of its prolongation, he lifted the siege on Rhodes, but the statue collapsed due to an earthquake in 226 BC. The Colossus' remains survived until 653 CE when the surviving pieces left on the ground were sold from an Arab to a Jew from Emesa. In chapter XXI of *De amministrando Imperio* Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus refuted that the architect was Chares, sustaining that the name engraved on the baseplate was Lachete: *Lachete of Lindos built the eighty-cubit colossus in Rhodes*¹⁹.

According to tradition, to guide the seafarers at night in the same way as the lighthouse of Alexandria, the colossus held a torch in the palm of its huge arm, in which there was a stairway to reach the light.

Also referring to lighthouses, from the image of the colossus, a theory has been proposed that, in the transposition of the mythical Cyclopes of Homeric tradition, the towers of Sicily's lighthouses could actually be recognised²⁰. As for the image of the statue, the colossus probably wore a sun crown on its head as a solar symbol of the deity Helios, as has been hypothesised by the iconography of the god whose head crowned by a sun crown can be found on several coins, coeval with the construction of the Colossus, which have been unearthed in Rhodes with the representation of the rose, the symbol of the island on the opposite side of the coin²¹.

Pseudo-Philon, in his work on the Seven Wonders, focuses on the technical, engineering and mechanical aspects of the Colossus: he mentions the marble base on which the cast parts of the statue were fixed in a pile, one after another, so that they could serve as supports for other parts to be assembled as the work developed in height. The author states that the sculptor succeeded in the enterprise to offer to the world a second Sun to match the first²².

Again, in this case I only quote Strabo and Pliny:

Strabo, *Geography*, XIV, 2, 5

ἡ δὲ τῶν Ροδίων πόλις κείται μὲν ἐπὶ τοῦ ἐωθινοῦ ἀκρωτηρίου, λιμέσι δὲ καὶ ὁδοῖς καὶ τειχεσι καὶ τῇ ἄλλῃ κατασκευῇ τοσοῦτον διαφέρει τῶν ἄλλων ὥστ' οὐκ ἔχομεν εἰπεῖν ἑτέραν ἄλλ' οὐδὲ ἄριστον, μὴ τί γε κρείττω ταύτης τῆς πόλεως. θαυμαστὴ δὲ καὶ ἡ εὐνομία καὶ ἡ ἐπιμέλεια πρὸς τε τὴν ἄλλην πολιτείαν καὶ τὴν περὶ τὰ ναυτικά, ἀφ' ἧς ἐθαλαττοκράτησε πολὺν χρόνον καὶ τὰ ληστήρια καθείλε καὶ Ῥωμαῖοις ἐγένετο φίλη καὶ τῶν βασιλέων τοῖς φιλωρωμαίοις τε καὶ φιλέλλησιν: ἀφ' ὧν αὐτόνομός τε διετέλεσε καὶ πολλοῖς ἀναθήμασιν ἐκοσμήθη, ἃ κείται τὰ μὲν πλείστα ἐν τῷ Διονυσίῳ καὶ τῷ γυμνασίῳ, ἄλλα δ' ἐν ἄλλοις τόποις. ἄριστα δὲ ὅ τε τοῦ Ἥλιου κολοσσός, ὃν φησὶν ὁ ποιήσας τὸ ἱαμβεῖον ὅτι “ἐπτὰκις δέκα Χάρης ἐποίει πηχέων ὁ Λίνδιος.” κείται δὲ νῦν ὑπὸ σεισμοῦ πεσὼν περικλασθεὶς ἀπὸ τῶν γονάτων: οὐκ ἀνέστησαν δ' αὐτὸν κατὰ τι λόγιον. τοῦτό τε δὴ τῶν ἀναθημάτων κράτιστον (τῶν γοῦν ἐπτὰ θεαμάτων ὁμολογεῖται).

The city of the Rhodians lies on the eastern promontory of Rhodes; and it is so far superior to all others in harbours and roads and walls and improvements in general that I am unable to speak of any other city as equal to it, or even as almost equal to it. Much less superior to it. It is remarkable also for its good order, and for its careful attention to the administration of affairs of state in general; and in particular to that of naval affairs, whereby it held the mastery of the sea for a long time and overthrew the business of piracy, and became a friend to the Romans and to all kings who favoured both the Romans and the Greeks.

Consequently, it not only has remained autonomous, but also has been adorned with many votive offerings, which for the most part are to be found in the Dionysium and the gymnasium, but partly in other places. The best of these are, first, the Colossus of Helios, of which the author of the iambic verse says, “seven times ten cubits in height, the work of Chares Lindian”; but it now lies on the ground, having been thrown down by an earth-quake and broken at the knees.

In accordance with a certain oracle, the people did not raise it again. This, then, is the most excellent of the votive offerings (at any rate, it is by common agreement one of the Seven Wonders)²³.

¹⁸ About the dedicatory inscription of the Colossus included among the poems of Palatine Anthology and the doubts on its authenticity, see JONES 2014. For an overview of ancient literary sources on the Colossus and later interpretations, see DE CALLATAÏ 2006; JONES 2014.

¹⁹ MARYON 1956.

²⁰ BENJAMIN 1880, p. 42.

²¹ MARYON 1956, p.83.

²² MARYON 1956, p. 69; CONDELLO-FLORIDI 2023, pp. 109-111.

²³ Translation by JONES 1929.

(Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, XXXIV, 18, 41)

ante omnes autem in admiratione fuit Solis colossus Rhodi, quem fecerat Chares Lindius, Lysippi supra dicti discipulus. LXX cubitorum altitudinis fuit hoc simulacrum, post LXVI annum terrae motu prostratum, sed iacens quoque miraculo est. pauci pollicem eius amplectuntur, maiores sunt digiti quam pleraeque statuae. vasti speculantur defractis membris; spectantur intus magnae molis saxa, quorum pondere stabiliverat eum constituens. duodecim annis tradunt effectum CCC talentis, quae contigerant ex apparatu regis Demetrii relicto morae taedio obsessa Rhodo.

But calling for admiration before all others was the colossal Statue of the Sun at Rhodes made by Chares of Lindus, the pupil of Lysippus mentioned above. This statue was 105 feet high; and, 66 years after its erection, was overthrown by an earthquake, but even lying on the ground it is a marvel. Few people can make their arms meet round the thumb of the figure, and the fingers are larger than most statues; and where the limbs have been broken off enormous cavities yawn, while inside are seen great masses of rock with the weight of which the artist steadied it when he erected it. It is recorded that it took twelve years to complete and cost 300 talents, money realized from the engines of war belonging to King Demetrius which he had abandoned when he got tired of the protracted siege of Rhodes²⁴.

Moving on to the reception in the Chinese tradition of these two monuments belonging to the Seven Wonders, it can be affirmed that in some Chinese sources we can find a peculiar response. Parallels can also be drawn on the concept of wonder and astonishment with special regard to what is uncommon, in the perception and meaning of what in ancient Greek culture was associated with the semantic horizon of θαυμάζω: on the Chinese counterpart, it can be found the semantic sphere of the terms *yi* 異 and *qi* 奇, which is often used in the expression of the seven wonders, translated as we will see in Chinese language as *qiqi* 七奇.

During the Hellenistic era and over the centuries that followed Alexander the Great's death, there was the emergence of a complex literary tradition, expressed by the many versions of Alexander's *Romance*. The character of Alexander gradually detached himself from his real historical figure, becoming a supernatural being capable of great gestures: he became a *homo mirabilis*. His fame spread eastwards, towards regions that had not even been touched by his military conquests. It is thus possible to speak of an "Alexander's Fortune Road", a route that has many points in common with the Silk Road²⁵.

In the Arab and Islamic world, the ruler was designated as "the one with two horns", in the Arabic language Dul-Qarnayn. The legacy of this epithet is represented by its transliteration, found in the first Chinese reference to the Lighthouse of Alexandria: the *Zhufan zhi*, written during Southern Song dynasty by Zhao Rugua (or Zhao Rukuo, 1170–1228), a maritime trade commissioner who lived in Quanzhou.

Due to a series of new historical circumstances, this period saw a new expression of that curiosity for the lands of the remote West that had already manifested itself in antiquity, starting with the mission of Zhang Qian 張騫, sent in 139-8 BCE by Emperor Han Wudi 漢武帝 to the political realities of the Greco-Hellenistic ecumene located in Central Asia²⁶.

In the *Zhufanzhi* 諸蕃志, the Macedonian ruler is cited in association with a fantastic monument, clearly inspired by the tradition of the Lighthouse of Alexandria:

遏根陀國

遏根陀國，勿斯里之屬也。相傳古人異人徂葛尼於瀕海建大塔，下鑿地為兩屋，磚結甚密；一窖糧食，一儲器械。塔高二百丈，可通四馬齊驅而上，至三分之二。塔心開大井，結渠透大江，以防他國，兵侵則舉國據塔以拒敵。上下可容二萬人，內居守而外出戰。其頂上有鏡極大，他國或有兵船侵犯，鏡先照見，即預備守禦之計。近來為外國人投塔下執役掃灑數年，人不疑之；忽一日，得便盜鏡拋沉海中而去。

The kingdom of Egentuo (Alexandria) belongs to Wusili (Egypt). According to the tradition, in ancient times, an extraordinary ancient man, Cugeni, built a large tower on the shore of the sea, in the depths of which he dug two chambers; the bricks were tightly bound to each other, to the point that there was not the smallest space left. In one of the two rooms (under the tower) were stored supplies of grain and cereals, in the other cellar were placed weapons. The tower was 200 *zhang* high. Four horses could pass through it and be led to the upper floors up to two thirds (of the height of the building). In the heart of the tower there was a large well, connected to a canal that led to a large river. To avoid invasions by armies from other countries, the entire kingdom relied on this tower to repel the enemy. In all its height (the tower) could accommodate 20,000 people. Some stayed inside to guard and others went outside to fight. At the top (of the tower) was a gigantic mirror. When there were warships from other states

²⁴ Translation by RACKHAM 1952.

2024a and the enclosed bibliography.

²⁵ For a more thorough treatment of these aspects, see FAREILLO

²⁶ FAREILLO 2024b.

coming to invade the country, the mirror would let them see them in advance, and plans for defence were immediately prepared. In recent times, it has been given to a foreigner a task to undertake a corvée and a cleaning job at the foot of the tower. No one doubted him. Then suddenly, one day, as soon as he had the chance, he stole the mirror, threw it into the sea and left²⁷.

Cugeni 徂葛尼, the name of the “extraordinary man” (*yi ren* 異人) that appears in the passage, is the phonetic transliteration of Dhu-l-qarnayn, the epithet by which Alexander is known in the Islamic tradition. This name appears here in the section on the kingdom or country of Egentuo 遏根陀, a toponym that turns out to be the phonetic rendering of ‘al-Iskandariyah’, Alexandria in Egypt, described as belonging to Wusili 勿斯里, a toponym identified with Egypt. The lighthouse is described here as more than 200 *zhang* high, a measure that would be equivalent to an improbable height of more than six hundred metres²⁸.

This story conveyed by Zhao Rugua can be compared to a narrative contained in a 10th-century encyclopaedic work compiled by Mas’ūdi, the *Murūj aldhahabwama’ādin al jawhar*²⁹. A further analogy with the Chinese text can be found in the work of the Andalusian geographer Gharnāti (1080–1169/1170), the *Tuhfat al-albab*³⁰.

The legend of the destruction of the lighthouse of Alexandria travelled all the way to China, thanks to the seafarers of the trade routes that reached Quanzhou, the most important international port during the Southern Song dynasty: it is plausible that Zhao Rugua, who was involved in the maritime foreign trade, may have heard this story from some travellers of the maritime trade routes between China and the Islamic world.

It is clear that this Chinese source derives directly from the Arabic milieu and not from the Western classical sources. However, the tradition that attributed the actual start of the building of the Lighthouse of Alexandria under the rule of Alexander and not Ptolemy may not have developed independently in the Arabian world: this tradition seemed to have already spread to the Western World, probably from the already mentioned *scholia* to the work of Lucian, *Icaromenippus*.

But it’s time to move on to the most successful era for exchange of knowledge between China and Europe, before modernity: the first phase of the missionary period (17th-18th century).

It’s a common idea shared by the scholars that *Zhifang waiji* 職方外紀 (Records of the lands beyond the Imperial administration), published in 1623 by Jesuit Giulio Aleni (1582-1649; Chinese name Ai Ruluë 艾儒略), represents a fundamental turning point in the Jesuits’ cultural activity in China, aimed at spreading the image (and excellence) of European civilisation in China. The work, belonging to the tradition of Renaissance’s cosmographical works, is the first global geography written in Chinese. The book is organised into a prologue and five books on Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas, and one on the seas; it also contains an elliptical world map, four continental maps, and two polar projection maps. One of the main sources for the book was the *Geografia* of the Italian cartographer Giovanni Antonio Magini, published in 1596³¹.

Zhifang waiji was written by Aleni with the collaboration of the Chinese literatus Yang Tingyun, using the notes that were compiled by the Jesuits Diego de Pantoja (1571-1618) and Sabatino de Ursis (1575-1620) for Matteo Ricci’s cartographical work³². Albeit defined as a “textual expansion” of Ricci’s map³³, *Zhifang waiji* contributed to the spread of the knowledge of the Western world in China much more than the *Kunyu wanguo quantu* 坤輿萬國全圖, the world map prepared for Emperor Wanli by Matteo Ricci in 1602³⁴. *Zhifang waiji* has been considered a milestone for all the following works on this topic, up until the 19th century.

Aleni was the first author who introduced the concept of the “Seven Wonders” in China, with the sentence: “the western countries say that there are seven wonders in the world” (西國稱天下有七奇). In the first chapter of the work, we find a description of the Colossus of Rhodes:

²⁷ My translation is slightly different from the one in HIRTH-ROCKHILL 1911, p. 146. For a new English translation, see YANG 2020. On Zhao Rugua, see KOLNIN 2018.

²⁸ In HIRTH-ROCKHILL 1911, p. 146, there is the hypothesis that here *zhang* is incorrectly used instead of *chi*, ‘foot’: in such case, the highness of the Lighthouse would be not too distant from some sources.

²⁹ As stressed already in HIRTH-ROCKHILL 1911, p. 147. In the story, the lighthouse of Alexandria is described as a minaret (*manāra*); this type of building seems to have a correspondence in *Zhufanzhi*, where the lighthouse is defined with the Chinese term *ta* 塔, which traditionally indicates the pagoda, an architectural structure derived from the Indian *stūpa* that in China assumed a significant development in height. The story tells of a *rumi* (term usually indicating Eastern Roman Empire people), who was a spy of the Byzantium king: he

indulged the greed of the Umayyad caliph, Walid I (705-715), with whom he was in service, by taking him to discover treasures. The caliph went to Alexandria with the spy, who had convinced him that under the Lighthouse was a great quantity of treasures, buried by Alexander the Great himself. After the mirror and the lighthouse were destroyed, the man escaped. For a detailed discussion of mediaeval Arabic sources on the Lighthouse of Alexandria, see DE CALLATAÏ 2020.

³⁰ YAMANAKA 2012; FARIELLO 2024a.

³¹ DE TROIA 2009, pp. 21-22. On Aleni, see also LUK 1977; MENE-GON 1994; LIPPIELLO, MALEK 1997; ZOU 2009; PAN 2020.

³² See CHENG 2019a, pp. 37-40.

³³ DE TROIA 2022, 127.

³⁴ On Ricci’s map and the contribution of Jesuits to cartography, D’ELIA 1938; D’ELIA 1961; ELMAN 2005, pp. 127-130; REICHLER

亞細亞之地中海有島百千。其大者[...] 一曰羅得島。天氣常清明。終歲見日。無竟日陰霾者其海畔。嘗鑄一巨銅人。高逾浮屠。海中築兩台以盛其足。風帆直過跨下。其一指中可容一人。直立掌托銅盤。夜燃火于內。以照行海者。鑄十二年而成。后為地震而崩。國人運其銅以駱駝九百只往負之。

In the Mediterranean Sea of Asia there are innumerable islands. Among the larger ones [...], one is called the island of Rhodes. The weather there is constantly clear, all year round the Sun is visible; all day long there are no clouds concealing its shores. In the past, a bronze giant was cast, which surpassed in height a stupa. Two platforms were built in the sea to support its feet. Sailing boats passed directly under its spread legs. In the space between his toes there was room for one person. Standing upright, he held a bronze basin, and at night a fire was lit inside it to give light to the sailors. It took twelve years to complete the casting. It later collapsed due to an earthquake. The people of the village carried the bronze away with nine hundred camels carrying it on their backs³⁵.

The Colossus appears also in the *Kunyu tushuo* 坤輿圖說 (*Illustrated explanation of the world*), a geographical work compiled in 1674 by the Jesuit missionary Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688; Chinese name Nan Huai ren 南懷仁), who held the position of Director of Astronomical Office under Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661-1722)³⁶.

The *Kunyu tushuo* was based largely on the *Zhifang waiji*: it even reported Aleni's introduction, enriched with some more details. The work shows the cultural landscape of the western world in a graphic form. The second section is divided into 15 chapters and describes geography, road system, customs, and local products of foreign countries. Geography is arranged according to the Five Continents.

The work ends with 23 illustrations showing strange animals (unicorns, rhinoceros, chameleons, tritons), a Portuguese ship and the Seven Wonders of the World (*qiqi* 七奇), plus the Colosseum in Rome (*gonglechang* 公樂場). Since the second half of 18th century, the *Kunyu tushuo* was included in the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書, *Zhibai* 指海 and *Congshu jicheng* 叢書集成 collections.

This is the description of the Colossus of Rhodes:

亞細亞之地中海。有島百千。其大者[...] 一曰羅得島。天氣常清明。終歲見日。嘗鑄一鉅銅人。高三十丈。海中築兩台盛其足。風帆直過跨下。一指可容一人直立。掌托銅盤。夜燃火以照行海。鑄十二年乃成。後地震而頽。運其銅，以九百駱駝往載。

In the Mediterranean Sea of Asia there are innumerable islands. Among the larger ones [...], one is called the island of Rhodes. The weather there is constantly clear, all year round the Sun is visible. In the past, a bronze giant of thirty *zhang* was cast. Two platforms were built in the sea to support its feet. Sailing boats passed directly under its spread legs. On one of its toes a man could stand. In the palm of his hand, he held a bronze basin, and at night a fire was lit to give light to the sailors. It took twelve years to complete the casting. It later collapsed due to an earthquake. The (colossus') bronze was carried away with nine hundred camels³⁷.

Verbiest's actual source of inspiration was probably one of the most popular world maps of the time, published by Willem Blaeu in 1606 and then reprinted in his *Atlas Maior* in 1635. It's interesting to note that in the representation of the Wonders at the end of the book the original iconography is simplified: all the features of the environment are removed, and no human presence is depicted. The Wonders became icons of Western classical culture (and architecture), and were transformed into distinctive emblems of Western identity³⁸.

In the illustrated section of the work, every image of the Wonders is accompanied by a short text. Here is the explanation of the image of the Colossus, the second in the list:

銅人巨像

樂德海島銅鑄一人。高三十丈。安置於海口。其手指一人難以圍抱。兩足踏兩石台。跨下高曠。能容大船經過。右手持燈。夜間點照。引海船認識港口叢泊。銅人內空。通從足至手。有螺旋梯。升上點燈。造工者每日千餘人。作十二年乃成。

The Bronze Colossus

On the island of Rhodes, there was a bronze statue of a man, thirty *zhang* high, standing in the harbour. A person would have had difficulty hugging a finger of it. His feet rested on stone platforms, the space between his legs was high and wide, so that large boats could pass through. With his right hand he held a lantern, which was lit at night

2016; CHENG 2019a; CHENG 2019b; PIASTRA 2021.

³⁵ AI 1936, pp. 32-33. See also the Italian translation in DE TROIA 2009, pp. 80-81. It is interesting to note that the motive of the Colossus spanning the port of Rhodes with his legs seems to have been diffused in European sources only at the beginning of XVI century:

see BADOUD 2012, pp. 9-11.

³⁶ On Verbiest and its role in the cultural milieu of Qing dynasty's China, GANG, DEMATTÈ 2007; GOLVERS 2011; REICHLÉ 2016.

³⁷ NAN 1937, pp. 80-81.

³⁸ FOLIN - PRETI 2021.

so that boats could recognise the anchorages in the harbour. The bronze statue was hollow on the inside; from the feet up to the hand was a spiral staircase, which could be climbed to light the lantern. For its construction, more than a thousand people participated each day; it was completed in twelve years³⁹.

The two descriptions of the Colossus of Rhodes seem to follow the model of the *Zhifang waiji*, but there are some new details, which derive from classical western sources, mainly Pliny and Strabo, already mentioned in this contribution.

In the illustrated section on the Seven Wonders of the *Kunyu tushuo* we also find a short description of the Lighthouse of Alexandria:

法羅海島高臺

厄日多國多祿茂王建造，崇隆無際。高台基址起自丘山，細白石築成，頂上安置多火炬，夜照海艘，以便認識港涯叢泊。

The tall Tower on the island of Pharo

It was built by King Ptolemy of the Kingdom of Egypt, and was so high that it seemed endless. The base of the tower rose from a hill; it was built of fine white stone. On its top were placed numerous torches, which illuminated ships at night, so that the anchorages in the harbour could be recognised⁴⁰.

Both the *Zhifang waiji* and the *Kunyu tushuo* were included in the imperial collection *Siku Quanshu*, commissioned by Qianlong Emperor in 1772-82. They are listed in the *shi* 史, the “Histories” category, under the *dili* 地理 (“geography”) subcategory.

In the context of Chinese perception of Western cultural heritage, it may be interesting to note that in the *Siku quanshu* the foreword note to the *Zhifang waiji* merely observes with some scepticism that the descriptions are bizarre and contain many exaggerations; but, since the world is very wide, nothing is impossible⁴¹.

What is most intriguing is the introductory note to the *Kunyu tushuo* edition, written in 1781, contained in the *Siku quanshu*. It is worth quoting:

是書[...]大致與艾儒略《職方外紀》互相出入，而亦時有詳略異同。案東方朔《神異經》曰：「東南大荒之中有樸父焉，夫婦並高千裏，腹圍案此下當有腹圍之裏烽，原本脫佚，今姑仍之自輔*天初立時，使其夫婦導開百川。嬾不用意，謫之並立東南，不飲不食，不畏寒暑。須黃河清，當復使其夫婦導護百川」云云。此書所載有銅人跨海而立，巨舶往來出其胯下者，似影附此語而作[...]。疑其東來以後，得見中國古書，因依仿而變幻其說 [...]

This book [...] is largely taken from Ai Rulüe's (Aleni) *Zhifang waiji*; however, there are sometimes differences in both details and general aspects. According to the *Shenyijing* by Dongfang Shuo, “At the centre of the Great Vastnesses, in the southeast, lies Piaofu. Husband and wife, both are a thousand *li* tall; in their bellies they carry a torch, and they support themselves. When Heaven was originally established, the couple was ordered to lead and bring forth the hundred streams of water. They were lazy and careless, and [Heaven] banished them and placed them in the southeast, without something to drink or eat, and without fear of cold or heat. When the Yellow River will become clear, then (Heaven) will again make this pair lead and protect the hundred streams”. Among the things recorded in this book, there is a bronze statue standing across the sea, with great ships coming and going under the opening of its legs: it seems that this was based on this narrative [...]. Perhaps after coming to the East, [the author] had the opportunity to see some ancient Chinese texts, copying them and confusing their sayings [...]⁴².

One could easily say that the writer of the note here drew a somehow quite rash conclusion. In fact, he associates the description of the Colossus with a short and enigmatic passage from the *Shenyijing* 神異經 (a text maybe composed in the 3rd century CE) describing two mythical giants. However, in this introductory note there is also a second reference to a passage from the *Shenyijing* that shows the description of an animal “similar to a giant mouse”, living in the distant frozen lands of the north, that seems to find correspondence in a passage from the *Kunyu tushuo*⁴³.

Thus, the ethnocentric critique of the commentator could be interpreted and somehow justified by the awareness that perhaps this description of the Wonders of the world could have been the product of a merging of both Western and Eastern influences: the first generated by the European Renaissance tradition rooted in the Western ancient classical knowledge, and the second consisting in the narrative contents developed in the Chinese cosmographical tradition.

³⁹ NAN 1937, pp. 219-220. In the already cited world map of Willem Blaeu, the image of the Colossus with its spread legs is represented as a decorative element: see BADOUD 2012, p. 21.

⁴⁰ NAN 1937, pp. 229-230.

⁴¹ *Qinding Siku quanshu tiyao*, in AI 1936, pp. 2-3.

⁴² *Qinding Siku quanshu tiyao*, in NAN 1937, pp. 1-2.

⁴³ *Qinding Siku quanshu tiyao*, in NAN 1937, p. 2.

Similar motives could be traced in the representation of the Colossus of Rhodes in the 1887 issue of the *Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報, a Chinese illustrated magazine published in Shanghai between 1884 and 1898. The topics expressed in the magazine were based on a unique combination of aspects of imported technological modernity from the West and indigenous traditional culture. This is the comment accompanying the image of the Colossus of Rhodes:

漢武帝範銅爲仙人，以玉盤承露，高出雲表。或疑史冊所書未免鋪張過分。近有客自海外歸，言樂德海島之港口，有銅人一具，跨海而立，其跨下能容大船經過；左手執燈，燃之，光照數十里，俾夜行者得認識港口，以便靠泊。據說，創造之時，每日鳩工千餘人，凡十二年而後成。至點燈之法，尤爲奇巧：空其中，爲旋螺式之暗梯，自內而登，由是至手，可拾級趨焉。聞者笑曰：如子言，固堂堂一表也，但惜其爲空心貨耳。

It is said that Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty had a bronze statue of an immortal casted: it had a jade disc to receive dew, and soared high among the clouds. Some people suspect, however, that such writing in the history books is an overstatement. Recently, a guest returned from overseas, saying that in the harbour of Rhodes Island there was a bronze man standing across the sea, with a span that could accommodate a large ship; in his left hand he held a lamp, which shone brightly for dozens of miles, so that those who were at night could know the harbour in order to berth there. It is said that at the time of its creation, more than 1,000 workers were working on it every day, and it took 12 years to complete. The means of lighting the lamp was especially ingenious: in the hollow interior of the statue was an unlit spiral staircase leading up to the hand, to which one could ascend. People hearing this story laughed and said, "As you say, sir, it was a grand exterior sight indeed. But it's a pity that it was only a worthless hollow commodity!"⁴⁴.

The commentary seems to emphasise that Chinese antiquity has nothing to envy from the Western classical world: the creation of statuary on a gigantic scale would not be a monopoly of the West, as Chinese sources allow us to trace parallels going back to the reign of Emperor Wu 武 of the Han 漢 (r. 141-87 BC). The conclusion seems to point that there was nothing exceptional in the Colossus of Rhodes. The reference to the gigantic statue of an Immortal, placed by the emperor Wu in his imperial garden and registered in some Chinese sources, was certainly a reflection of a proud awareness of the indigenous cultural heritage, in the midst of the colonial period.

In the endless game of mirrors represented by the search to determine the direction of cultural influences, it is also necessary to consider that the sudden appearance of large-scale statuary in the Qin and Han periods has been linked by some scholars to a Hellenistic influence. But there is no space here to deal with this fascinating topic⁴⁵.

As a conclusion, I would like to quote a mindful expression borrowed from a work by Zou Zhenhuan published in 2022. Commenting the representation of the Seven Wonders in the *Kunyu tushuo*, the Chinese author says:

“七奇” 遗存在《坤輿图说》中是作为历史景观来介绍的，在南怀仁看来，“七奇”似乎包含双重意义，一是关于“七奇”在古代的真实的历史，二是这些古老的形象所承载的是多元的文化含量。真实的历史在漫长的历史沉淀中缓慢地发酵，即使已成为废墟的古迹同样具有文化符号的意义。在不同的文化语境中这些文化景观经过酝酿，渐渐锻造成为一种多元文化的合金。

It is in the same way as the historical landscapes that the vestiges of the “Seven Wonders” are introduced in *Kunyu tushuo*; in Verbiest's view, the “Seven Wonders” seems to contain a double meaning: one is the true history of the “Seven Wonders” in ancient times; the other is the multicultural content carried by these ancient images. Real history slowly ferments in a long historical sedimentation; although these ancient monuments have already become ruins, they still possess a symbolic cultural significance. In different cultural contexts, these cultural landscapes go through (a process) of fermentation, to be gradually forged into a multicultural alloy⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ *Dianshizhai huabao*, 1887, p. 2; see <http://dianshizhai-ccstw.cctw.nccu.edu.tw/s/dianshizhai/item/11336#?cv=&c=&m=&s=> (accessed 15/8/2024). See also WASSESTROM - NEDOSTUP 2015,

p. IV-12.

⁴⁵ See NICKEL 2013; DUAN 2023; FARIELLO 2024b.

⁴⁶ ZOU 2020([inhttps://www.sohu.com/a/724052752_121119386](https://www.sohu.com/a/724052752_121119386)).

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