

Now you may take my word for it that many roads lead from this city of Khanbaliq through many provinces; or, rather, one road leads to one province while another leads to another. ...

The fact is that between one post and the next, at intervals of three miles, there are villages consisting of as many as forty houses occupied by unmounted couriers who also play a part in the emperor's [Kublai Khan] postal service. I will tell you how. They wear large belts covered all round with bells, so that when they are on the move they can be heard a long way off. They always run at full tilt, and never for more than three miles. And the other couriers who are waiting three miles down the road clearly hear them while they are still some way off and stand at the ready. As soon as the first courier arrives, the second takes what he is carrying, along with a little ticket given to him by the clerk, and sets off to run the second leg of three miles, at the end of which the handover is repeated. And you can take my word for it that by means of these couriers the emperor gets news from places ten days' journey away in a day and a night. For you should know that these runners cover the distance of a ten-day journey in a day and a night, and in two days and nights they bring news from places twenty days' journey away; and so in ten days and nights the emperor would have news from places a hundred days' journey away.

-Marco Polo, "*The Travels*" (13th Century) excerpt.