of the Great Khan, he received them honourably and welcomed them with lavish hospitality and was altogether delighted that they had come. He asked them many questions: first about the Emperors, the government of their dominions, and the maintenance of justice; then about kings, princes, and other nobles. Next he asked about the Lord Pope, and all the practices of the Roman Church and the customs of the Latins. And Messer Niccolò and Messer Maffeo told him all the truth about each matter in due order, well and wisely, like the wise men they were, and with a good understanding of the Tartar language.

When the Great Khan, whose name was Kubilai, who was lord of all the Tartars in the world and of all the provinces and kingdoms and regions of this vast part of the earth, had heard all about the Latins, as the two brothers had well and plainly declared it, he was exceedingly pleased. He made up his mind to send emissaries to the Pope, and asked the two brothers to go on this mission with one of his barons. They answered that they would carry out all his commands, as the commands of their liege lord. Then the Great Khan summoned to his presence one of his barons, who was named Kogatal, and told him that he wished him to go with the brothers to the Pope. Kogatal answered: 'Sire, I am your man and ready to do all that you command to the utmost of my power.' Thereupon the Great Khan had letters written in the Turkish language to send to the Pope and entrusted them to the two brothers and to his baron and instructed them what they should say on his behalf to the Pope. You must know that the purport of his letters and his mission was this: he sent word to the Pope that he should send up to a hundred men learned in the Christian religion, well versed in the seven arts, and skilled to argue and demonstrate plainly to idolaters and those of other persuasions that their religion is utterly mistaken and that all the idols which they keep in their houses and worship are things of the Devil — men able to show by clear reasoning that the Christian religion is better than theirs. Furthermore the Great Khan directed the brothers to bring oil from the lamp that burns above the sepulchre of God in Jerusalem. Such then was the purport of their mission.

The Great Khan also gave the brothers and his baron a tablet of gold, on which it was written that the three emissaries, wherever they went, should be given all the lodging they might need and horses and men to escort them from one land to another. And when Messer Niccolò and Messer Maffeo and the other emissaries were well equipped with everything they needed, they took leave of the Great and Mighty Khan, mounted their horses and took to the road.

When they had ridden a certain distance, the Tartar baron who accompanied the brothers fell ill, so that he could not continue the journey but remained at a city. Seeing that he was ill, the two brothers left him and went on their way. And I assure you that they were served and obeyed everywhere they went in whatever they chose to command. What more need I say? They rode on day after day till at last they came to Ayas. And I assure you that they were hard put to it to make the journey in three years. This was because they could not ride all the time, but were delayed by stress of weather, by snow and by swollen rivers.

From Ayas they went on to Acre, which they reached in the month of April, in the year of the Incarnation 1269. There they learnt that the Lord Pope, whose name was Clement, was dead. They went accordingly to a learned clerk, who was legate of the church of Rome for the whole kingdom of Egypt, a man of great authority named Tedaldo of Piacenza, and told him of the mission on which the Great Khan of the Tartars had sent them to the Pope. When the legate had heard what they had to say, he was filled with wonder, and it seemed to him that this affair was greatly to the profit and honour of Christendom. He said to them: 'Sirs, you see that the Pope is dead. Therefore your only wise course is to wait in patience until such time as there is a Pope. When there is a Pope, then you may fulfill your mission. The two brothers, who saw clearly that the legate was speaking the truth, declared that pending the election of a Pope they would go to Venice to see their families. So they left Acre and went to Negropont, whence they took ship and sailed to Venice. There Messer Niccolò learnt that his wife was dead, and there was left to him a son of fifteen, whose name was Marçô.