



*Invisible Cities is a book by Italo Calvino that sets out to explore the meaning and symbols of cities that as the title indicates, exist on another level of perception, via interpretation of symbols, or signs.*

THE BOOK IS AN EXPLORATION of imagination and the imaginable as the main narrator, Marco Polo, explores the vast Mongol Empire under the commission of Kublai Khan. Yet the cities described are not limited to, or even based on, those in the Mongol Empire (in fact, most of which Marco Polo has actually written in his memoir is contested by historians) but those that exist in our minds and arguably in our visible world: for example, cities that constantly re-buy all of their belongings and throw out the old everyday.

Italo Calvino, one of Italy's finest postwar writers, has delighted readers around the world with his deceptively simple, fable-like stories. The son of traveling botanists, Calvino was born in Cuba in 1923 and raised in San Remo, Italy; he fought for the Italian Resistance from 1943–45. He first became well known in Italy for editing Einaudi's monumental collection of Italian folk tales. His writing gradually diverged from the dominant neorealist style and assumed its own peculiar and distinctive voice.

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a city, except the water pipes that rise vertically where the houses should be and spread out horizontally where the floors should be," the spider-web city of Octavia, and other marvelous burghs, it may be that he is creating them all out of his imagination, or perhaps he is recreating details of his native Venice over and over again, or perhaps he is simply recounting some of the myriad possible forms a city might take.

TRANSLATION: *William Weaver*  
COVER DESIGN: *Paul Wilde L'Heureux*  
AUTHOR PHOTO: *Carla Corati*



Italo Calvino

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Invisible  
Cities | by Italo Calvino



KUBLAI KHAN DOES NOT NECESSARILY believe everything Marco Polo says when he describes the cities visited on his expeditions, but the emperor of the Tartars does continue listening to the young Venetian with greater attention and curiosity than he shows any other messenger or explorer of his." So begins Italo Calvino's compilation of fragmentary urban images. As Marco tells the Khan about Armilla, which "has nothing that makes it seem

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