

# A letter from Queen Elizabeth I to the Emperor of Cathay [China] 1602AD

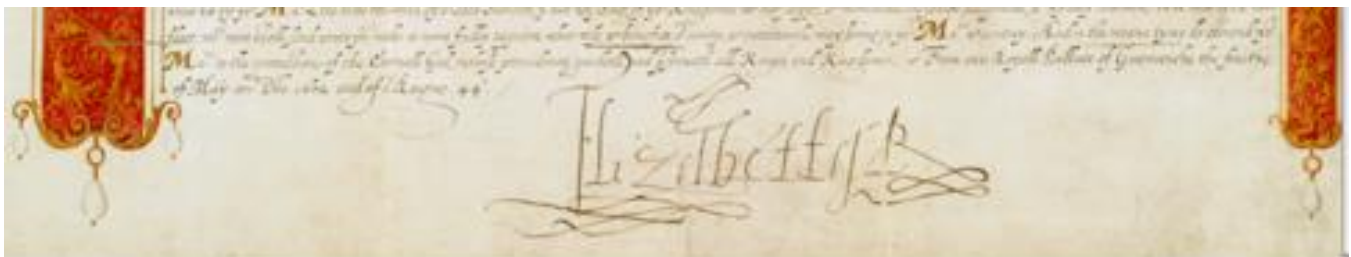
A transcription (in original Mediaeval English) – followed by the same but in modern English



**ELIZABETH BY THE GRACE OF GOD QUEEN** of England, France and Ireland Defendor of the faith ets. To the great, mighty, and Invincible Emperour of Cathaia. greeting. Wee haue receaved Dyuers, and sundry relac~ons both by our owne Subjects, and by others, whoe haue visited some parts of your Ma<sup>ts</sup> Empire, and Dominions, wherby they haue reported unto us as well your Inuincible greatness, as your kind vsage of Strangers, that resorte unto yo~r Kingdomes with trade of merchandise, w~ch hath wrought in us a desire, to fynd oute some neerer waye of passage by Seas from us, into your cuntrey, then the usuall frequented course that hitherto hath byn houlden by compassing the greatest part of the world, By which neerer passage, not only opportunity of entercourse of traffique of merchandize may be offred between y<sup>e</sup> Subiects of both o<sup>r</sup> Kingdomes, but also a mutuall league, and amity may growe, and be continued, between yo<sup>r</sup> Ma<sup>ts</sup> and us, or Cuntries, and Dominions being in their distance of scituations, not so farr remote, or severed, as they are estranged, and unknowen the one to the other, by reason of the long and tedious course of Navigacon hitherto used – from theis party unto yo<sup>r</sup>. To which ende wee have heretofore many yeares past, and at sundry tymes synce made choice of some of o<sup>r</sup> Subiects, being a people by nature enclyned to great attempts, and to the discouery of Contries, and Kingdomes unknowen and sett them in hand w<sup>th</sup> the fynding out of some neerer passage by Seas into yo<sup>r</sup> Ma<sup>ts</sup> Contries, through the North. Or East parts of the World, wherin hitherto not preuayling, but some of their Ships neuer returning back agayne, nor being heard of synce their departure hence, & some of them retourning back agayne being hindered in their entended voyage by the frozen Seas, and intolerable cold of those Clymayes; wee haue yet once more of o<sup>r</sup> earnest desire to try the uttermost y<sup>t</sup> may be done to pforme at length a neerer discouery of yor Contrye, prepared and sett fourth two small Shippis under y<sup>e</sup> direction of our Subiect & Seruant George Waymouth being y<sup>e</sup> principall Pylott of this present voyage, a man for his knowledge & Experience in navigacon, specially chosen by us to this attempte, Whom if it shall please god so to prosper in his

passage, y<sup>t</sup> either he, or any of his company shall aryue in any port of your Kingdome, wee pray yo<sup>r</sup> Ma<sup>tie</sup> in fauor of us, who haue soe desired y<sup>e</sup> attaining this meanes of accesse unto yo<sup>u</sup>, & in regard of an enyerprize pformed by hym, & his company w<sup>th</sup> so great difficulty, & danger, y<sup>t</sup> you will use them w<sup>th</sup> that regard y<sup>t</sup> may gyue them encouragem<sup>t</sup> to make this their newe discouered passage, w<sup>ch</sup> hitherto hath not byn frequented, or knowne by any to become a usuall frequented trade from theis pts of y<sup>e</sup> world to yo<sup>r</sup> Ma<sup>tie</sup>. By w<sup>ch</sup> meanes yor contry may hereafter be serued wth the natyue comodities of theis parts of speciall seruice, & use both for yo<sup>r</sup> Ma<sup>tie</sup> and Subiects and by returne, and enterchange of your contrey comodities, wee & our Subiects may be furnished w<sup>th</sup> thinges of lyke seruice and use out of wch mutuall benefit amity, and frendshipe may growe, and be established between us, w<sup>ch</sup> wee for our part will not lett hereby to offer unto you for the honorable report wch we haue heard of yo<sup>r</sup> Ma<sup>tie</sup> and because in yis first discouery of the waye to y<sup>or</sup> contrey, it seemed to us not convenient to ymploy Shippes of that burthen w<sup>ch</sup> might bring them any great quantity of or natyue comodities wherby they might be pestered, wee had resolue to use small shippes as fittest for an unkowen passage, laden for ye most part w<sup>th</sup> such necessaries, as were of use for their discouery,. It may please yo<sup>r</sup> Ma<sup>tie</sup> by the pticukers of such things, as are brought in theis shippes to understand y<sup>t</sup> of goods of those kyndes, or kingdome is able to furnish yo<sup>r</sup> Ma<sup>tie</sup> most amply & also of sundry other kynds of merchandize of like use, wherof it may please yo<sup>r</sup> Ma<sup>tie</sup> to be more pticulery enformed by the said George waymuth, & his company, of all wch upon signifcaco unto us by yo<sup>r</sup> Ma<sup>tie</sup> Lres (Ed. = Largesse?) to be returned by or said Subiect, y<sup>t</sup> our visiting of yo<sup>r</sup> Kingdomes wth our shippes, & merchandize shalbe acceptable, & kindly receiued, wee will in the next fleet, wch wee shall send unto you, make it more fully appeare what use, & benefitt, or amity, & entercourse may bring yor Matie & contre. And in the meane tyme do commend yor Matie to the protection of the Eternall God, whose providence guideth, and pserueth all Kinges, and Kingdomes,. From our Royall Pallace of Greenwiche the fourthe of May ano Dni 1602 and of or Raigne 44

Elizabeth R



The seal with its ornate parchment support.

See next page for a detail of the seal



The seal. One can just make out 'Elizabeth' top-right of the circular frame to the Royal coat-of-arms

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### Modern English version:

Elizabeth, by the grace of God, Queen of England, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith to the great, mighty and invincible Emperor of Cathay, greetings.

We have received divers and sundry reports both by our own subjects and others, who have visited some parts of your Majesty's empire. They have told us of your greatness and your kind usage of strangers, who come to your kingdom with merchandise to trade.

This has encouraged us to find a shorter route by sea from us to your country than the usual course that involves encompassing the greatest part of the world.

This nearer passage may provide opportunity for trade between the subjects of both our countries and also amity may grow between us, due to the navigation of a closer route. With this in mind, we have many times in the past encouraged some of our pioneering

subjects to find this nearer passage through the north. Some of their ships didn't return again and nothing was ever heard of them, presumably because of frozen seas and intolerable cold.

However, we wish to try again and have prepared and set forth two small ships under the direction of our subject, George Waymouth, employed as principal pilot for his knowledge and experience in navigation.

We hope your Majesty will look kindly on them and give them encouragement to make this new discovered passage, which hitherto has not be frequented or known as a usual trade route.

By this means our countries can exchange commodities for our mutual benefit and as a result, friendship may grow.

We decided for this first passage not to burden your Majesty with great quantities of commodities as the ships were venturing on a previously unknown route and would need such necessities as required for their discovery.

It may please your Majesty to observe, on the ships, samples available from our country of many diverse materials which we can supply most amply and may it please your Majesty to enquire of the said George Waymouth what may be supplied by the next fleet.

In the meantime, we commend your Majesty to the protection of the Eternal God, whose providence guides and follows all kings and kingdoms. From our Royal Palace of Greenwich, the fourth of May, Anno Domini 1602 and of our reign 44.

Elizabeth R

**I acknowledge the help of the County Record Office of Lancashire. Their reference for this document, which is part of the [Crosse of Shaw Hill papers](#), is: DDSH 15/3.**

***Duncan France  
August, 2016***