

GEOG 220

Alan Nash

“The Human Environment: Place, Space and Identity”

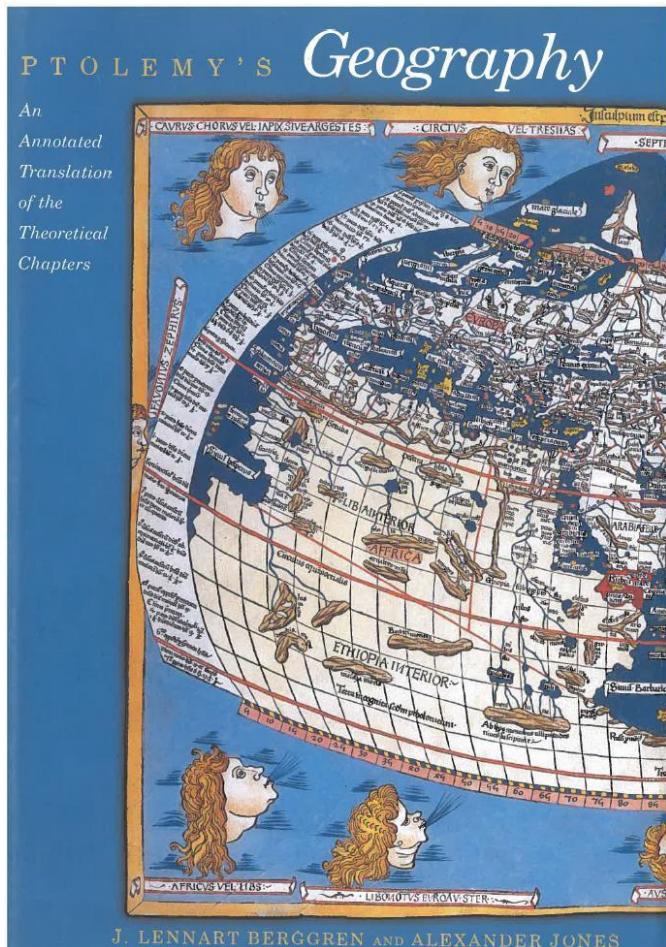
*The evolution of human geography Part 2:
from Ancient Greeks to Columbus*

The story so far

We have seen

- how almost all early peoples had a knowledge of geography
- How groups such as the Ancient Greeks were able to build on this with
 - (a) topographic description
 - (b) mathematical or astronomic observation of their world
- Lets pick up the story with a quick mention of Ptolemy and his “Atlas”...
- [what is an atlas?]

Ptolemy's Geography



- J. Lennart Berggren and Alexander Jones, *Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000)
- Ptolemy is important because he develops ideas of latitude and longitude - that go to make an atlas

Ptolemy's "Atlas"

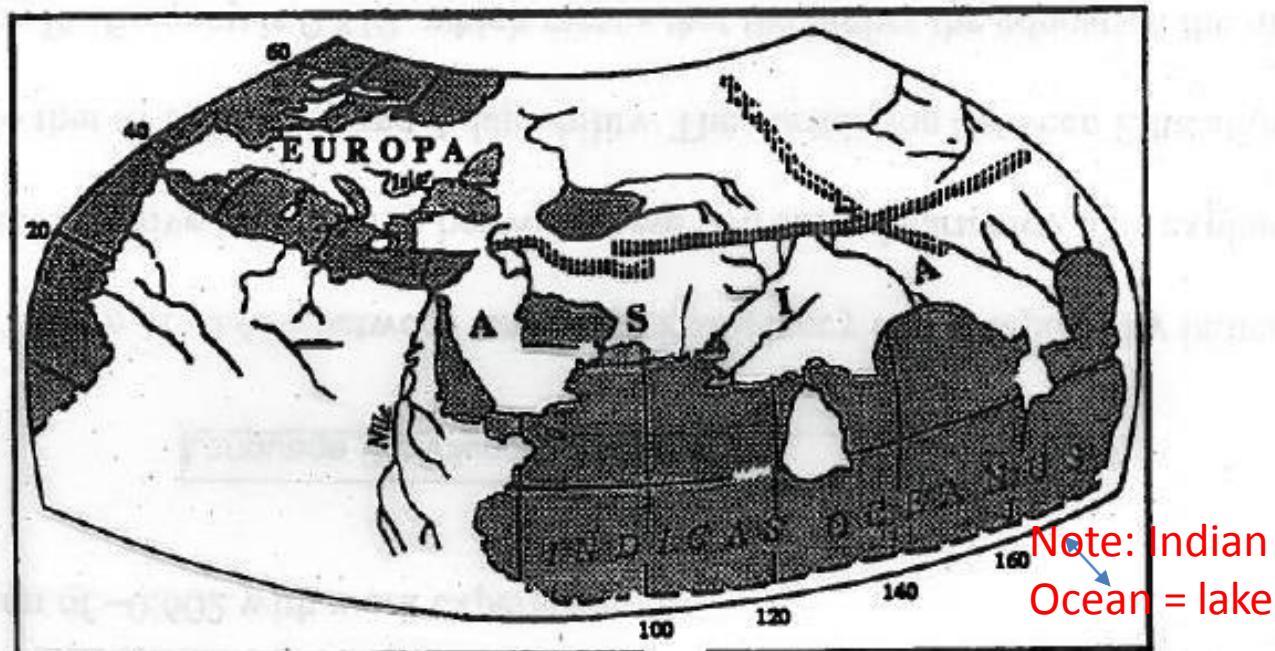


Figure 1.2 The world according to Ptolemy.

(90 - 168 AD)



rura6.Ma.porthe-...-ld in Pwleait, eecoc'ld PfllldoBCUlrn<lldooor1482)

Ptolemy's "Atlas" was only a list
of co-ordinates

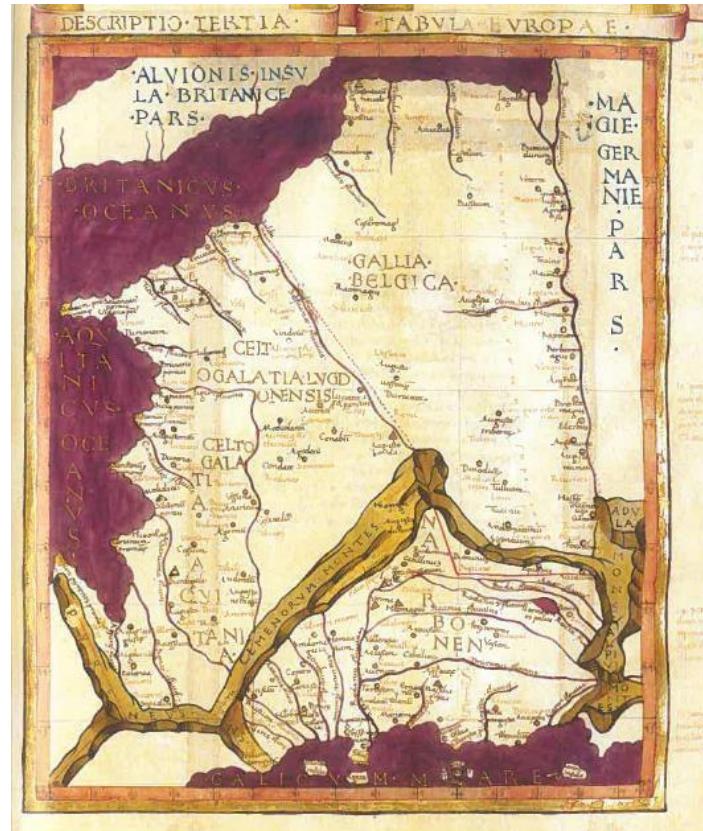
His co-ordinates

[Continuation of the description of the coast]

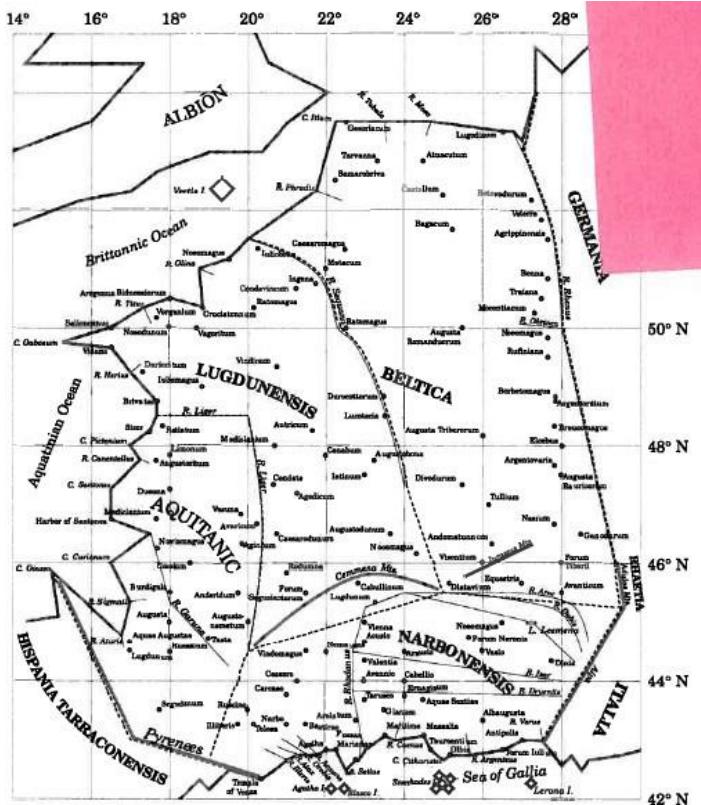
After the R. Rhodanus on the sea, there is situated Avatili [Anatili]:

| | | |
|---|-----|-------------------|
| Maritima colonia (city) | 23½ | 43½ ₁₂ |
| Then the mouths of the R. Caenus | 23¾ | 43 |
| Comani [Commoni]: | | |
| • Massalia [Massilia, <i>Marseilles</i>] (Greek city) | 24½ | 43½ ₁₂ |
| Taurouentium | 24¾ | 42¾ |
| And Cape Citharistes | 25 | 42¾ |
| Olbia (city) | 25½ | 42¾ |
| And the mouths of the R. Argenteus [<i>Argens</i>] | 25¾ | 42¾ |
| And Forum Iulium colonia [<i>Iulii colonia, Fréjus</i>] | 26½ | 42¾ |
| Decatii: | | |
| Antipolis [<i>Antibes</i>] | 27 | 43 |
| And the mouths of the R. Varus | 27½ | 43 |

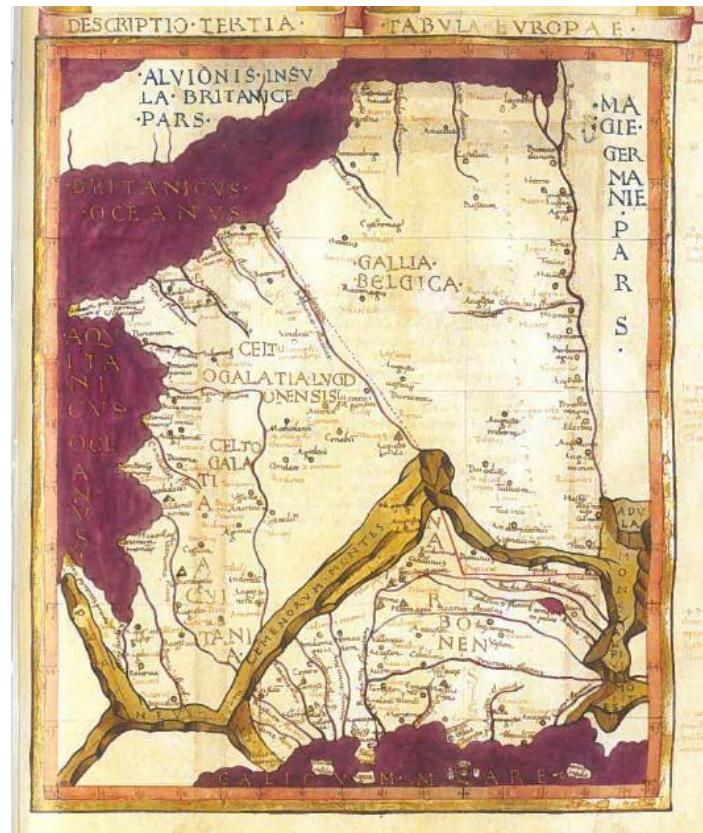
Later these were mapped



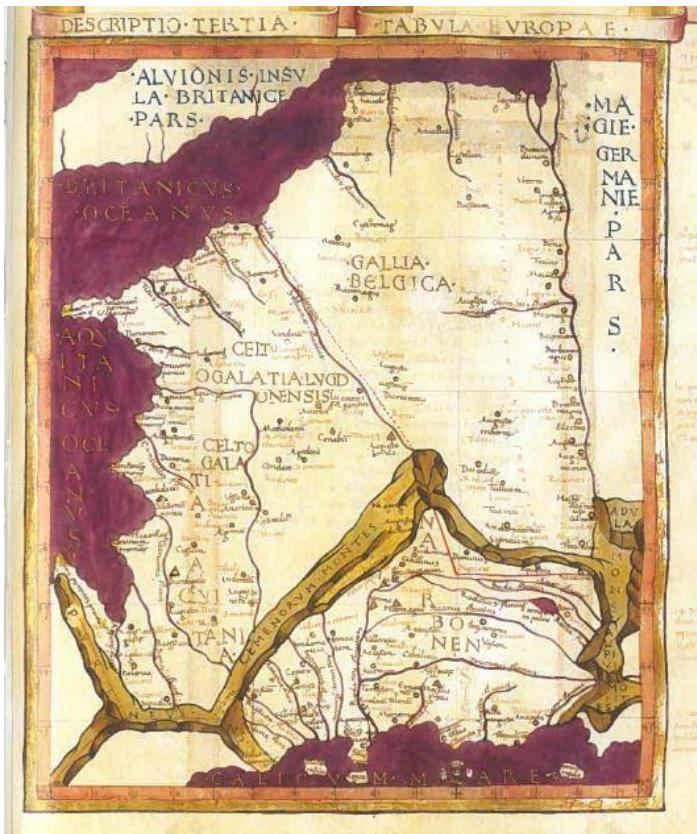
France – using Ptolemy's co-ordinates



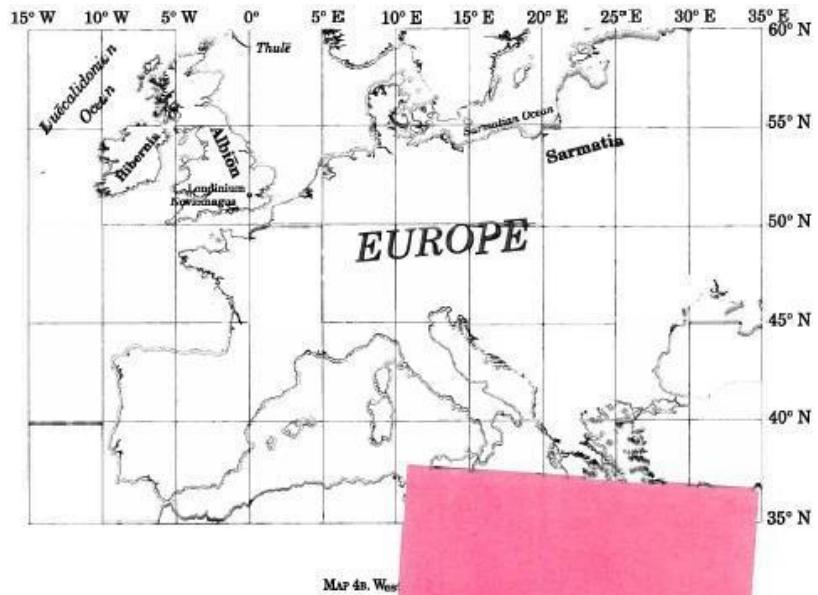
France



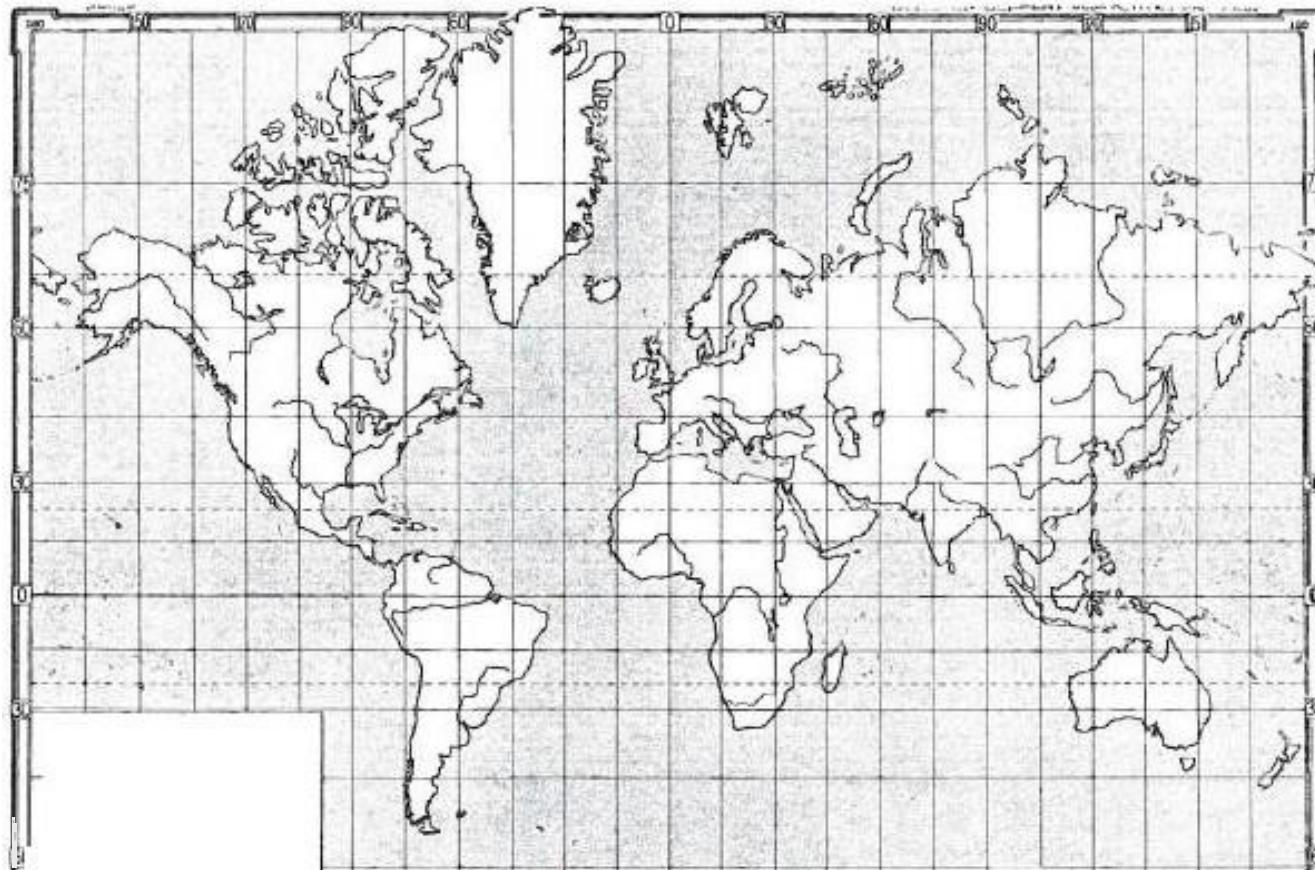
France -- Ptolemy



France – modern map



Can you do any better than Ptolemy??



Can you mark these on your map?

- Cape Town
- Argentina
- North Korea
- Montreal
- Burma (Myanmar)
- Berlin
- Chicago
- Baffin Island
- The Equator
- The Amazon River
- New Orleans
- The Congo River
- Alexandria
- And one extra place you know you know!

And what are their co-ordinates (latitude and longitude)??? Check your atlas – do you have one?

What happens after Ancient Greeks?

The knowledge of the Ancient Greeks is continued – in Europe -- by the Roman Empire

And – as we will see in later – is taken into a growing Arabic geographical scholarship

And – as we will see MUCH later – their knowledge returns to Europe during the Renaissance

A note – the Renaissance {we will remind ourselves about this later}

- The period 1400-1500 sees the “rebirth”
{Renaissance} of Classical knowledge in Europe.
- Important for geography in Europe.
 - i.e. copies of Ptolemy’s *Atlas* “re-discovered” in Istanbul, taken to Venice and translated from Arabic into Latin in 1410.
 - It is on calculations made by Ptolemy in his atlas (made 1400 years before) that Columbus bases his view of the world’s size.
 - ... a world in which he tries to fit the Travels of Marco Polo – China, Japan, Java

But to return to our main story... after the Ancient Greeks – the Romans

One example is the so-called Peutinger Map of the late Roman period

The Peutinger Map – a 13th Century copy of a 4-5thc Roman copy of a map of 27BC-14AD

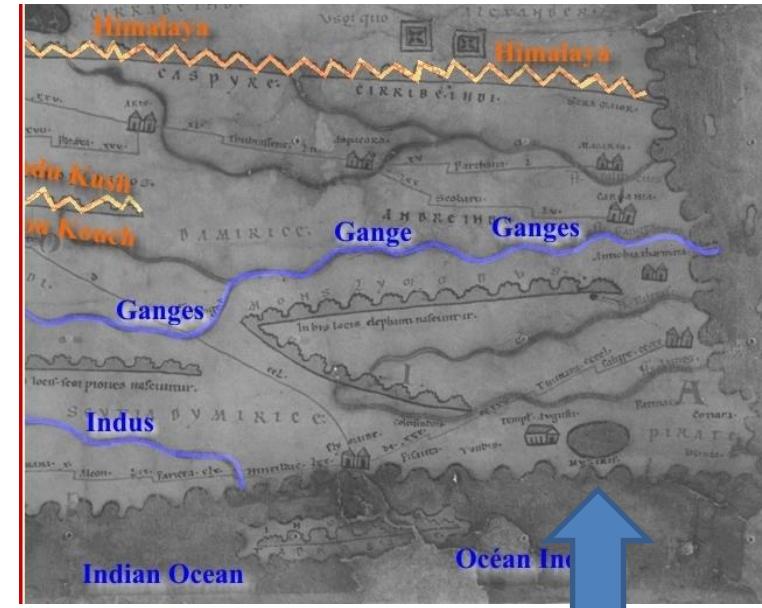
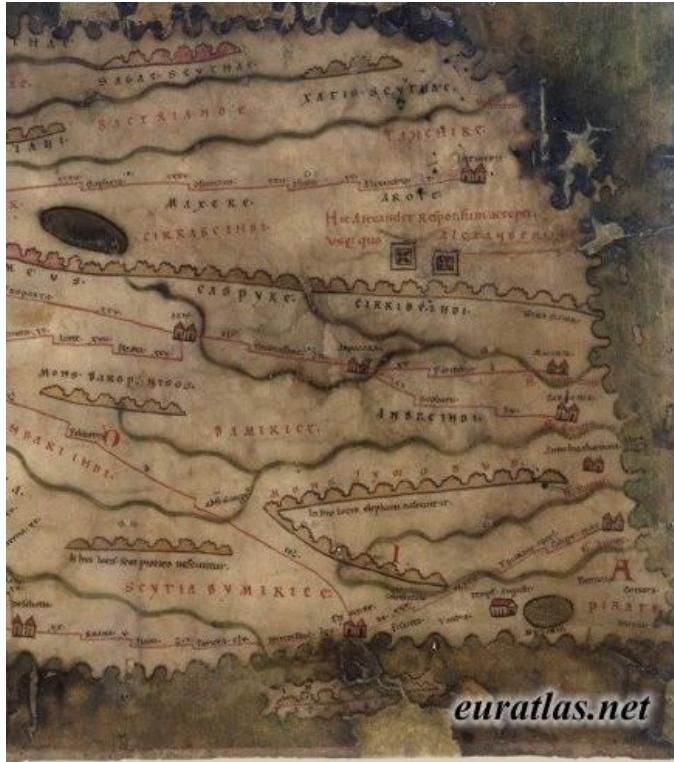


ITALY

ROME

Ostia, the
Port of Rome

The Peutinger Map covers Europe to India



Muziris

Take a look on Wikipedia under the term “Tabula Peutingeriana” and you will see all of the long long map at the end of the entry
Muziris is the site of a port in S. India where the Greeks and Romans sourced their pepper



eurasias.net

Muziris

What happens after the Romans?

Most of this geographical knowledge was “lost” during the period of the “Dark Ages” in Europe – i.e. after the fall of Rome (c 400 AD)

and was eventually replaced during the European Middle Ages (c 400-1500AD) by the *mappa mundi* [world maps, sometimes called “T-O maps”] – maps that were way less “accurate” but in more agreement with the Christian world view of western Europe in the Middle Ages.

So let us look at the development of what are called *Mappa mundi*, or “T—O maps” as the Middle Ages gets underway, and as Christianity’s views of the world replace pagan Greek and Roman ideas

The “T-O” map of Europe’s Middle Ages

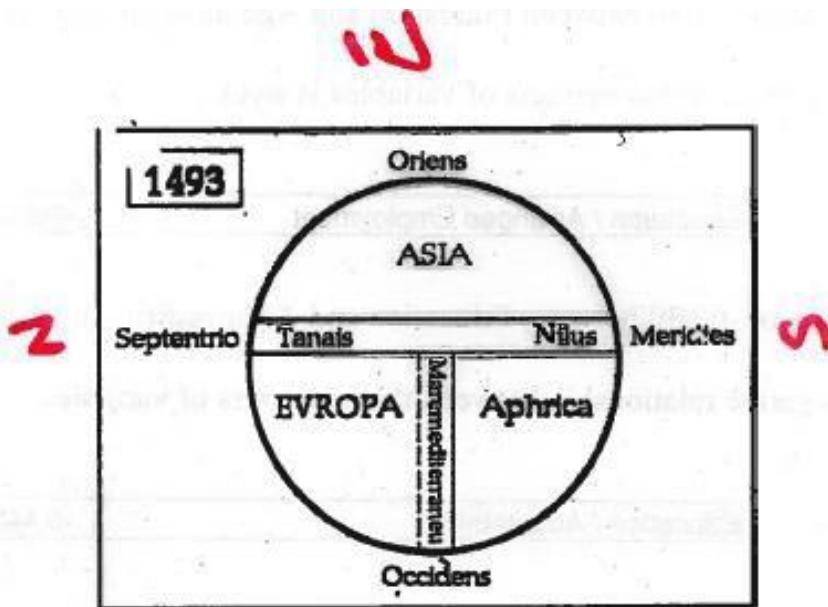


Figure 1.3 An example of a T-O map.

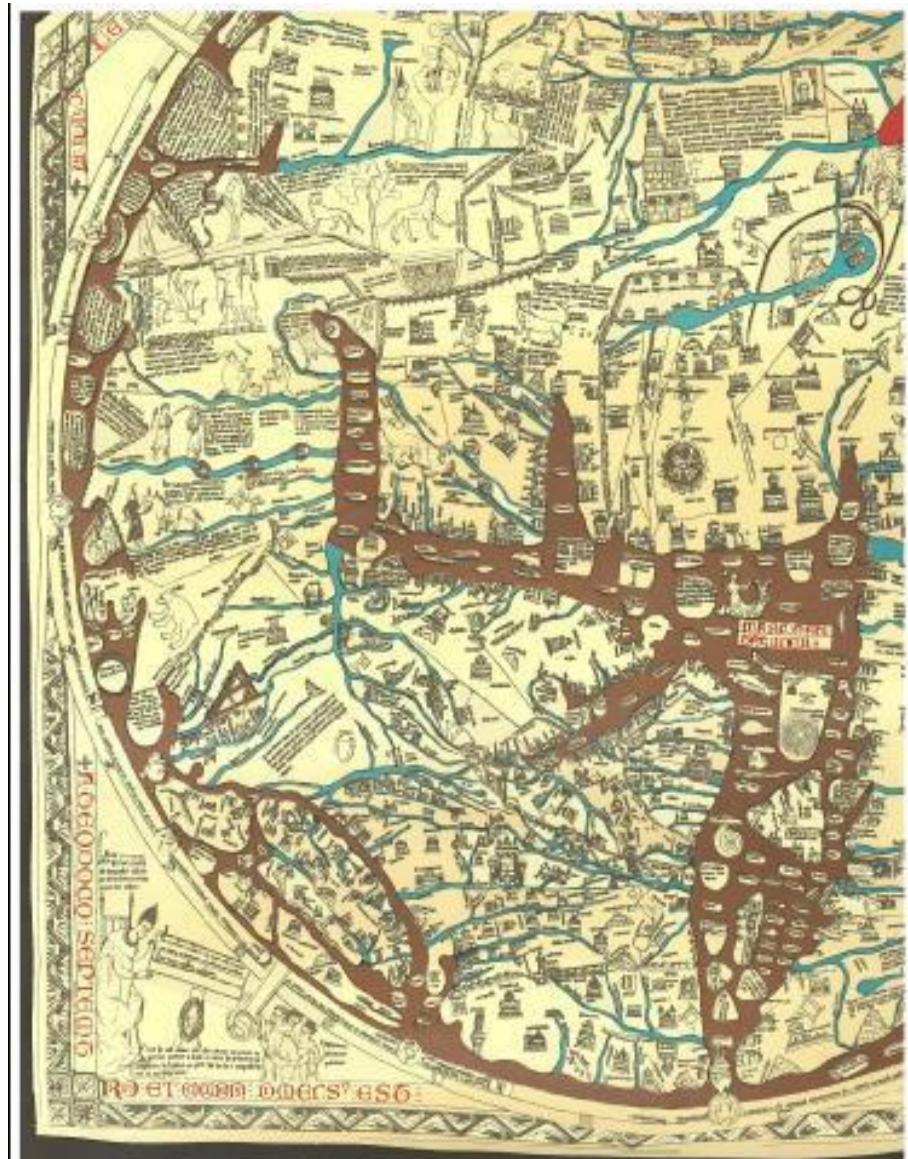
3

T-O maps

- T-O maps are also Known as *Mappae mundi* [“maps of the world”]
- “The function of the *mappae mundi* was primarily to provide a visual narrative of Christian history cast in a geographical framework, not to communicate geographical or cosmological facts” David Woodward, “Reality, Symbolism, Time and Space in Medieval World Maps” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* vol 75 no. 4 Dec 1985, pages 510-521

AN EXAMPLE OF A MAPPA MUNDI

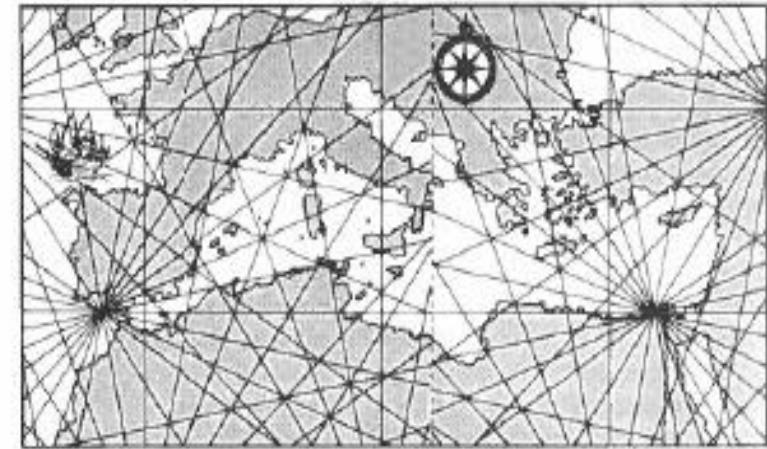
Europe as shown
in the mappa
mundi known
as
The Hereford
Map of c 1283 AD
(CE)



There were more practical maps – these are known as “portolano maps”

The earliest Portolano maps date from the 1300s and were used for navigation. Instead of latitude and longitude lines, they had radiating lines from a point corresponding to a wind direction

CURÆ 7. A Portolano chart of the Mediterranean, after Juan de la Cosa, 1500.



Source: GJ Martin and PE James All Possible Worlds: A history of Geographical Ideas
Wiley: New York 1993, p 48 3rd edn

They say – “Portolano”=handy or easily available
Wikipedia says “Portolano”=related to ports

Although geography seems to go backwards in Europe during the period of the Middle Ages, there are two other parts of the world where the practice of geography was very much alive and well –

These are

1. the Arab realm
2. China

Lets take a quick look at each of these

A. In the Arab world

Arab scholars developed a strong geographic tradition, built on their advances in maths and astronomy, and also took from the knowledge of the Ancient Greeks – which they had preserved and built upon long after it was forgotten in W. Europe.

- Examples: Al-Idrisi (1100-1165), Ibn Battuta (1304-1368)
- And (only discovered in 2000) – the Book of Curiosities (c1050)

Ibn Batuta (1304-1368)

- Ibn Batuta (1304-1368) visits China and Africa – the person who probably travelled the furthest around the world
- A nice book on this is *Travels with a Tangerine: A Journey in the Footnotes of Ibn Battutah*, by Tim Mackintosh-Smith (London: Murray, 2001). There is a good PBS TV documentary based on this trip. See also: The *Travels of Ibn Battutah*, edited by Tim Mackintosh-Smith (London: Picador, 2002)

Al-Idrisi: world map

PLATE II. AL-IDRISI'S WORLD MAP FROM THE OXFORD MANUSCRIPT. Dated 1154 and copied by Ali ibn Hasan al-Hatib al-Qasimi, this world map comes from a well-preserved and complete manuscript.

POCKET MANUSCRIPT. Dated 1456 and copied by Ali ibn Hasan Library, Oxford (MS. Pococke 373, fol. 3v-4r). Diameter of the original: ca. 23 cm. By permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford (MS. Pococke 373, fol. 3v-4r).



Al-Idrisi (1100-1165)

- Born in Ceuta, Morocco
- Prepares world map for Roger II of Sicily (1097-1154)
 - Which was engraved on silver disc about 6 feet wide for his palace in Palermo, Italy
 - And describes it in a work he calls *Nuzhat al-mustaqq fi'khtiraqq al-afaqq* {"The book of pleasant journeys to faraway lands}, which contained a small world map and 70 individual ones. The text describes each region
 - He follows Ptolemy but adds information from Arab and Norman knowledge.

[see S. Maqbul Ahmad, "Cartography of al-Sharif al-Idrisi" in J. Harley and D. Woodward, *The History of Cartography. Vol 2* (1992) 156-174.]

Palermo: Royal Palace



Another example of Arab geographical knowledge is the recently discovered “The Book Of Curiosities of the sciences and marvels for the eyes” (written 1020-1050 in Cairo)

Source: Lost Maps of the Caliphs: Drawing the World in Eleventh-Century Cairo. Y. Rapoport and E. Savage Smith (Chicago 2018)

-- First to use a scale -

--We see how

Ptolemaic knowledge is added to by Arabic work – they add the use of itineraries (as in the Peutinger Map) to the basic map



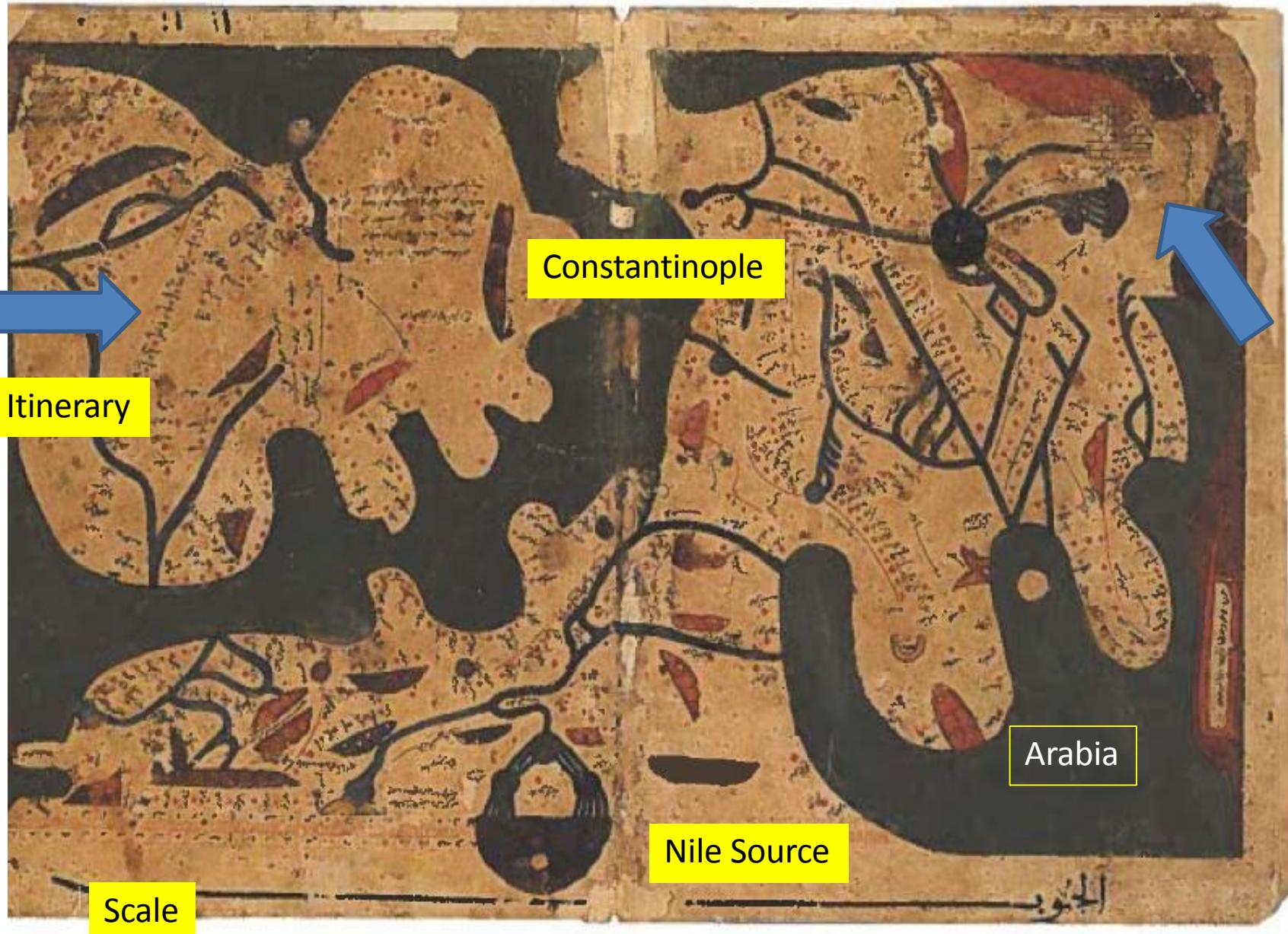
PLATE 1. The rectangular world map. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Arab. c. 90, fol. 23b-24a, copied ca. 1200. South is at the top.

Kitāb Gharā'ib al-funūn wa-mulaḥ al-'uyūn



PLATE 1. The rectangular world map. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Arab. c. 90, fols. 23b–24a, copied ca. 1200. South is at the top.

PLATE 1. The rectangular world map. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Arab. c. 90, fols. 23b-24a, copied ca. 1200. South is at the top.



B. In China

From 2nd century BC to 1500s AD China was most advanced geographically

- Invention of the compass (first used in *Feng-shui* – a type of geomancy)
- Zhu Siben's (1273-1377) map of China (see next slide)

Zhu Siben's (1273-1377) map of China

Figure 1.1.3 Early Chinese contributions to geography Chinese geographical writing dates back to the fifth century B.C., when Chinese writers began to compile travellers' guides. For a thousand years, between roughly A.D. 300 and A.D. 1300, cartographers slowly but steadily added to the body of knowledge about China and adjacent parts of Asia. This knowledge was summarized by Zhu Siben (1273–1337), whose map of China, prepared between 1311 and 1320, was a standard work of reference for more than 200 years. The map shown here, drawn by an anonymous cartographer in 1555 and based on Zhu's work, represents territory from Samarkand in Central Asia to Japan and from present-day Mongolia to Java and Sumatra in Southeast Asia. (Source: Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain. Plate 1, facing p. 324, in J.B. Harley and D. Woodward [eds.], *The History of Cartography*, vol. 2, bk. 2, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.)



In addition to its technical advances, China also had a number of great travellers – one of whom (Xuangzang*) travelled further than any one – except Ibn Battuta!

Lets take a quick look at his travels.

*(Wriggins 2004 suggests those unfamiliar with Chinese pronunciation try “Hsu-wan Tsahng” as a close approximation)

Xuangzang (602-664 AD)



Birthplace in Luoyang, Henan, China



Source of images: Wikipedia Aug 2020

The journey of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang of 629 – 645 AD -- from China to India and back

Our source for this is a wonderful book by Sally Hovey Wriggins, *The Silk Road Journey with Xuanzang* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Books, 2004) available as an ebook from the Concordia library if you're interested.

Xuanzang* was a Chinese Buddhist monk who had come to be very worried by the fact that the Buddhist texts available to him in China were of a poor quality – missing pieces, incorrectly translated – clearly demonstrated by the fact that what was supposed to be the same text actually varied considerably from monastery to monastery – which was the correct text? *(Wriggins suggests those unfamiliar with Chinese pronunciation try “Hsu-wan Tsahng” as a close approximation)

Xuanzang decided that a trip to the source was the only way to find out – and the following maps show the lengths he went to achieve this goal. So we should see his travels as an example of cultural diffusion –of religion and related artefacts (inc texts and statues – and some plants, inc sugar)

Example of an ancient Buddhist scroll

A fragment from the first-century AD Gandharan scroll (one of the oldest surviving Buddhist texts)

Now in the British Museum

Image source: Veronica Walker, "Lumbini:

Birthplace of the

Buddha", National

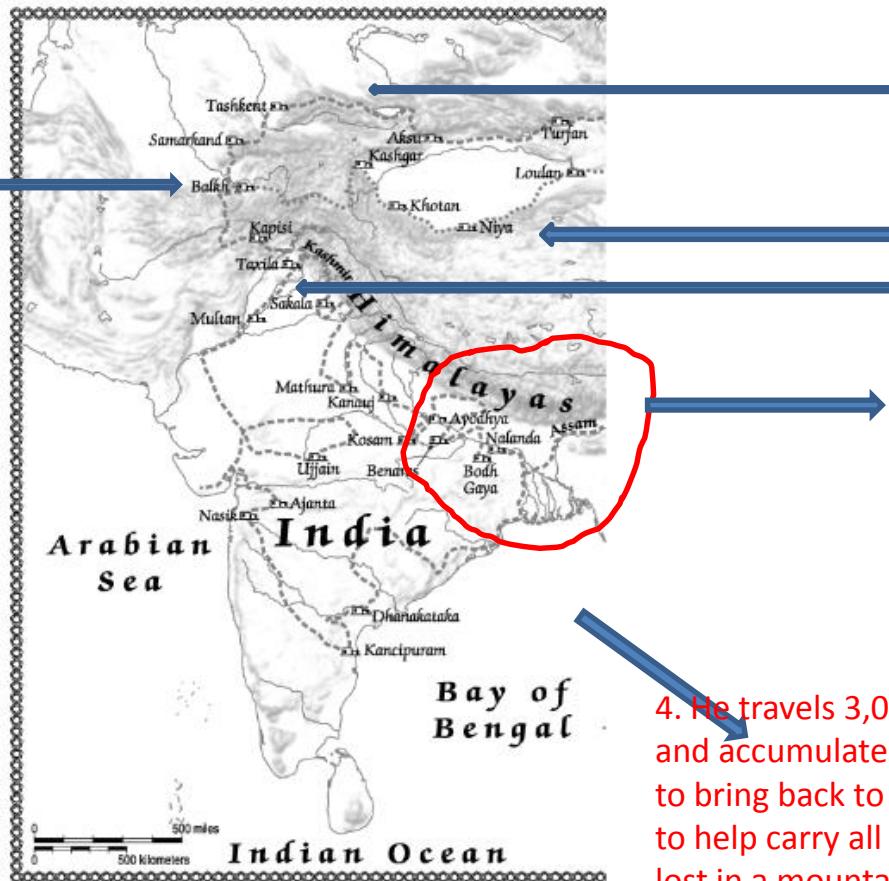
Geographic: History

September/October 2020,
pages 34-47



XUANZANG'S TRAVELS 629-645AD – IN BRIEF

2. At Balkh, learns of origins of Stupa design – morphs into the pagoda design in China & Japan



1. 629 AD Xuanzang travels to India along the northern edges of the Taklamakan Desert

5. 645AD He returns along the southern route, the one taken by Marco Polo in 1271

6. Crossing R. Indus near here, loses all plant seeds and lot of texts on return to China

3. In the hearth of Buddhism, Xuanzang learns Sanskrit, obtains correct versions of texts and visits many sacred sites (638-642 AD) His meeting with King Harsha leads to further missions from China – one of which seeks to learn of the secrets of sugar processing

4. He travels 3,000 miles around India, and accumulates 527 boxes of texts and statues to bring back to China. Given an elephant by King Harsha to help carry all this, the animal is later lost in a mountain gorge

The Return: Crossing the Pamir Mountains to Kashgar

– in taking this route back (rather than via Samarkand – the way he had come
– Xuanzang was on the route that Marco Polo would take to China in 1271



FIGURE 9.1

View of the Pamirs, which Xuanzang crossed in order to go from Afghanistan to Kashgar. The American Museum of Natural History.

His memory lives on

Temple with
memorial
to Xuanzang.
Sun Moon Lake,
Taiwan.
Source:
Wikipedia 2020

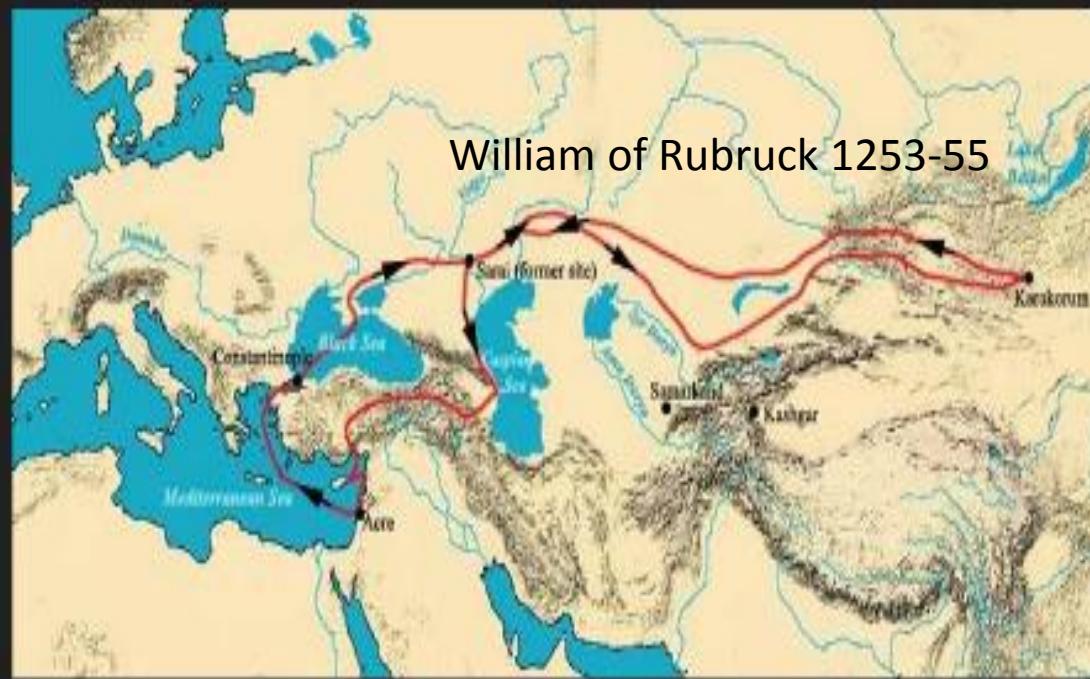


The end of the T-O map: Marco Polo

China was certainly one of the most technologically advanced countries of the world during the Middle Ages, and it was the travels of people such as Marco Polo along the Silk Road to Xanadu (The Chinese emperor's summer palace) that were to begin the challenge that led to the unravelling of Europe's medieval world map and its radical revision by Christopher Columbus.

But Marco Polo 1254-1324 was not the only traveller to the East – there were others

In the Mongol camp at Karakoram, William finds a goldsmith from Burgundy who made a mechanical fountain from which flowed four different drinks



Source Wikipedia

Marco Polo and the revision of Europe's view of the world

Marco Polo was born 1254
in Venice; and died 1324 in
Venice

In between, he travels to
China and back 1271-1295

And is most famous for his
account of his travels



Palazzo Doria-Tursi, in [Genoa](#), Italy

A mosaic in Genoa depicting Marco Polo
Source: Wikipedia accessed 25 Aug 2020

The importance of Marco Polo—"the rise of geography in Europe after the 1400s"

A great deal has been written about Marco Polo – what was he doing, did he go to China etc.

Some of this I try to summarize in the following slides – most of which I will leave you to read if you are interested, and only try to focus on the main point here –

That his Travels became part of Europe's revision of its world view, a view that was ripe for change as Europe was abandoning the T-O map as it (1) re-discovered the knowledge of the Ancient Greeks and (2) tried to reconcile that with Marco Polo's description of a much bigger world – part of what John Larner (Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World (Yale UP, 1999 pages 135-6) has called the rise of geography in Europe after the 1400s

A Marco Polo bibliography

I have found that the following 1958 “Penguin” edition is still very useful. Inexpensive, it provides the full text of Marco Polo’s account in modern English – the main drawback being a lack of context or commentary. You’ll find it as an ebook via the library (though the link actually takes you to another edition!!)

The Travels of Marco Polo translated and with an introduction by R.E. Latham
(Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958)

If you want context and commentary, highly recommended is

Laurence Bergreen, Marco Polo: From Venice to Xanadu (New York: Random House 2007)

There are lots of other editions. Many turn up second-hand and are quite useful. However you find one, I’d encourage you to read at least a bit. I have used the following in these powerpoints.

Maurice Collis: Marco Polo (London: Faber, 1959). A short combined summary and commentary on the person and his travels.

Francis R. Gemme: The Travels of Marco Polo (New York: Airmont, 1969). One of many editions of the full text of Marco’s account – in this case using one of the standard versions, that edited by Professor Yule.

Marco Polo: A very brief Summary

The writer Maurice Collis says: Marco Polo [born 1254; died 1324] could have summarized his life thus:

In 1260, when I was a child of 6, my father Nicolo Polo and my uncle Maffeo left me at home with my mother in the family home in Venice and went on business to Constantinople. From there they paid a visit to the Crimea. One opening led to another..."

1260-1265: Nicolo and Maffeo go via Sarai (on the Volga) to Samarkand where they meet envoys of Kubilai [also can be spelled Kublai] Khan (Great Khan of the Mongols and new conqueror of China) who persuades them to go – via the Silk Road through the deserts of Tibet -- to the Chinese winter capital now known as Beijing – which they reach in 1265.

1266-69 : Nicolo and Maffeo Polo travel back to Venice with request from the Khan for missionaries from the Pope.

1271: Nicolo, Maffeo AND Marco Polo (now 17) set off for China

The trip takes them 3.5 years

1277: Marco seems to become a trusted representative of the Khan, may be even a local governor, and reports to the Khan about his kingdom

1292: The Polos are finally given permission to return to Venice (in order to escort one of the Khan's relatives who is to be married in Persia). This time they travel home by sea – via Sumatra and India

1295: Return to Venice.



The departure of Marco Polo from
Venice in 1271 depicted in a fifteenth
-century illuminated manuscript
{source: Bergreen 2007}

His travels were only the beginning of Marco Polo's story – the rest springs from his book *about those travels*

As Maurice Collis imagines Marco Polo saying – “I thought that my adventures were over, but this was not the case” (1959: 5).

As a sailor in Venice’s navy, **Marco Polo is captured in 1298** in a sea battle with the Genoese and spends 3 years in a Genoese gaol.

While there, **he meets a writer called Rustichello of Pisa** (“a prolific writer of Arthurian romances”, according to Bergreen (2007: 7), and also a prisoner in the same gaol) and they pass the time away by writing up Marco’s travels – Marco even sends to Venice to get his notes!

The resulting book – usually called **The Travels** – soon becomes a great hit, and spreads through Europe. The only problem is that is before the invention of printing in Europe and the book it spreads by being copied out – and for that reason, many versions (many incomplete or altered) exist. Some scholars (i.e. Latham) suggest that this may account for some of the “inconsistencies” in Marco’s account of his trip.



The Polos on
their travels

From the
Catalan Atlas
(1375)

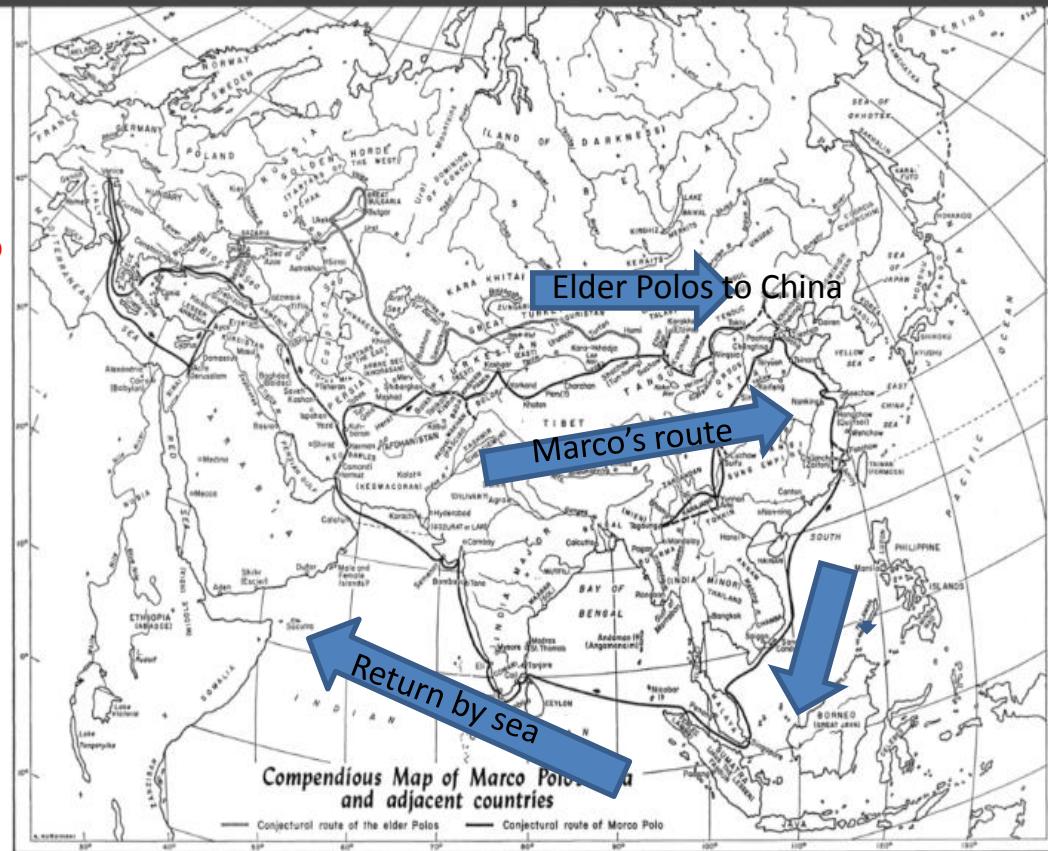
Source:
Bergreen 2007

Reading The Travels

The Travels by Marco Polo is actually something of a strange read. Unlike other accounts (such as that by William of Rubruck, or Xuanzang), it is written in a way that it is hard to know which places Marco visited himself, which ones are the reports of others, and in what order he might have travelled between places.

This is because his text reads more like a bunch of places or countries -- described according to their unusual (to European eyes) characteristics – but there is very little of the “The next place I went was...”. Think of it as the difference between a letter you’d write describing a trip you made, and the section on China from the Lonely Planet Guide to Asia. For this reason, most editions refrain from containing a map of his route – the one I have here is a brave effort from Leonard Olschki’s Marco Polo’s Asia 1960 – and content themselves with a location map of the places mentioned (i.e Latham), or of the khanates (Gemme p. 9)

The Travels of Marco Polo and his family,
1260-1295



Map source: Leonard Olschki's Marco Polo's Asia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960) available as an ebook from Concordia's library.



FIGURE 6. *Travels of Marco Polo*.

Source: GJ Martin and PE James All Possible Worlds: A history of Geographical Ideas: New York 1993, p 46 3rd edn

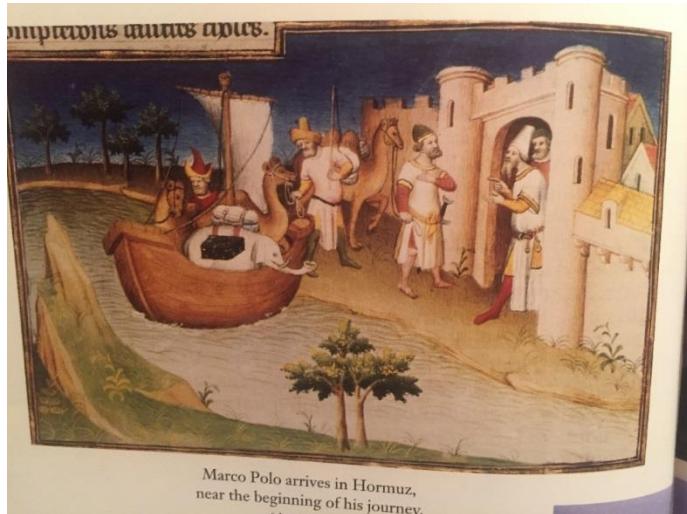
Marco Polo's book contains all sorts of information: descriptions, trivia, legends... and that has likely been the source of his appeal – two examples:

The coconut [Pharoah nut] of India
“One of these nuts is a meal for a person, both meat and drink. Their outer husk is matted with fibres, which are employed in various ways and serve many useful purposes. Under this husk is a food that provides a square meal for a person. It is very tasty, as sweet as sugar and as white as milk, and is in the form of a cup like the surrounding husk. Inside this food is enough juice to fill a phial. The juice is clear and cool and admirably flavoured.” (Latham 1958: 257-8)

The city of “Xanadu” [Shang-tu] – Kublai Khan’s summer palace in China

“When the traveller ... journeys north-north-east for three days, he comes to a city called Shang-tu, which was built by the Great Khan now reigning, whose name is Kubilai Khan. In this city [he] built a huge palace of marble and other ornamental stones. Its halls and chambers are all gilded, and the whole building is marvellously embellished and richly adorned. At one end it extends into the middle of the city; at the other it abuts the city wall. At this end, another wall ... encloses and encircles fully sixteen miles of park-land well watered with springs and streams and diversified with lawns...here the Great Khan keeps animals of all sorts ... for the gerfalcons and other falcons which he has here... (Latham 1958: 77-78]

Another example: Marco Polo's description of the town of Hormuz [Cormos in the text below]



Marco Polo arrives at Hormuz
Source: Bergreen 2007

You must know that the plain of which I have told you, stretches to the south for the space of five days' journey. At the end of the five days, one reaches another descent, and for the space of twenty miles one must continue going down. The road is exceedingly bad and infested by robbers, and hence perilous. When one reaches the bottom of this descent, one finds another very beautiful plain, called the plain of Cormos. It stretches for two days' journey. There are fine rivers, with plenty of dates and other fruit. There are also francolins and parrots and other kinds of birds, different from ours.

After two more days' riding, one reaches the Ocean Sea. On the shore there is a city called Cormos, which possesses a harbour. You must know that here arrive the traders from India with their ships, bringing all kinds of spices, precious stones, pearls, gold and silk cloths, elephants' teeth, and many other wares. In

Text: from Olschki 1960

What was Marco Polo actually doing in China?

There have been many theories –

- The Polos were stuck in China until the Khan gave them permission to leave
- Busy developing merchant contacts for trade etc
When they return- lots of gems in their clothing!
- They were spies for the Khan
- The Khan preferred to use foreigners to keep an eye on things – especially tax gathering– indeed, this may be how he employed Marco in his retinue for a number of years
- Or, and this one I like, Marco showed himself to be the best describer of the khan's lands and had a knack of telling Kublai what he had seen – a skill that the Great Kahn liked so much, he sent Marco off round China so he could bring back reports.

The moral – keep your eyes open and be a great geographer!!

Marco Polo's book was an attraction for many European readers from the time it was written

We know of over 100 manuscript copies that were made in the era before printing -- and have survived (a number only exceeded by Dante, and The Travels of Sir John Mandeville – both best sellers at 200 copies or so each).

It is an engaging book and Marco Polo's enthusiasm for almost everything he sees is often endearing. Perhaps this is why everyone likes to think that he actually did everything he said in The Travels – although there have always been a number of people who will say it was all made up – and Marco's habit in later years of saying he had seen “Millions” of this or that when in China led to him being nicknamed *Il Milione* [or because he was believed to have a lot of money]

This is a long-standing tradition – even at the end of his life, when he was dying, people asked him whether he had been telling the truth or not about his travels to China – the legend is that with his dying breath he replied “**I have not told you the half of what I saw**”.

It seems that Marco Polo still has an attraction for many European readers

The bravest – or most foolish(!!) – of the “naysayers” is Frances Wood, a Sinologist at the British Museum – who ought to know her stuff – who has argued that the “anti-Polo” line in her book Did Marco Polo go to China? (London: Secker and Warburg, 1995). She lists the main problems and as these often come up among “Marco Polo-ists” (both “pro-” and “anti-”), let me list some of them in the following slides

To be fair to Marco Polo, of course, we should note (1) that he never said that he went everywhere in the book; (2) his “ghost writer” may well have added content to spice it up and increase readership; (3) some scholars (i.e. Latham) have noted that the many editions could have added material that Polo never wrote (or – missed out stuff that he did!). You’ll appreciate that we begin to have a way of excusing any slip and can believe what we want!

Frances Woods' major problems with Marco Polo

Problems

1. He does not refer to the **Great Wall** – how could he fail to miss such a thing – it was, after all, “Great” !

Marco's defence team reply

1. ah – It was not built at the time – at least not all of it

Or – his reference to “Gog and Magog” is a hint. This was the wall that Alexander the Great built at the edge of the world to keep out the two monsters mentioned in the Bible’s Book of Revelations (see Bergreen 2007).

Problems

2. He does not mention **tea drinking** – surely he ought to have seen that?

2. Bergreen (2007: 179) notes that a 19thC French scholar, M.G. Pauthier, concluded that Marco Polo's description of what he thought were cloves is more likely to have been Assam, or black tea

What he saw, Marco said, “twigs and leaves like a laurel ... the flower it makes is white and small as in the clove, when it is dusky black”

Problems

3. Does not mention Chinese block printing for books, or the use of Chinese writing

Defence

3 In some early editions of the Travels he describes “pamphlets and books” (Bergeron 2007: 144; see also p 222)
Marco describes their printing of paper money.

Problems

- 4 Does not describe foot-binding
- 5 He does not describe chopsticks
- 6 In his vocabulary for places and things, he almost always uses words of Persian origin – not Chinese or Mongol

Defence

- 4. He was not likely to see inside Chinese homes
- 5. Take a look at the defence on Wikipedia – a nicely written piece
- 6. This is one of Woods' key arguments that Marco never went to China at all – but his defenders say Persian was one of the common languages of the day (*a lingua franca*)

Woods' problems

7. Because he is not clear on the places he visited and those he didn't, how reliable is he really as an eye witness?

The defence

7. Recall that Marco tells us he will include things he has not himself seen (but these will be things he has heard of that he finds reliable)

BUT he certainly does include a lot he has not seen (the sections on Japan and their return through India is third-hand)

Woods

8. More generally – Since there are clearly sections that report myths and legends -- To what extent is he just making almost everything up?

defence

8. Yes - He does have some entirely fictional accounts –

the best are the accounts of the Khan's battles with Prester John – a legendary Christian king whom Europe hoped existed,

but we can blame Rustichello for this
The best defence is to contextualize Marco's material with other sources.

Sometimes this can be done –

i.e. the intended marriage of the Khan's relative to a khan in the Levant appears in Arab, Mongol and Chinese histories of the time (sources Marco had no access to).

Pietro D'Abano (astronomy prof at Padua) hears Marco's account of stars in Zanzibar – something unknown to Europeans of the time

Why is Marco Polo important?

I would argue that his importance lies less in anything he brought back – despite Bergreen (2007: 321) suggestions to the contrary, I don't see any real evidence Europe benefitted from any Chinese inventions he had seen, or that China picked up on any Venetian innovations of the time. Certainly:

No truth that Marco introduced “pasta” or “noodles” from China to Italy {their use in Italy actually dates from earlier than his trip}

No truth in that the elder Polos introduce the Mongol armies to the use of siege engines {the story in the Travels is likely a garbled one, and the siege wrongly dated}

For both these, I'd recommend again the Wikipedia entry on Marco Polo as a nice summary

Instead, I think that his importance lies in the fact that he made Europe aware of China

- The widespread diffusion of his book added European knowledge of their world
 - i.e. First introduction (for Europeans) to Japan, to Java in his book
- Europe begins to revise the T-O map (see Fra Mauro map in following slide)
- And perhaps by far the best example of this would be that Christopher Columbus read and extensively annotated [“wrote notes on”] his copy of the Travels before his own travels

Here is Christopher Columbus's copy of Marco Polo's Travels – we can see how carefully Columbus read the book from his notes in the margins

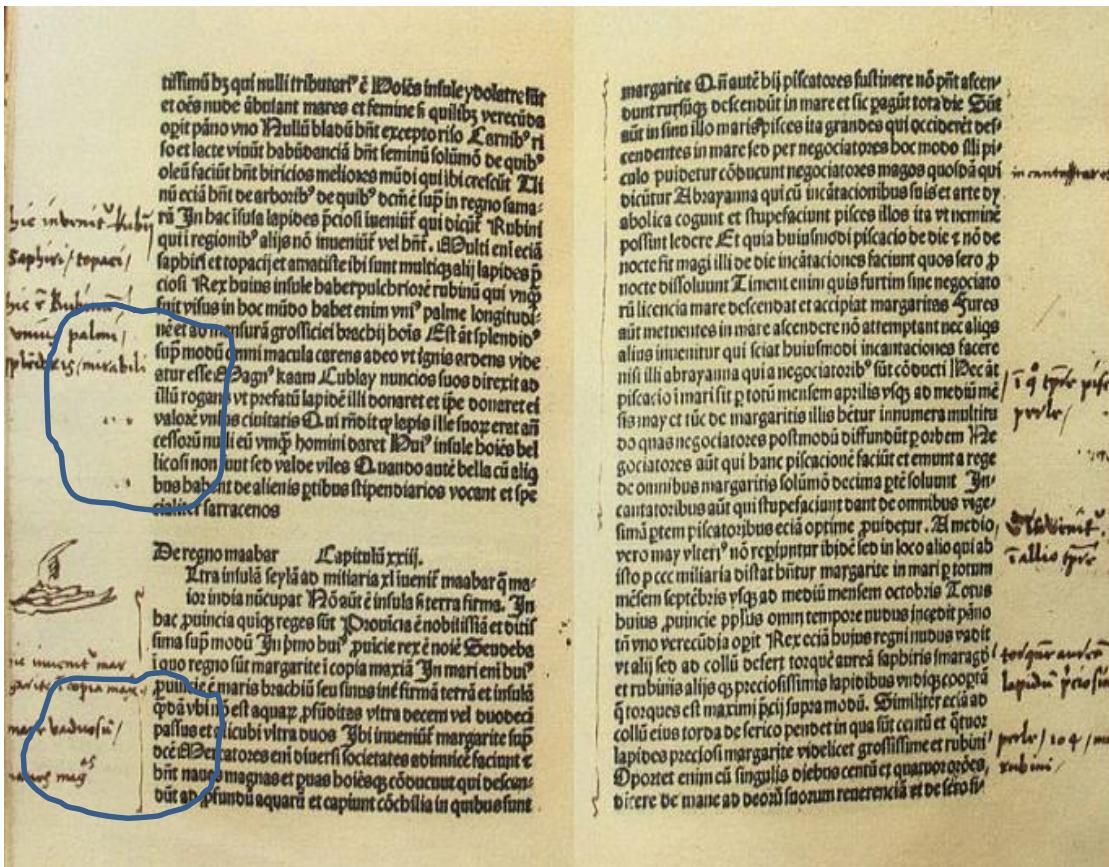


image
source:
Wikipedia
Aug 2020.

The pages shown are those translated in Latham pp 231-233 [Ceyon-India]

Part of what seems to have caught Columbus's attention are the references to rubies, sapphire and topaz ... and pearls

Interesting point:
when
did Columbus make
these annotations?
Felipe Fernández-
Armesto in his book
Columbus says before
1492; John Larner in
his *Marco Polo and the*
Discovery of the World
says 1497 or 1498 –
what difference do you
think this makes??

Columbus was so influenced by Marco Polo: example - rhubarb

When he reached what he thought was China, he expected he would find there plants described by Marco

Rhubarb - Although known in Europe (for its medicinal properties), people had only seen it as the dried, mostly black, shredded root.

Importantly, no European knew what the growing plant looked like. And no one there knew its source was the Russian-Chinese border Columbus knows from Marco Polo that it was found in China. But Columbus had never seen the growing plant. Nevertheless, when he encounters something he thinks is rhubarb in the Caribbean [likely just roots], he thinks it really is rhubarb – and because it is rhubarb, he must be in China!!

Example: **Rhubarb.** There are two entries in the Travels. The first is Ok as it's near where we'd expect. The second seems too far south, but is discussed at length in Haw 2006

"In all of the mountains of this region [Kan-su in NW China] rhubarb grows in great abundance; it is brought here by merchants who export it far and wide" [Latham 1958: 60]

"In the adjacent mountains [to Sugu, in Kiang-Su, Southern China] rhubarb and ginger grow in great profusion so that one Venetian groat [a unit of money] would buy forty pounds of fresh ginger of excellent quality" {Latham 1958: 182-3}

See Stephen G. Haw, Marco Polo's China: A Venetian in the realm of Kubilai Khan (Routledge 2006) ebook via Concordia Library – has a whole chapter on rhubarb – also take a look at Spengler 2019.

Columbus was so influenced by Marco Polo

That he took with him letters of introduction to the Great Khan, Kubilai

That he used Marco Polo's account of his travels to calculate how far China was from Europe

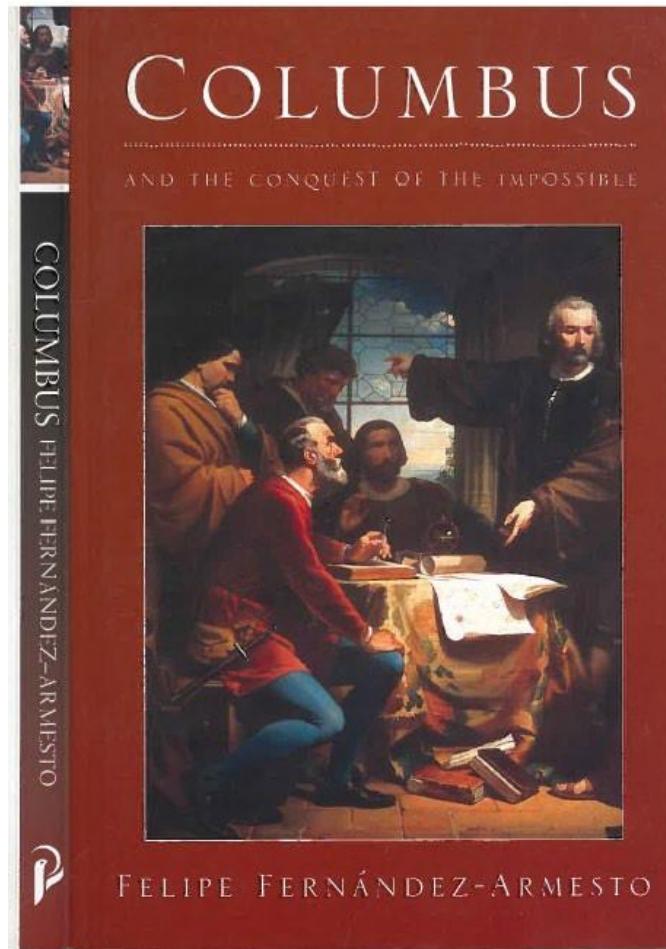
Source of image: Wikipedia Aug 2020

Fra Mauro's 1450 Map of the World built on Polo's work



c. 1450 by the Venetian monk [Fra Mauro](#).

Christopher Columbus



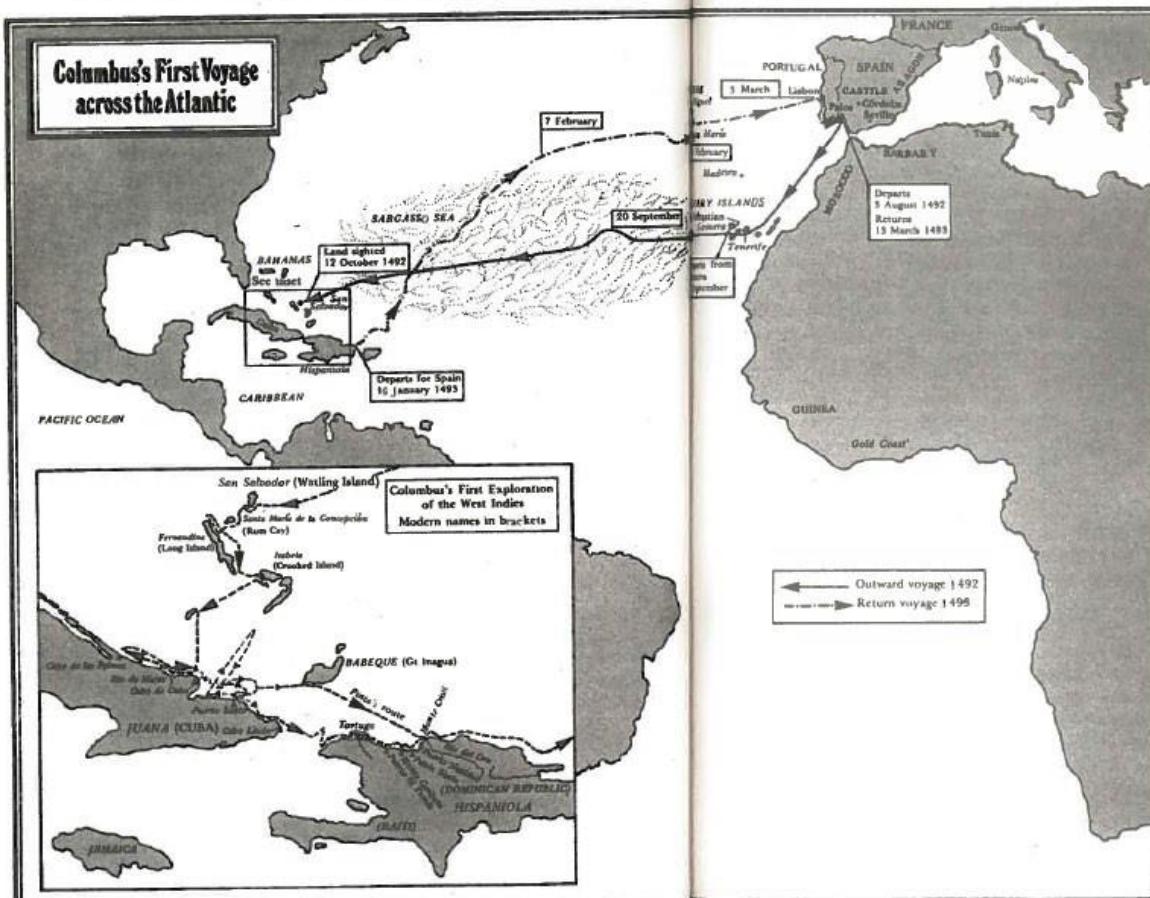
London: 1974)

Columbus: First voyage

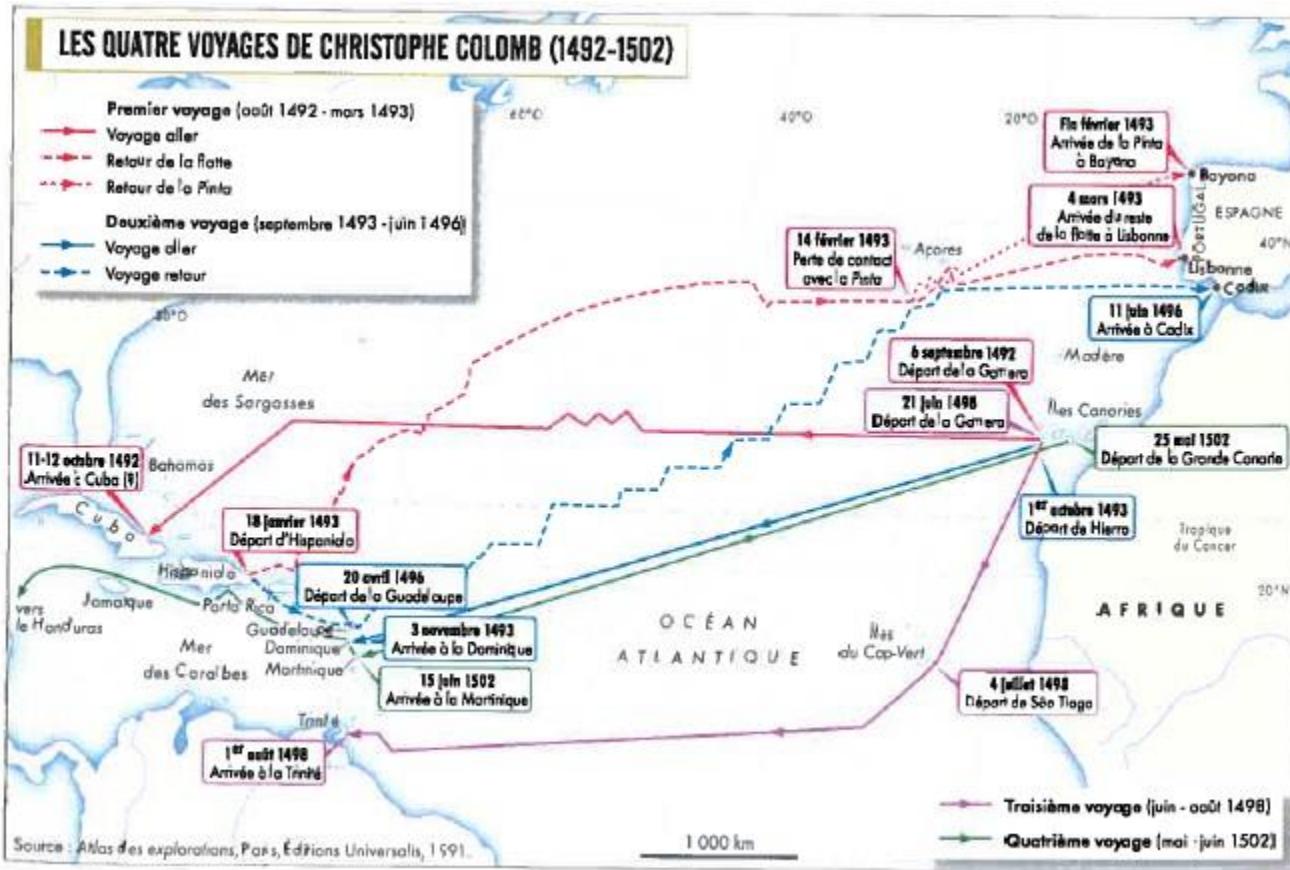
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COLUMBU

THE SUCCESS OF AN ILLUSION



Columbus: 4 voyages

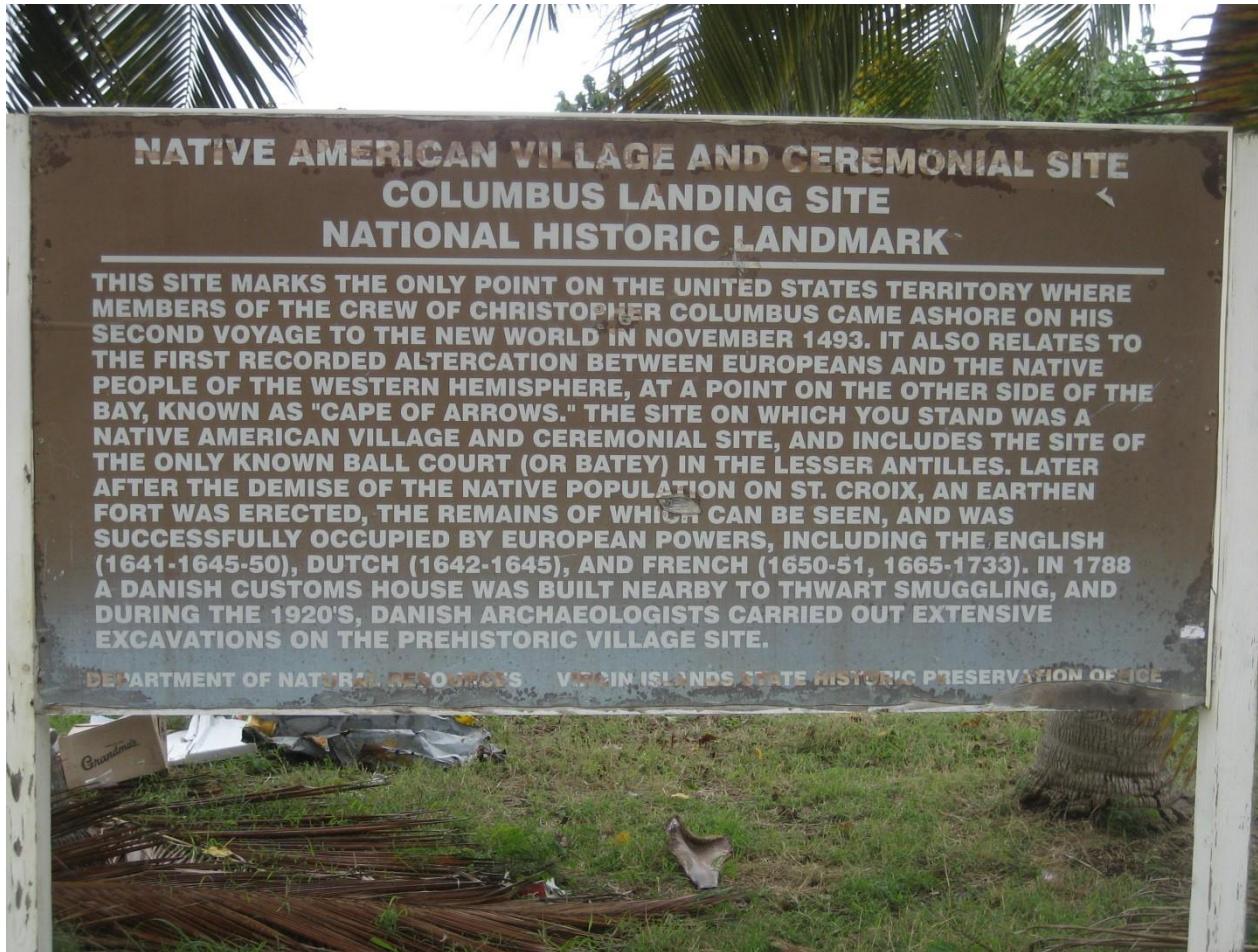


1493 Columbus 2nd voyage lands at St Croix, US Virgin Islands



Note: Columbus in Le Carbet, Martinique June 15 1502

1493 Columbus 2nd voyage lands at St Croix, US Virgin Islands

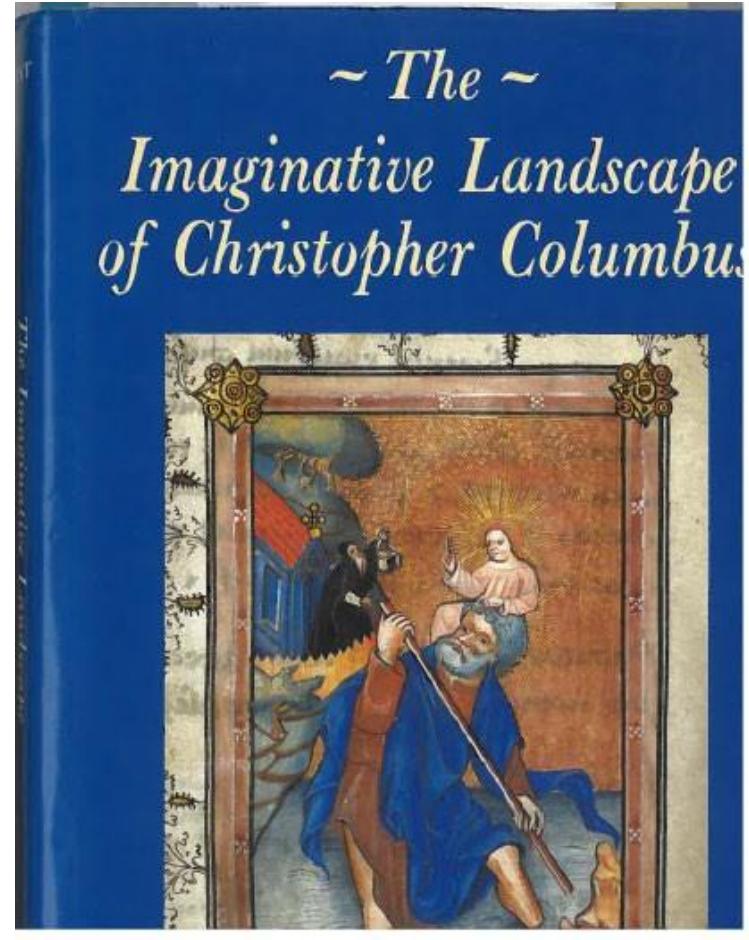


Christopher Columbus 1492: “discovers” America

- The period 1400-1500 sees the “rebirth”
{Renaissance} of Classical knowledge in Europe.
- Important for geography in Europe.
 - i.e. copies of Ptolemy’s *Atlas* “re-discovered” in Istanbul, taken to Venice and translated from Arabic into Latin in 1410.
 - It is on calculations made by Ptolemy in his atlas (made 1400 years before) that Columbus bases his view of the world’s size.
 - ... a world in which he tries to fit the Travels of Marco Polo – China, Japan, Java

One key to Columbus's mind

- He struggles to reconcile the medieval church's view of the world with the teachings of the Ancient Greeks, and with the anecdotal evidence of medieval European travellers and sailors
 - One example – the Ancient Greeks knew the size of the earth and therefore how far it would be to get across the Atlantic to whatever was beyond
 - Columbus took those ideas, but believed that “whatever was beyond” was the coast of China (or the offshore islands such as Japan)



Another example of the state of Columbus' library – or why you should never lend him a book

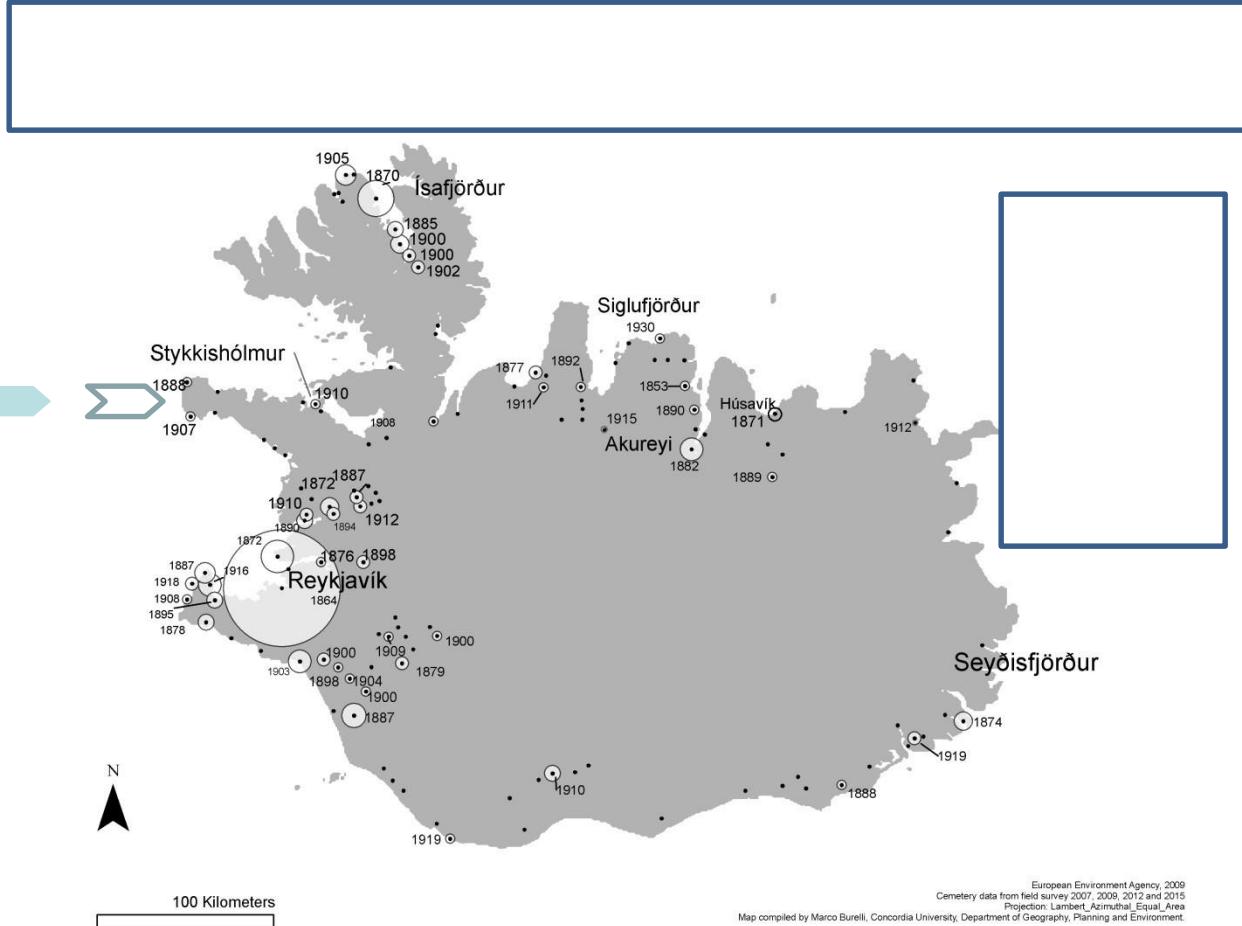


- Columbus' own notes on D'Ailly's *Imago Mundi* {source Gomez 2000]

Here we see Columbus adding his note to another Medieval work of geography

One fanciful story says Columbus visits Iceland in 1477

Here ➤



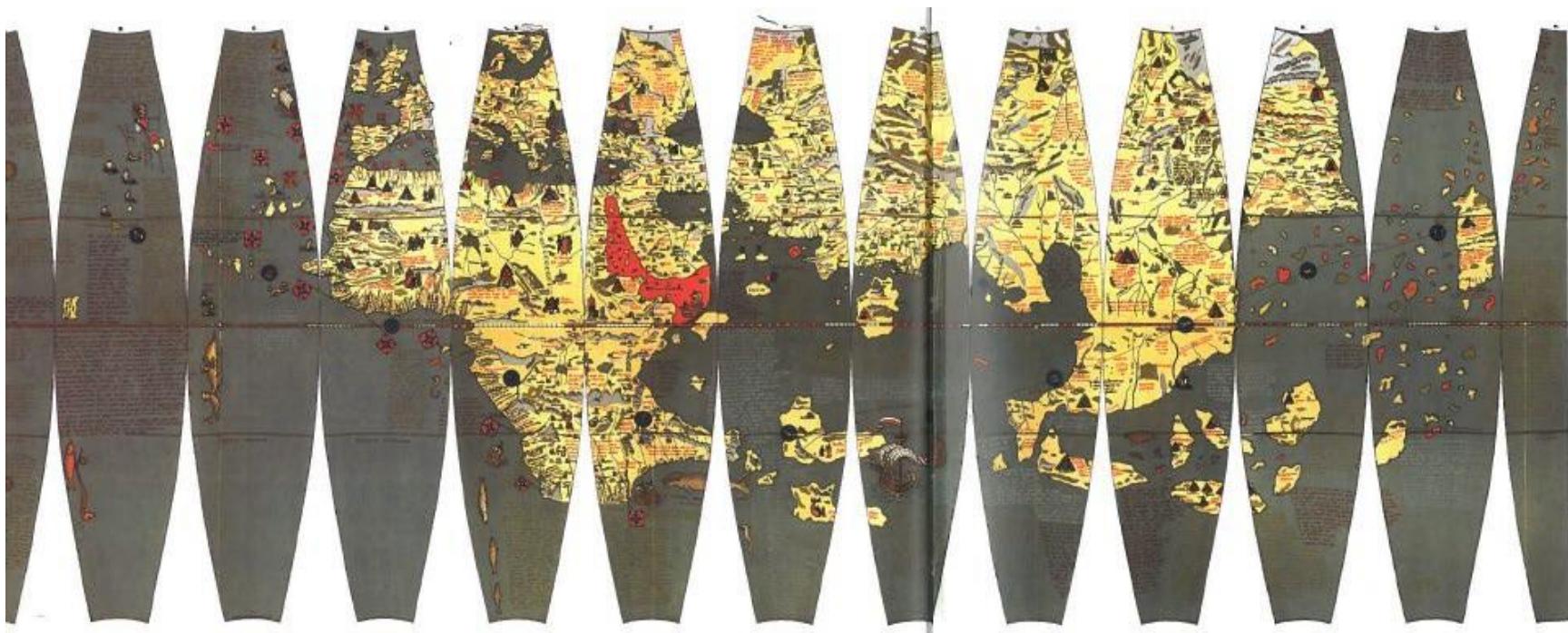
One fanciful story says Columbus visits Iceland in 1477



But please note is only a legend, and may really refer to trips to Bristol in England

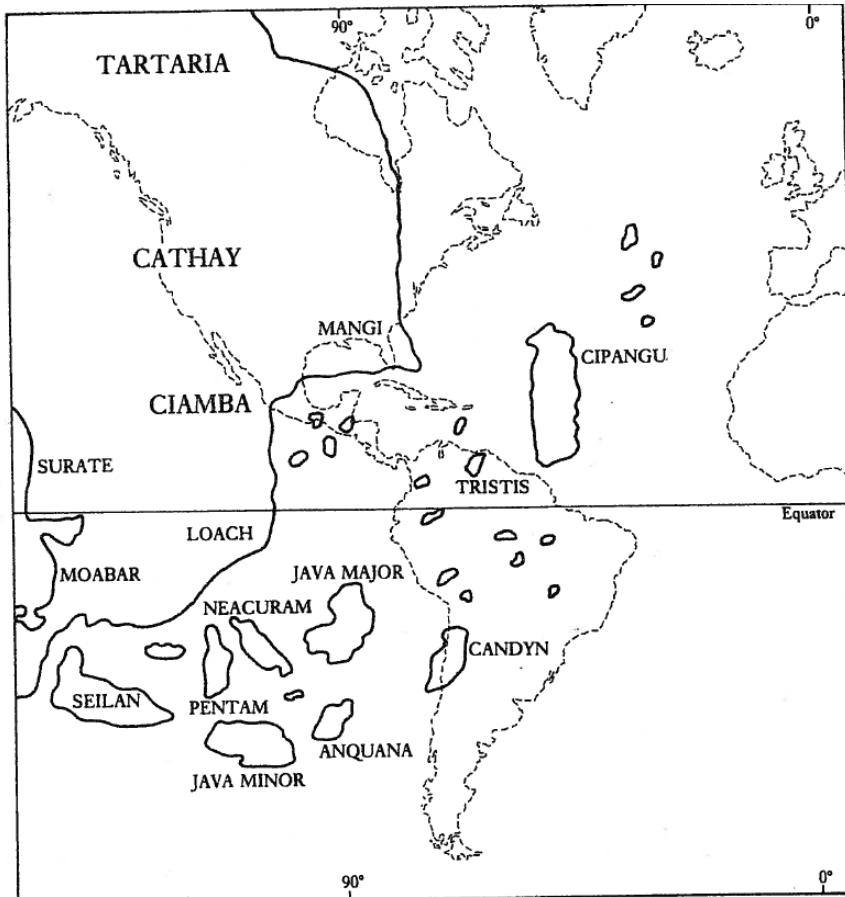
Martin Behaim's atlas of 1492

The world as Europe saw it – on the eve of Columbus' travels – no Americas or Pacific



Note: Martin Behaim's map converts to a globe – one of the first to try and suggest (as Marco Polo had done) the size of the world by incorporating China and the islands of Indonesia into a European cartography

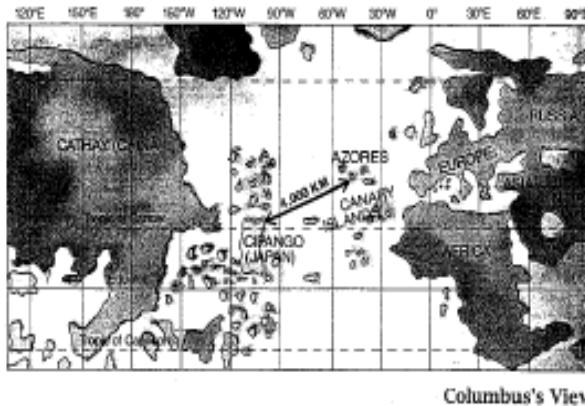
Martin Behaim's 1492 view



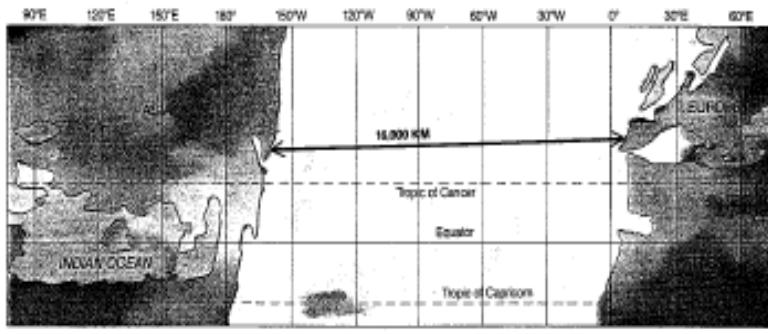
If we take Martin Behaim's view of the world, we can see that by allowing for the great extent of all Marco Polo described in the lands of Cathay, the east coast of China appears to reach almost to the coast of the Eastern USA – i.e. no hint of the Pacific

Although Columbus underestimated Ptolemy's calculations (about the size of the globe)...and as we know, does not know the Americas exist!!

Columbus believed about the circumference of the earth and the arrangement of its continents (top) and Ptolemaic geography (middle) is clear on maps. Only by understanding the earth's circumference and overstating the breadth of Asia could Columbus justify a voyage west to the Indies. Both maps of course omitted North and South America (bottom). The continents on the top map are taken from a globe made by Martin Behaim in Nuremberg in 1492.



Columbus's View

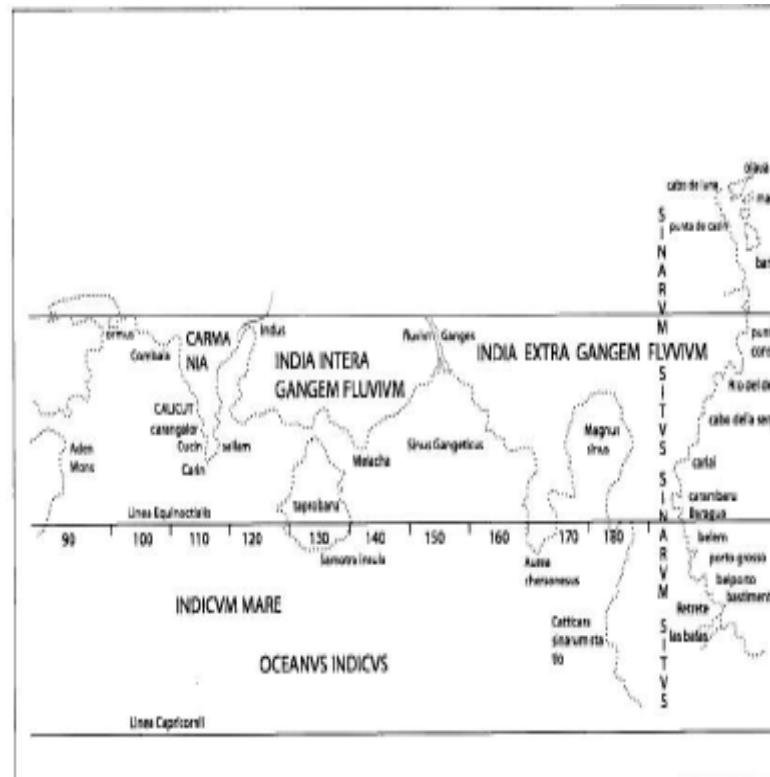
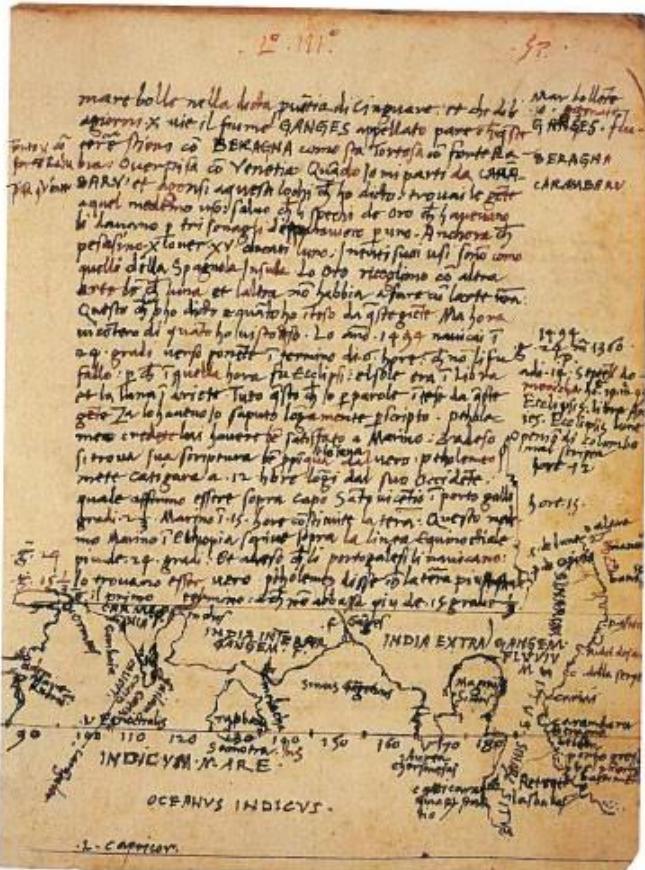


Ptolemaic View

Source: Scientific American, 1990s

By underestimating the Earth's circumference [perhaps by converting the units of measurements wrongly, And by overestimating the extent of China to the east [like Martin Behaim perhaps in an effort to get all of the thousands of islands that Marco Polo said lay off its coast], Columbus got the size of the Atlantic wrong – importantly he thought he only had 4,000 km to sail, instead of 14,000

A sketch by Columbus' son about where they thought they'd gone (Source: Gomez)



Columbus

- An important thing to note about Columbus was that to his dying day he never grasped the fact that he had reached the New World.
- He retains a medieval view of world.
- He continued to believe that he had reached China, Japan, the Far East and source of spices
- “Evidence” he used:
- **Pearls** (only from Asia, he thought) found off Costa Rica
- Types of **rhubarb** (he thought) found on Cuba
- **Magnetic deviations** (off American coast) could be signs of Garden of Eden (off Asian coast in TO maps)