

Early Exploration and Cartography

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Maps of Early Exploration

It is a widely known fact that during the days of early exploration, daring seamen frequently told tales of magnificent, distant lands. Explorers such as Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus and Hernando De Soto, are famously known for their adventurous expeditions and courage in the face of many challenges preventing wide scale exploration. Exploration provided a sense of conquering the unknown and expanding a country's territory. Some early pioneers even disbursed decades creating detailed maps of the foreign lands that they explored. However, the assumption that the earth was flat hindered progress and branded many maps as too inaccurate. Early exploration was essential for country development on a global scale. This was especially factual, when considering Great Britain, Spain and France's unquenched hunger for more land.

Claudius Ptolemy, who was an astronomer, mathematician, and geographer, who lived from 85–165 CE, was famous for his contributions to the Cartography industry. People, who did not have much experience or knowledge of vast continents between Europe and Asia, needed a sense of reliability when seafaring. Mapmaking or cartography became widely used by voyagers because it allowed them to steer their way through the seas more accurately. They also saved time and could discover more lands in less time. In fact, quoted from "gallery.sjsu.edu", "The

first organized and systematic studies of Cartography were accomplished by Claudius Ptolemy (pronounced 'tawlemy') in the Second century A.D.” Claudius diligently recorded his findings concerning the earth and the heavens into the book entitled the Geographia. However, real geographic epitomes did not take place until the 15th and 16th centuries. Within these centuries, more technological advancements took place.

In ancient times of the past, our planet was seen as a flat disc shaped world by various astronomers. Captains would literally, fear falling off the edge of the Earth into a raging waterfall. This assumption alone has been the barrier that once prevented numerous sailors from going out to sea in the first place. The Earth was also seen as the focal point of the universe at once period. However, eventually with the help of people who dared to be different, such as Galileo, humanity has come to its senses with most cartography. Although he was ultimately prohibited to teach his theories regarding the shape of earth, he was known for his methods of attempting to prove them. One well-known experiment is when he drops the objects from the tower of Pisa. The Earth's shape on early maps was an essential variable when explorers needed to sail their courses and voyages with better accuracy.

As early exploration progressed into the Age of Exploration sailors, and seamen in the cartography field, began to use more modernized tools and gadgets to make sailing a more proficient experience. Tools such as the caravel, astrolabe, magnetic compass, lead lines and hour-glasses all contributed to the Age of exploration in their own way. A caravel was simply a large, fast ship. With faster ships, sailors could map out more land in a less amount of time. An Astrolabe was an angle and altitude-measuring tool. The magnetic compass was a compass that had a magnetized needle supporting a magnetic card. Surprisingly, magnetic compasses showed from four to eight directions. Lead lines were very important tools because they helped mariners

and surveyors measure the depths of the ocean. Sand hour-glasses and other time-telling tools were some of the most important advancements, because they allowed people to count time down instead of the usual counting up.

One famous explorer, who will long be remembered because of the swimming pool game named after him, is Marco Polo. This brave adventurer was born in Venice, Italy in 1254. When he became 17, he began an expedition with his uncle and father along the Silk Road. They advanced towards the Mongolian capital of Shang-tu. The long trek lasted for over three years. During the journey they surpassed wide-ranging deserts and colossal elevations where mountain peaks lingered. When they finally reached their destination, the descendent of Genghis Khan, Kublai Khan greeted them to his Shang-tu summer palace. As he became a servant of the Khan dynasty he traveled all over the Mongol Empire.

Although he received much honor and respect when he made it to Shang-tu, his voyage back home was not so pleasant. Originally he was not allowed to return home because Kublai enjoyed his company so much. He wanted to ensure that Marco was happy and well taken care of. Cited from page 14 of the Scholastic Atlas of Exploration, “the most important of the Khan’s servants carried a gold tablet. This was a sign to show people that the khan’s servants could go wherever they pleased and that people had to supply them with fresh horses, food, shelter, and any other help they needed. Marco Polo, his father and uncle carried one of these gold tablets with them whenever they traveled.” Unfortunately, when he was finally allowed to go homeward, Venice was at war with the people of Genoese. Polo was captured and spent years in prison.

As years passed by he began to pass the time by describing his many adventures in China to his fellow inmate Rustichello. It was because of this down time that his entire journey to China was remembered and recorded in great detail. Tales about Western coal, gun power, porcelain, printing, paper money, and silk. He also told stories of the exotic animals that he came in contact with during voyages. Marco saw tigers with strange striped patterns, “small men with tails” and many other animals that were included in his research archives. Marco Polo may have been inspired to explore and map out Asian lands, because he liked to see new things and experience new cultures. Although he perished in 1324, at the age of 70, his descriptions of Asia as a tremendous land of wealth inspired people to seriously ponder ways to get to Asia.

Among the many explorers, John Cabot was widely known for his voyage from Bristol, England, to the coast of America north of Nova Scotia across the North Atlantic Ocean. He was born around 1450 in Genoa, and moved to Venice in the early 1460s. It is assumed that he worked as a merchant in the spice trade of the Eastern Mediterranean, otherwise known as the Levant. He may have even traveled as far as Mecca. John studied Cartography and navigation. He was intrigued by the opportunity of reaching rich bazaars of Asia by sailing in a westward direction, in the same way Christopher Columbus was.

Cabot’s first voyage was endorsed and sponsored by King Henry VII, in 1496. It was going to be a simple “expedition of discovery” that would provide goods for sale on the English market. John sailed out of Bristol on the small ship named “Matthew” in May 1497, with a crew of 18 men. The band of explorers landed in North America on June 24. Although the exact location is unclear, According to various sources it is believed that they may have been in southern Labrador, the island of Newfoundland or Cape Breton Island. He took possession of the

territory for King Henry himself, but he hoisted both the English and Venetian flags.
(History.com)

Unfortunately, John Cabot's second voyage was not as successful as his first. It is very common for explorers to make one too many expeditions. In the process they have possibilities of failure or in some cases death. In 1497, Cabot asked King Henry to sponsor a second expedition across the North Atlantic. This time, he would continue westward from his first landfall until he reached the island of Cipangu or modern day Japan. In February 1498, his majesty issued patent letters for the second voyage, so Cabot set sail with about five ships and 200 men. It was believed that the ships had been caught in a severe storm, and by 1499, Cabot himself was anticipated to have deceased at sea. (History.com)

When thinking about early exploration one of the most common names that comes to mind is in fact, Christopher Columbus. He was born a curious Genoese child in 1451, and dreamed of sailing the seas. His dreams became a reality when he began seafaring adventures with his mapmaker brother at age 14. These brief smaller adventures helped to give Columbus the idea of bringing back precious silks and spices from Asia across the Atlantic Ocean. He is famous for discovering the "Americas". Unfortunately, he was technically not the first to land in America. The early Vikings, who also explored various unknown lands were said to have discovered it. In his time period it was a time of new ideas in Europe. This is why it was called the Renaissance.

According to the Scholastic Atlas of Exploration Christopher Columbus was known for using a copy of a Greek map. The Greeks were known for making the first "accurate" maps. Maps from other civilizations such as the Babylonians or Egyptians invented sections that they

didn't know. However the Greeks would carefully chart out everything needed on their maps to insure accuracy. Columbus used this map because it was still the most accurate even though it more than a thousand years old. It was called the Ptolemy named after Claudius Ptolemy.

After 33 long days of oceangoing Christopher Columbus' ship landed on October 12th, 1492 on a small island coast in the Bahamas. Even though there were already native inhabitants on the island he and his crew proudly carried Spanish flags and claimed the shores for Spain. The native people of the island were called the Arawak people. In the favor of Columbus they were generous and peace-loving. In fact, they were even happy to share their food and possessions with the fascinating visitors.

Nevertheless the Spaniards developed the sense of greed and began to steal cinnamon, cotton, and valuable stones. The appetite for more did not stop here. They later began to take captives from the islands to sell as slaves. Suffering for the Arawak people did not end there. Foreign diseases were also being transferred by the Spaniards. Smallpox was one of the most common diseases acquired from Columbus' crew. After just fifty years after the voyage set sail Hispaniola's population of about 250,000 had died out. (Starkey 21)

Another famous explorer who was well known for his voyages was Ponce de Leon. He along with Vasco Nunez de Balboa, and James Cook were explorers of the Pacific Ocean. (Oleksy 19) Oftentimes multiple explorers were assigned to chart the same area so that the maps created could be as accurate as possible. There was less room for mistakes when you were held accountable by other cartographers who mapped the same territories. Born into Spanish dignity in 1460, Juan Ponce de León was another curious explorer who hunted adventure. Some historians believe he may have accompanied Christopher Columbus on his 1493 expedition to

the New World. A decade later, he worked as governor of the eastern province of Hispaniola. During this occupation he decided to explore a nearby island, which later became Puerto Rico.

Above all other quests he was in pursuit of a rumored fountain of youth located on the island known as Bimini. According to legend if one drank from the fountain of youth they would have eternal life. De León led an expedition to the coast of present day Florida in 1513. Thinking it was the island he sought, he sailed back to colonize the region in 1521, but was gravely wounded in a Native American attack soon after his arrival. Although he never did drink from the legendary fountain he did however become immortalized and remembered as a part of history. (History.com)

Out of the multiple legendary explorers, Vasco Nunez De Balboa was one explorer who claimed a body of water. “The Spanish soldier Vasco Nunez de balboa heard stories about a land where men ride camels and even the cooking pots are made of gold. A great ocean washed the shores of this land.”(Vail 27) Balboa and his crew of 190 men, of which Francisco Pizarro was included, journeyed to discover the special sea. With the constant pace of one mile per day, they conquered highlands, forests, flooding waterways, and even marshes. When they finally surpassed the last mountain and tasted the salty waters of the shore they were overjoyed. Many men died from malaria. Some even died due to Native American conflicts. However above all the odds they team made it to their goal. Balboa named the ocean “the south sea”.

Another well-known explorer is Hernando De Soto. De Soto is primarily famous for helping to conquer the Inca Empire in the New World. He was also know for leading the first European expedition across the Mississippi River. Growing up in the province of Extremadura, Spain, De Soto dreamed of one day designing and constructing his own automobile. Although he

never lived to accomplish this task, designs that he had sketched were discovered and later used as a model for the first De Soto automobile. Hernando acted in a realistic manor and put exploring before inventing. He began this career very early in the tropical rain forest of present day Panama. In the mid 1530's De Soto, who was by now an excellent soldier and horseman, received a fax from another famous explorer, Francisco Pizzaro, to come join him in Peru to defeat the Inca Indians. Through schemes and deceitfulness, they managed to trick the Incan emperor Atahualpa into an ambush. Although the Incas paid an enormous ransom for their emperor, the Spanish executed him anyway and kept the money. (allaboutexplorers.com) This is an example of how greedy Spain was during the Age of Exploration.

Conclusion, early exploration was essential in order for countries to develop modern borders and territories. Claudius Ptolemy contributed to the first modern world map. As early Catholic teachers assumed that the world was flat, they caused early maps to be flawed and unprecise. Explores such as, Marco Polo were inspired to explore new lands in search of land, resources and adventure. As the period progressed into the Age of Exploration, many sea inventions benefitted mankind. Christopher Columbus did not discover the Americas first. As stated before early Vikings did.

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