Geog 126: Maps in Science and Society

Two great early travelers: Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo

Probably the First Expedition

Ships dispatched from Egypt about 1485 BCE by Queen Hatshepsut to the land of Punt to bring back frankincense, cinnamon, baboons, dogs, and myrrh trees.

A tree from Punt
“Almost two centuries before Columbus, a young Moroccan named Ibn Battuta set off for Mecca. He returned home three decades later as one of history’s great travelers…”

Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta Arabic: أبو عبد الله محمد ابن بطوطس

- b. February 24, 1304; d 1368 or 1377
- Arabian, Berber scholar and judge from a school of Sunni Islamic law
- Known as a traveler and explorer, covered 73,000 miles in 30 years
- Almost the entirety of the known Islamic world and beyond
- North Africa, West Africa, Southern Europe and Eastern Europe in the west, to the Middle East, Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, Southeast Asia and China
The Account

- At the instigation of the Sultan of Morocco, Abu Inan Faris, several years after his return, Ibn Battuta dictated an account of his journeys,
- This account, recorded by Ibn Juzayy and interspersed with the latter’s own comments, is the primary source of information for his adventures
- Book called "السفر و عجائب الأمصار غرباء في النظراء تحفة or A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travelling,"
- Referred to as the Riha, or "Journey"

Sample from the Riha

- Arrival at Alexandria pp. 47-50
- At length on April 5th (1326) we reached Alexandria. It is a beautiful city, well-built and fortified with four gates and a magnificent port. Among all the ports in the world I have seen none to equal it except Kualam [Quilon] and Calicut in India, the port of the infidels [Genoese] at Sudaq [Sudak, in the Crimea] in the land of the Turks, and the port of Zaytun [Canton?] in China, all of which will be described later.
- The famous lighthouse, one of the "wonders of the ancient world"
- I went to see the lighthouse on this occasion and found one of its faces in ruins. It is a very high square building, and its door is above the level of the earth. Opposite the door, and of the same height, is a building from which there is a plank bridge to the door: if this is removed there is no means of entrance. Inside the door is a place for the lighthouse-keeper, and within the lighthouse there are many chambers. The breadth of the passage inside is nine spans and that of the wall ten spans; each of the four sides of the lighthouse is 140 spans in breadth. It is situated on a high mound and lies three miles from the city on a long tongue of land which juts out into the sea from close by the city wall, so that the lighthouse cannot be reached by land except from the sea. On my return to the West in the year 750 [1349] I visited the lighthouse again, and found that it had fallen into so ruinous a condition that it was not possible to enter it or climb up to the door.

Major locations visited

- Morocco
- Tangier
- Algeria
- Tlemcen (Tilimsan)
- Miliana
- Algiers
- Tripoli
- Libya
- Tripoli
- Coasts, also called Susah.
- Gabes
- Sfax
- Gabes
- Libya
- Somalia
- Mogadishu
- East Africa
- Kilwa
- Mombasa
- Malai
- Wāliata
- Timbuktu
- Gao
- Annaba, also called Bona.
- Tunisia - At that time Abu Yahya (son of Abu Zajaria) was the sultan of Tunis.
Trade was the life-blood of the Mamluk Empire, and caravanserais ("hotels" for caravan travelers) were built to encourage trade. One caravanserai for Syrian merchants had 360 lodgings above the storerooms and enough space for 4,000 guests at a time! Ibn Battuta would be staying at places like this built along the main trade routes.

Written in the conventional literary style of the time, Ibn Battuta’s Rihla is a comprehensive survey of the personalities, places, governments, customs, and curiosities of the Muslim world in the second quarter of the fourteenth century.
Ibn Battuta’s Tomb in Tangiers

Ibn Battuta’s geographical legacy

Tabula Rogaine, drawn by Al-Idrisi for Roger II of Sicily in 1154
After???
Piri Ries world map of
1513 (Fall of Constantinople,
1453; Rise of Ottoman Empire)

Marco Polo

• 1254-1324
• Most famous Westerner to
travel the Silk Road.
• Journey through Asia lasted
24 years
• Crossed Mongolia to China
• Confidant of Kublai Khan
(1214-1294)
• Traveled the whole of China
• Returned to Venice

The Polo Story Venice

Marco Polo (c.1254 - 1324)
The Outward Journey

• Venetian Marco Polo traveller and writer -- one of the first
westerners to visit China.
• Born c. 1254 into a wealthy merchant family.
• Polo's father and uncle, Niccolò and Maffeo Polo, were jewel
merchants.
• In 1260 they left Venice to travel to the Black Sea, moving onwards
to central Asia and joining a diplomatic mission to the court of Kublai
Khan, the Mongol ruler of China.
• Khan asked the Polo brothers to return to Europe and persuade the
Pope to send scholars.
• Arrived back in Venice in 1269.
• In 1271, they set off again, accompanied by two missionaries arrived
1275
• For the next 17 years the Polos lived in the Emperor's lands.
• Marco was sent on various diplomatic missions which gave him the
opportunity to see many parts of China.
The return journey

• Around 1292, the Polos offered to accompany a Mongol princess who was to become the consort of Arghun Khan in Persia.
• The party sailed from a southern Chinese port via Sumatra, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), southern India, and the Persian Gulf.
• After leaving the princess in Iran, the Polos travelled overland to Constantinople and then to Venice, arriving home in 1295.
• Marco became involved in a naval conflict between Venice and Genoa and in 1298 was captured by the Genoese.
• In prison, his stories attracted the attention of a writer from Pisa, Rustichello, who began to write them down, frequently embellishing them as he went.
• The resulting book was extremely popular and was translated into many languages under a number of titles, including 'The Million', 'Book of the Marvels of the World' and the 'Travels of Marco Polo'.
• After Polo was released he returned to Venice, where he remained for the rest of his life.
• Died 8 January 1324

Kublai Khan

(September 23, 1215- February 18, 1294)
(Mongolian: Хубилай хаан, Chinese: 忽必烈; pinyin: Hūbìlìé Hán), was the fifth and last Great Khan (1260–1294) of the Mongol Empire. In 1271, he founded the Yuan Dynasty, and became the first Yuan emperor.

The Travels

The Travels is divided into four books. Book One describes the lands of the Middle East and Central Asia that Marco encountered on his way to China. Book Two describes China and the court of Kublai Khan. Book Three describes some of the coastal regions of the East: Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and the east coast of Africa. Finally, Book Four describes some of the recent wars among the Mongols and some of the regions of the far north, like Russia.

Sample

• CHAPTER XVIII.
• OF THE CITY OF CAMADI AND ITS RUINS; ALSO TOUCHING THE CARAUNA ROBBERS.
• After you have ridden down hill those two days, you find yourself in a vast plain, and at the beginning thereof there is a city called CAMADI, which formerly was a great and noble place, but now is of little consequence, for the Tartars in their incursions have several times ravaged it. The plain whereof I speak is a very hot region; and the province that we now enter is called REOBARLES. The fruits of the country are dates, pistachios, and apples of Paradise, with others of the like not found in our cold climate. [There are vast numbers of turtledoves, attracted by the abundance of fruits, but the Saracens never take them, for they hold them in abomination.] And on this plain there is a kind of bird called francolin, but different from the francolin of other countries, for their colour is a mixture of black and white, and the feet and beak are vermilion colour.
Polo’s Impact on Cartography

- First new map with names mentioned by Polo was Catalan Atlas of Charles V (1375)
- Mid-fifteenth century the cartographer of Murano, Fra Mauro, meticulously included all of Polo's toponyms in his map of the world
- A heavily annotated copy of Polo's book was among the belongings of Columbus.
- Other thirteenth-century European travelers who journeyed to the court of the Great Khan and wrote books were André de Longjumeau, William of Rubruck and Giovanni da Pian del Carpine with Benedykt Polak

Catalan Atlas 1375
See: http://www.newberry.org/smith/slidesets/ss25.html

Fra Mauro World Map 1457-9
(Shown inverted)
Similarities

- Extensive travel by many means of transportation
- Much toponymy, later taken up by cartographers
- Embellished, especially wrt riches
- Dictated to others
- Highly popular accounts
- Immense impact on world knowledge