Geog 126: Maps in Science and Society

Cartographic Red Herrings: Frobisher’s Gold, Inland Seas and Frisland
“Somebody had blundered”

- Dishonest cartography
- Mistakes
- Stupidity
- Ignorance
- Astonishing persistence
- Irrational belief
Some examples

• Frobishers Gold and the North West Passage
• The strait of Anian and the Inland Sea
• Frisland and the Zeno Brothers
Sir Martin Frobisher (c. 1535 or 1539 – November 22, 1594)
The Irony: It does exist!
The World View

[Map of the world with labels such as Terra Septrionalis, Terra Australis, America, Asia, and others.]

Oceanus Australis

Polus Antarticus
First Voyage

- In search of a Northwest Passage as a trade-route to India and China (referred to at that time as Cathay).
- After 15 years, in 1576 Frobisher convinced the Muscovy Company to license his expedition (first major chartered joint stock company)
- Three barks: the Gabriel and Michael, 20-25 tons each, and a pinnace of ten tons, with a total crew of 35, left Blackwall, via the Shetland Is.
- 28 July, with only Michael left: sighted land
- Reached Frobisher Bay "whether he might carry himself through the same into some open sea on the back side."
- Baffin Island reached 18 August 1576
- Took on a native guide. Several crew held hostage, none returned.
- Returned to London on 9 October.
- Returned with a "piece of a black stone"
- Assayers were unimpressed
- Muscovy Company used this assessment to lobby for investment for another voyage “Company of Cathay”
Second Voyage

- Elizabeth I sold the Royal Navy ship *Ayde* to the Company of Cathay and gave £1000 and a royal charter.
- Company had exclusive right of sailing in every direction but east.
- Frobisher appointed high admiral of all lands and waters that might be discovered.
- *Ayde*, *Gabriel* and *Michael*, with 150 men, including miners, refiners, gentlemen, and soldiers left 25 May 1577.
- Sailed north of Scotland reached Hall's Island at the mouth of Frobisher Bay on 17 July. Took possession in the queen's name.
- "defer the further discovery of the passage until another time."
- Parley and skirmishing with the natives, did not recover the men captured the previous year.
- *Ayde* reached Milford Haven on 23 September. The *Gabriel* and *Michael* later arrived separately at Bristol and Yarmouth.
- Frobisher was received and thanked by the queen at Windsor.
- Much fuss about the 200 tons of ore. Disputes begin.
The Ayde: 200 tons
Third Voyage

- Elizabeth named new land *Meta Incognita*
- Sought a new expedition to establish of a colony of 100 men
- Left Harwich 30 June 1578 with fifteen vessels
- Stopped at south of Greenland
- Frobisher Bay was sighted July 2nd.
- Stormy weather wrecked the barque *Dennis* and drove the fleet into a new strait (Hudson).
- Sailed sixty miles up this "mistaken strait," then returned to Frobisher Bay.
- Tried to create settlement, but dissension and discontent
- Returned August to October
- The ore was taken to a specially constructed smelting plant at Powder Mill Lane in Deptford, Kent.
- Despite many attempts, the ore was apparently not worth smelting and was eventually used in Elizabethan road construction
Countess of Warwick's Island, now Kodlunarn Island.
Ship trench
Reservoir trench
Title page of Hakluyt's (1589) account of Frobisher's voyages
The value: Best’s narrative
Smelting
Later travels

- Went to sea with a trading expedition sailing to the Guinea coast of Africa.
- The following year on another expedition to Guinea he was held hostage for several months before being freed.
- By 1565, he is referred to as Captain Martin Frobisher and in 1571—1572 as being in the public service at sea off the coast of Ireland.
- As an English privateer/pirate, he collected riches from French ships
  - (Drake circumnavigation 1577-80)
- Later knighted for his service in repelling the Spanish Armada in 1588
- Frobisher was charged with piracy at least three times, although the cases never went to trial.
The Spanish Armada: 1588
Best’s Map: 1578+
George Best

• Sailed with Frobisher as navigator on the second voyage in 1577
• Best’s narratives of the voyages, first published in 1578 passed through several editions.
• "The Three Voyages of Martin Frobisher" by George Best was edited from the original 1578 text by Stefansson (1937).
George Best’s map
William Sanson 1687
De Martini Forbisseri Angli nauigatione in regiones occidentis et septentrionis narratio

historica . . . . Noribergae [Nuremberg], 1580
The Zeno Brothers

- **Nicolò** (c. 1326–c. 1402) and **Antonio Zeno** (died c. 1403)
- Italian navigators from Venice
- Brothers of the Venetian naval hero Carlo Zeno
- Family held the franchise for transportation between Venice and the Holy Land during the Crusades.
- Letters and a map published in the year 1558 by one of Nicolò's descendants, also named Nicolò Zeno.
- Allegedly written by the brothers around 1400, purportedly describe a voyage of exploration in the North Atlantic by a prince named Zichmni
- The letters and map are controversial and are regarded by most historians as a hoax, either by the Zeno brothers themselves or by the descendant who published them
- Nevertheless, Frisland treated as fact for hundreds of years
The letters
The Zeno Map
Zeno map
Mercator, Gerhard, 1512-1594.

"Septentrionalium Terrarum descriptio" [1595].
Wytfliet, Corneille, d. ca. 1597.

"Estotilandia Et Laboratoris Terra" [1597].
Blaeu, Willem Janszoon, 1571-1638.

"Regiones Sub Polo Arctico" [ca. 1638]
Wit, Frederik de, 1630-1706.

"Poli Arctici, et Circumiacentium Terrarum Descriptio Novissima" [ca. 1676]
Islands of the Atlantic: Sansun 1600
Partie de l’Amerique Septentrionale, qui comprend le Canada, la Louisiane, le Labrador, le Groenland, la Nouvelle Angleterre, la Floride &c....., 1776, by Rigobert Bonne and Jean Lattre, Paris
‘PARTIE DE LA CARTE DU CAPITAINE CLUNY AUTEUR D’UN OUVRAGE ANGLOIS INTITULÉ AMERICAN TRAVELLER PUBLIÉE À LONDRES EN 1769’. Northern Western hemisphere on Mercator’s projection showing North America and Europe and the supposed North-West passage between Hudson and Baffin Bay and the Arctic Ocean. A short ‘R. de l’Ouest’ is indicated from the Californian coast inland. Robert de Vaugondy after Cluny’s map of 1769, publ. in Diderot’s
The North West Passage

- First navigated by Roald Amundsen in 1903–1906
- Until 2009, the Arctic pack ice prevented regular marine shipping throughout most of the year
- Climate change has reduced the pack ice
- Contested sovereignty claims over the waters may complicate future shipping through the region
- The Canadian government considers the Northwestern Passages part of Canadian Internal Waters
- United States and various European countries maintain they are an international strait or transit passage, allowing free and unencumbered passage
- Russia has laid claim to the pole by submarine
Summary

- Exploration, discovery and blunders go hand in hand!
- Once a place appears on a map, it is hard to correct
- Examined Frobisher’s gold, Zeno map, North West Passage
- Ironically, NWP now exists!