

II. Europe Before the Age of Discovery

A. What the People of Europe Knew of the World

1. In Ancient times, a Greek geographer named Ptolemy had created a map of the world that represented all that was known of the world.
 - a) Ptolemy's map showed only Europe, Africa, and Asia — and not very accurately.
 - b) Ptolemy knew nothing of the Americas.
2. Most European knew nothing of the world around them, and rarely left home, but some, religious travelers called “pilgrims,” made their way to the Holy Land (the place where Jesus had lived, which is called Israel today.)
3. Then the Christians of Europe decided to conquer the Holy Land from the Muslims in a series of wars known as the *Crusades*, it was the first time that large groups of Europeans actually left Europe for another part of the world.

B. Marco Polo and Interest in Asia

1. The Europeans living in areas around the Holy Land during the time of the Crusades were conquered by the Mongols, whose vast empire stretched from Mongolia and China all the way to Eastern Europe.
2. Among these Europeans was the Polo family, merchants from the Italian city of Venice.
3. Niccolo and Mafeo Polo were invited to meet with the Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan in the far eastern part of the Empire.
4. When they met him, he became interested in Christianity and he sent the Polos back to Europe to bring back priests to teach the Mongols about Christianity.
5. On the return trip to Asia, Niccolo brought his son Marco.
6. This time, the Polos stayed in China for 17 years, in the service of the Emperor.
7. Upon their return to Europe people could hardly believe the stories the Polos told of Asia, but the story of Marco Polo's travels was written as a book and became a popular story that increased people's interest in the world outside Europe.

III. The Age of Discovery (1415-1607)

A. Portuguese Exploration under Prince Henry “The Navigator”

1. Portugal Takes the Lead
 - a) Portugal is the country that started the “Age of Discovery” (the period in history that involved a great wave of exploration by Europeans.)
 - b) Portugal's king wanted to enrich his country in order to stay independent from his powerful neighbor, the kingdom of Castile.
 - c) Portugal wanted to trade with Asia, but Portugal was outside the Mediterranean, its merchants would have to compete with the Italian merchants there, and the Portuguese preferred to make war on Muslims, rather than trade with them.
2. Prince Henry
 - a) In 1415, the King's son, Prince Henry, led an expedition to conquer the Muslim city of Ceuta in northern Africa.
 - b) There he learned more about Africa, and from ancient geographers, he learned that it might be possible to sail through or around it to Asia.
 - c) For over 40 years, Portuguese sailors under Prince Henry then worked on this project, slowly creeping past Cape Verde (the westernmost point of Africa), and the equator.
 - d) A route to Asia was not found during Prince Henry's life, but the Age of Discovery had begun because Europeans had finally started to explore the world again after the Dark Ages.