

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.
 - b) Ptolemy did not really know the shape of Africa or Asia.
 - c) Ptolemy did not know of anything west of Europe.
2. Well until 1492, Europeans remained ignorant of the world's geography. Most Europeans had never even left their own corner of Europe.
3. Pilgrims (religious travelers) made their way to the Holy Land (the place where Jesus had lived, and where Israel is today). They brought back stories of what they had seen and journals explaining the routes they had traveled.
4. Then the Christians of Europe decided to conquer the land that had been on the eastern fringe of the Roman Empire, in which Jesus had lived and died. To them it was the "Holy Land," but it was now controlled by Muslims, who had conquered it even before conquering Spain.
5. In a series of wars called the Crusades, large groups of Europeans actually left Europe and started to learn more about the world around them again.

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 vast Mongol Empire that stretched out from Mongolia and China all the way to Eastern Europe.
2. Among them was the Polo family, merchants from the Italian city of Venice.
3. Niccolo and Mafeo Polo were invited to meet with the Mongol Emperor of China, Kublai Khan, in the far eastern part of the Empire.
4. Kublai Khan became interested in Christianity and trade with Europe, 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 Marco Polo's travels still 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 great wave of exploration by Europeans known as the “Age of Discovery.”
 - b) Portugal’s king wanted to enrich his country in order to stay independent from his powerful neighbor, the kingdom of Castile.
 - c) Portugal's main goal was to establish trade with Asia, but this would prove difficult, if it tried to do so by way of the Mediterranean.
 - i) Portugal was outside the Mediterranean, and to reach it, its sailors would have to pass through the Strait of Gibraltar and Muslim-controlled waters.
 - ii) Its merchants would have to compete with the Italian merchants of Genoa and Venice.
 - iii) The Portuguese also preferred to wage 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) He discovered that Ceuta was part of a trading network that extended far into Africa, which could be conquered to Portugal's advantage.
 - c) Prince Henry then established a school of geography and exploration at Sagres in southern Portugal.
 - d) The work of ancient geographers, such as Ptolemy and Al-Idrisi, suggested that the Portuguese might be able to sail through Africa (on the Western Nile) or around it, to get to Asia.
 - e) Prince Henry’s renewed interest in such questions helped bring about the rebirth of the science of geography. The only way to know was to go out, explore, and strive to better understand the world in a scientific way again, as the Greeks had begun to do so long before.
 - f) Prince Henry ordered his sailors to make the attempt, and for over 40 years, they continued to work on this project, slowly creeping past Cape Verde (the westernmost point of Africa) and the equator.
 - g) A route to Asia was not found during Prince Henry’s life, but the voyages he organized were the first efforts of a new trend of exploration, therefore he is often remembered by the moniker “the Navigator.”