Were the Chinese Here First?

By: Dr. William K. Laidlaw, Jr.

An Essay for Kit Kat Club
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Disclaimer: I'm not a professional historian but a not-for-profit manager who, for the last four years, has worked at an historical society. History is my avocation! Thus the Kit Kat Club rule prohibiting one from writing about one's work doesn't apply the same way to me as it would if I were a trained historian.

Two topics have interested me throughout my life: i.e., animal navigation and geography. This topic blends the two. Plus I like mysteries! In this essay I'm going to expand on a theory of New World discovery, then explore the criticism of that theory and finally I'm going to use this example to comment on the social construction of history.

Background and the Main Assertion

You may have seen a piece in the *Columbus Dispatch* in late October by John Switzer who observed that three cultures visited the "New World" before Columbus. One was the Scandinavians (think about Lief Ericsson) around 1000 AD. Another was the Asians who crossed a land bridge over what is now the Bering Strait about 20,000 years ago. The third visit was attributed to Polynesians who left chicken bones on the South American coast that dated to between 1304 and 1424. Chickens were not found in the New World at that time. Peruvian sweet potatoes were also found in Polynesia so Switzer reported the case was made for multiple pre-Columbian contacts.

Then comes Gavin Menzies, the author of *"1421, The Year China Discovered America"*, who asserts that between the years 1421 and 1423 the Chinese sent four fleets around the world, under the guidance of one man, (Slide 1) to chart the continents and extend their so-called "tribute" international trading system which I'll explain later in this essay. Published in 2002, this book initiated a fascination with the theory that the Chinese

preceded the Europeans to America. The significance is that Europeans were not the first to discover the New World and, when they started their exploration, they had maps and charts that showed them where to sail and where they'd find land.

The man who made this astounding claim is a retired British submariner with 17 years experience including commanding for two years a submarine that followed the routes of the major explorers. He understands ocean currents and winds that drive sailing ships.

Menzies' and the other books I studied are mainly about one man who may well be the world's most accomplished sailor and trader. The man who led this epic voyage was Zheng He, (Slide 2) who was a Muslim from the Mongol territory. He was captured in battle with the Chinese, castrated (by severing the penis and testicles) and assigned to the household of the young ruler-to-be. Zheng He was assigned first to the military and then, after he became a trusted leader of the eunuchs, to the household of the young ruler.

Zheng He (Slide 3) was large (almost 7 ft. tall, weighed about 220 lbs with a waist about five feet in circumference), had a stride like a tiger, a booming voice, and thus was a very commanding personality.

The former ruler had relied on mandarins to run the ministries. The mandarins were elite, educated (studying the writing of Confucius) and valued order and hierarchy. They loathed eunuchs and saw them as usurpers who were ill suited for leadership and people who disturbed the interaction of natural forces.

Mandarins saw farmers as stable members of society and saw merchants and foreigners as people who upset the natural order.

The new ruler, when he took power in 1402, made the eunuchs a more formidable political force. Zheng He became the Grand Eunuch and earned the nickname San Bao, "Three Treasures" which referred to the reasons for existence of the Buddhist faith: Buddha, doctrine and meditation. Zheng He placed his severed private parts in a casket

containing his “manhood treasures” that would accompany him to the next world. But in his life on earth, he was sworn to be a loyal, faithful servant of his master, the third Ming emperor. Remember the name “San Bao”.

Within 12 months (1403), though he’d been a military leader on land but never been to sea, Zheng He was appointed Commander-in-Chief of one of the largest fleets ever built. He initiated plans to expand greatly the production capacity of the Nanjing shipyards and began to make plans for an ambitious sailing program. In all, he would make seven epic voyages for the emperor (these would reportedly become to be known as “*The Seven Voyages of Sinbad*” as his name was transliterated into Arabian and then into western culture).

China (along with the Arabs, Indians and others) had plied the South China Sea and Indian Ocean for over 900 years before the Ming Dynasty came to power in the late 14th century. Chinese foreign policy was based more on trade, influence and bribery than on conflict and colonization, as was the case with the Europeans who succeeded them as rulers of the seas starting 100 years later.

Massive armadas of treasure ships were launched every few years from 900 to 1400 AD accompanied by supply and troop ships that traveled the oceans between China and the east coast of Africa carrying out a “tribute” system. The Ming sailors would take as gifts precious goods such as porcelain and silk to present to the leaders of countries they visited. In return they received a vast array of exotic gifts ranging from lions, elephants, parrots, gold-spotted leopards, ostriches and giraffes to gold cloth, hardwood, incense, tin and cardamom. The Chinese were careful to give away more in value than they received so the foreign countries would be in their debt and so the Chinese could feel superior.

Foreign rulers who accepted the emperor’s leadership were granted titles, protection and trade missions. They were brought by the fleet to the Chinese capital for special events for up to a year’s stay and treated as royalty. By paying “tribute” to the emperor, they

earned special privileges from the Chinese and were granted favorable trade status and safe travel. Thus the term “tribute system”.

Prior to the ambitious Ming expeditions, the seas had been filled with pirates who made trade unsafe and uncertain. The massive Chinese fleets squashed the pirates, eradicating most of the danger so trade could flourish, especially among those nations and cities that paid fealty to the Chinese emperor.

The emperor’s goals were audacious! He moved the capital from Nanjing to Beijing, repaired the Great Wall, rebuilt the Grand Canal (over 1800 kilometers long), fought the Mongols in the North and the Vietnamese in the South and set out to dominate world trade via the oceans while charting the continents and improving navigational techniques. All of these projects extracted great burdens on the people of China over many years and they were not well accepted by the Mandarins who remained in many of the ministries.

With a personal interest in astronomy, the emperor capitalized on the 2000-year experience of Chinese astronomers. Over the millennia, they mapped 1400 stars, (Slide 4) determined the world was round, learned of the north and south poles in the 3rd century BC, and charted the arrival of Halley’s comet since 240 BC. They could predict both solar and lunar eclipses. Observatories were erected at many of the sites visited frequently by their fleets. The practical application was to improve navigation. So it’s not a stretch to assert the Chinese had the skill and knowledge to sail great distances.

In 1403 the emperor commissioned 1681 new ships that would bring the total fleet to 3500 ships. 250 of the new ships were nine-masted treasure ships of up to 440 feet in length (Slide 5) and 180 feet in width. By comparison, the Santa Maria was 85 feet long (Slide 6). In all there were 1350 patrol ships, 1350 combat vessels, 400 larger warships, and 400 freighters for transporting horses, grain and water for the fleet with a capacity to carry 28,000 people. Their task was to sail the world, chart continents, and establish new trade sources. When they arrived in port (Slide 7) they made an impression.

Menzies became interested in this subject while reviewing maps at the James Ford Bell library at the University of Minnesota in 1993. A 1424 map attributed to a Venetian

cartographer showed Europe and part of Africa with coastlines very accurately drawn: i.e., more precise then Menzies expected, based on his knowledge of sea charts and world maps derived from a career in the British Royal Navy. But the most interesting feature was a group of four islands in the western Atlantic Ocean where no islands existed and with names that didn't correspond to modern day places. At first he attributed their location to the Europeans' failure to calculate longitude (i.e., distance east and west), for the English didn't develop that skill until John Harrison invented the chronometer in the middle of the 18th Century, some three hundred years later.

Upon further examination, Menzies concluded the two largest of the four islands were Puerto Rico and Guadeloupe. There were far too many points of similarity (geographic features and name places) to be coincidence, but that was 70 years before Columbus reached the Caribbean (the early 1420s vs. 1492). He wondered who could have created these maps, for whoever it was would have had to both sail to many parts of the world, implementing skilled navigation that westerners thought didn't exist in that era, and they would have had to stay at sea much longer than was thought possible in the 13th to 14th centuries.

The texts from which we learned our world explorer history taught about the great explorers such as:

- Bartolomeu Dias (c. 1450-1500) who left Portugal in 1487 and was the first man to round the Cape of Good Hope, the southern tip of Africa.
- Vasco da Gama (c. 1469-1525). Following Dias' wake ten years later (1497) he sailed up the east coast of Africa, crossed the Indian Ocean to India and opened the first sea route for spice trade.
- Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) who on October 12, 1492, sighted land in the modern Bahamian Islands, believing he had reached Asia. He, of course, is recorded in history as the first European to view the New World.

- Ferdinand Magellan (c. 1480-1521) who is given credit for discovering the strait between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and for circumnavigating the globe.

Who created the maps these explorers used?

Menzies rules out the other nations or states that could have mustered the resources to mount such an expedition: Venice was in too much disarray, Northern European powers lacked the ships to cross the English Channel at that time, Egypt was enmeshed in Civil War, the Islamic world was disintegrating with the Portuguese invading its north African bases and the Mongol empire was in shambles.

He concluded the only nation with the necessary skill and resources at that time in history was the Chinese. The problem with trying to prove that theory was the Chinese, after 1433, had destroyed nearly all the records and most of the physical evidence of the great voyages. When Zheng He returned from his sixth voyage in 1423, the enabling emperor had died and his successor had decreed in 1424 China would turn inward and renounce international trade and commerce. The Confucian mandarins had returned to favor with the new emperor and had succeeded in convincing him that foreign efforts were a waste of resources and a distraction from spending on more important domestic priorities. In addition, they saw the change of leadership as their chance to unseat from influence the eunuchs such as Zheng He who had held so much sway for more than two decades over the decisions of earlier emperors.

Evidence

What evidence did Menzies and others assert to support their theory that the entire world's oceans and continents were charted by 1423, before the Europeans set out on their voyages of discovery?

He believes four huge Chinese fleets comprised of over 800 vessels sailed around the world between 1421 and 1423 (Slide 8). The Ming fleets visited 3,000 countries, sailed 100,000 miles, enough to sail around world five times, and were away for five years total. They visited Australia, the Americas, and islands in the Pacific Ocean, among other places.

With them were cartographers from Venice and Portugal who made the maps of the voyage, some of which were saved in Europe or made their way out after the new emperor turned China inward.

Niccolo da Conti, a Venetian, was in Calicut (now Calcutta) in 1420 and experienced the Chinese fleet based on his written description. Da Conti's descriptions were nearly identical to those of Zheng He's official chronicler. Da Conti describes his travel with Zheng He's fleet from Calicut to China via Australia.

He also believes, they possessed the capability to sail and chart the world's oceans. He bases that assertion on evidence of centuries of seafaring experience and on the presence of sailing aids such as a 1424 map (Slide 9) showing the island Antilia (modern Puerto Rico), a 1428 map (Slide 10) showing both the east and west coasts of Africa plus six other maps from the mid-15th to 16th centuries indicating the world had been mapped to show coastlines, major rivers of the world, the Straits of Magellan and exotic animals drawn in the margins that were obviously from distant lands like Australia and Patagonia.

Menzies also says the Europeans sailed with maps showing with accuracy their destinations. For example, Columbus possessed an excerpt of a 1428 chart showing the island of Antilia (Puerto Rico). Columbus also mentions in his logs seeing "drawings and mappae mundi" (a Portuguese map of the world) indicating Antilia could be found in a certain region.

Even Samuel Eliot Morrison, the Columbus biographer who wrote "*Admiral of the Ocean Sea"*, reported Columbus had a 1492 map (Slide 11) by a German geographer that

contained references to Chinese mountains and to Japan (*Cipangu*) located in what we know as the Caribbean Sea. He asserts that Columbus and the German may have been "collaborators", even though there is no evidence they met. Dias and da Gama (1487 and 1497, respectively) viewed the Cape of Good Hope on a 1459 map. Magellan quelled a 1520 mutiny by telling his sailors there was another strait that led to the Pacific Ocean that he had seen on a marine chart of the King of Portugal.

Determination of latitude, longitude and measuring elapsed time.

The Chinese had developed the compass by 7th century and, using sand in an hourglass, could tell how far they had traveled by dividing the day into ten 2.4-hour segments (Slide 12). They used the North Star to determine latitude in northern hemisphere and they learned how to use Canopus and the Southern Cross to determine the location of the South Pole, and calculate latitude in the southern hemisphere.

The Chinese could also measure elapsed time using gnomons (40 foot high poles that cast a shadow showing the passage of time during daylight hours). By using observation platforms around the world to measure lunar eclipses, Menzies claims, they developed a process for calculating longitude. If you'd like more info on that process, it will be in the electronic version but I can explain during the question period.

- Chinese could also measure elapsed time using gnomons (40 foot high poles that cast a shadow showing the passage of time during daylight hours). The knew the length of a day varied based on latitude, with the shadow varying just over 3.56 inches for each four hundred miles of latitude. Thus they could make correction for north/south position on earth. They also understood the length of the shadow varied with the seasons -- from 12.37 feet at the summer solstice to 76.74 feet at the winter. Thus they could make corrections for day of the year plus location on the earth's surface. Finally the Chinese understood the variation in time caused by the eccentricity of the earth's orbit around the sun. Between 1277 and 1280 they calculated the length of a lunar month so precisely that is was off by less than one second per month.

- Established observation platforms around various oceans to observe lunar eclipses, which they could predict and which occurred every somewhere across the globe every six months. With earth between the sun and the moon, the Chinese observed that moment when the last bit of darkness appears as the first sliver of light comes out from behind the earth. An observer in a new territory and the observer at the home location would determine which major star is transiting the local meridian (that imaginary line extending from the north pole straight overhead to the south pole) at that precise moment. The new territory star is compared to the home star, then the two observers, once

  back in the Chinese capital, measure the elapsed time it takes for the two start to pass the local meridian. That time yields the distance the earth rotated between the two observation points. The earth rotates 360 degrees every 24 hours. If the elapsed time between the two transiting stars were six hours, that gap would represent one quarter of 360 degrees, or 90 degrees. Thus the new territory point would be ¼ of the distance around the world. By repeating this measurement many times at many observation points, the Chinese astronomers could improve their precision of calculating longitude and do it at different latitudes.

Peoples, artifacts and leave-behinds

Other kinds of evidence consisted of people, artifacts and objects left behind by the Chinese explorers. Many peoples of Chinese origin were encountered by the "first" Europeans to visit the New World. Reports included one from Columbus, who was told that "People from Cathay (China) have visited here" when he was in Greenland. There was a 1555 report of a Chinese colony discovered between the Sacramento and Russian Rivers in California.

Paul Chaisson, in "*The Island of Seven Cities"* claims the Chinese established a year-round settlement on Cape Breton Island in Canada. What started out as an investigation of hand-carved rocks lining a walled road to the top of the island led to his conclusion. The two most impressive pieces of evidence are: first, the combined remains of a small

settlement and road with the same width dimensions and construction design as that used in China during and before the Ming Dynasty; second, the local natives (the Mi'kmaq tribe) were the only Indians on this continent with a written language and several of their characters resemble Chinese characters. All this transpired prior to the first Europeans to arrive.

Numerous animals and plants that are native of China preceded the Europeans: the fulvous tree duck that is a poor flyer is originally from India and is found in Brazil; Rhode Island red chickens are native to Asia; other Asiatic chickens appeared in South America; horses were found in South America; plus evidence of various Asiatic plants such as rice; hibiscus; poppy seeds; mulberry trees, and "Yellow Delicious " apples were found in the Americas by archaeologists.

A Chinese junk has been uncovered in the Sacramento River with wood carbon-dated to 1410.

Porcelain has been found in the Pacific Northwest and Magellan recorded more porcelain as he landed at islands in the Pacific Ocean from Leyte to the Spice Islands. He reported in his logs that rulers dressed in silk came to meet him and that they ate off of Ming porcelain plates.

Pre-Columbian Chinese jade has been found at various sites in South America and Mexico plus in mounds in Georgia and Michigan.

Lacquer boxes in Mexico appear to have been produced using an identical process as that developed in China.

The Newport Round Tower is similar in design, and stones similarly carved, to one in China using mortar containing gypsum that is foreign to area. Numerous stone markers with Chinese markings to denote position have been found, including ones in New England (South Peabody and Shutesbury, Mass.)

A slipway for repairing ships was found on Bimini North Island, Bahamas, composed of a combination of natural rocks and what appears to be hull ballast from ships much like the ballast used in 15th C. Chinese ships.

Linguistics

There are Peruvian villagers living three miles apart who understand Chinese when spoken to them but do not understand each others' patois.

There are 95 geographical names in Peru that are Chinese words but have no meaning in the local languages.

There also are 130 geographical names in Peru that correspond to names in China. Both "Peru" (white mist) and "Chile" (dependent territory) have meaning in Chinese.

Genetic

There is evidence that DNA of Native Americans is from Asia, but Menzies can't prove when the transfer happened – it could have happened 10 – 12,000 years ago via the land bridge across the Bering Strait. The dating of mutation rates it too controversial on which to base any "recent" (i.e., 15th C.) transfer. The DNA of natives of Greenland and of Alaska are very similar to each other and to the Chinese, though they reside 3000 miles apart. If "Chinese" DNA were transferred to this continent across the Bering Strait, then made it's way across 3000 miles of Northern Canada, there would be more peoples in between with similar DNA. The similarity of DNA of natives of Alaska and Greenland suggests the gene flow from Asia happened at about the same time and arrived via sea.

Certain diseases that cannot survive extremely cold conditions of frozen Bering Strait crossings may be evidence. These include, among others, hookworm and roundworm, where the eggs require warm, moist conditions for survival. The DNA of these particular

diseases is similar to that originating in Asia and is unlike the DNA of other similar diseases found in the Americas.

Counter-evidence and other challenges to the assertion the Chinese discovered America.

So that is a summary of the evidence from Menzies and others who purport that the Chinese traveled to the New World before the Europeans. But many of Menzies' claims are not backed up by hard evidence. They constitute circumstantial evidence, exhibit leaps of logic and generally are difficult, if not impossible, to prove. A few examples follow.

Menzies rules out various cultures as not having sufficient naval strength or resources to mount a worldwide navigation in the 15th century and asserts the Chinese were the only ones who could have done it. Without proof the Chinese made the specific voyage, his assertion is only that.

He claims the fleet must have circumnavigated the globe because one of the carved stone tablets erected by Zheng He said they visited 3000 countries. Because of the similarity of the Chinese characters for 100 and 1000, it appears the real number is 300 countries. That number would be more in line with visiting states bordering the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, the maximum distance other authors believe he sailed.

Menzies bases a lot of inference on the participation by Niccolo da Conti sailing with the fleet from Calicut throughout the Indian Ocean, to Australia and back to China. Da Conti, while he described one Chinese junk, did not say he saw the entire fleet, much less that he sailed on it. He supposedly gave information to a mapmaker, but there was only one Chinese ship depicted on that map, not a fleet.

Menzies turned islands in the Caribbean 90 and 180 degrees, and some island positions were swapped relative to where those islands are today, to make them fit his theory.

Menzies attributes that inaccuracy to a mapmaker having transcribed the maps incorrectly.

If the Chinese had "discovered" the islands, one would think there would be Chinese names on some of them, but there are none. All names seem to be Portuguese.

The translation Menzies uses to confirm that one island had volcanoes includes terms that scholars in 15th Century Portuguese say were never used that way at that time.

Experts claim there is geological evidence the underwater road on Bimini is composed of natural stones but no archeological evidence the stones were man made. Menzies claims there were cement blocks with Chinese dimensions and ship markings on them but they are no longer available to support his contention. He can't prove any of the remaining stones are Chinese in origin.

Chinese scholars say there is no evidence in the few records they have, including stone tablets erected by Zheng He, that the Chinese calculated longitude. They claim the Chinese didn't know about longitude until Jesuit missionaries brought that information to China 200 (sic) years later.

The Newport Rhode Island Tower was included in the 1677 will of Benedict Arnold as his stone-built windmill. It's possible Arnold adapted a pre-existing tower to a windmill from one he found there, but his records don't imply that fabrication. To date there has been no conclusive proof the mortar consisted of Chinese materials.

Chinese records don't say they sailed beyond the Cape of Good Hope.

Menzies seems to be using circular logic when he says Columbus died thinking he had sailed to Cathay (China) because he met people where he visited who were Chinese. Columbus may have called them Chinese because he thought he was in China!

Scholars using existing source material make the case for seven voyages of Zheng He, but report he went no farther than India on three, Hormuz on one and the east coast of Africa on three, including the critical sixth voyage Menzies claims went around the world.

Conclusion

The Chinese were no doubt a formidable naval force in the 15th century and could have sailed around the world mapping coastlines and exploring continents both north and south of the equator. The lack of original source material, most of which was destroyed by the succeeding emperor and his Mandarin minions, makes proving those assertions difficult. The Chinese bureaucracy didn't write the definitive history of that period until 100 years later, by which time much of what was reported could have been changed to fit what was politically correct. By that time the eunuchs were long gone and the Confucian mandarins were of paramount influence and thus could write the record in such a way as to make sure there was no reversion to international exploration by sea.

Some say that lack of hard evidence enables Menzies and others to speculate theories that are unsupportable and that he's taking unfair advantage of that void.

Many of the assertions pose interesting mysteries that are hard to explain, and the existing evidence does often point to a Chinese, or at least Asian, connection. The difficulty is that the timing of the interaction can't be pinned down. It could have taken place centuries prior to 1421 or it could have been afterwards, including post-Columbian. Not knowing for sure does not lead to a firm conclusion that the Chinese influence came from the voyage that took place during 1421 to 1423.

I don't believe the case has been made that Zheng He circumnavigated the globe.

It's possible that Zheng He set the stage for a circumnavigation carried out by others, but that would likely have had to take place before the "new" emperor decreed in 1424 an end to such travels and international contacts. Thus the circumstantial evidence remains

seductive, since there are so many unanswered questions, such as the settlements and the DNA questions, that remain to be explored. The initial question, however, remains unanswered: i.e., who made the maps used by the European "discoverers" to find their way?

Social construction of history

The evaluation of assertions the Chinese were here first, as Menzies and others contend, raises interesting questions about how history gets recorded and knowledge dispersed. Social construction asserts that human subjectivity imposes itself on those facts we take to be objective; even those facts we learned as kids in school and have relied upon for decades. Even objective facts can be reinterpreted! Since the records of Zheng He's voyages were mostly destroyed, along with most of the physical evidence, and subsequent Chinese historians had reasons to provide an account that differs from what Menzies asserts, people who want incontrovertible proof are left with little on which they can rely. Mostly the story has not been told. When it is told, to the extent it differs from what we were all taught in western history, it goes up against considerable odds to be incorporated into acceptable world history. Most of the world history we've learned comes from Westerners who socially constructed it, recorded it and who had the resources to spread their messages via books and other channels so those accounts became embedded in our lore. The burden to alter the way history is recorded is on those who want to provide a different interpretation of what happened, and that burden is great.

We may take for granted that most of what we know about Christopher Columbus is true, but much of it was fabricated about 100 years after his voyages and, therefore, the accuracy of what is related is somewhat questionable in its own right. Morison tells us the Spanish court ignored Columbus following his voyages as he fell out of favor. Thus his story became lost and confused in the intervening years until such time that it became worthwhile to resurrect it in order to enhance the image of Spain once again. By that time, some of the brutal experiences were expunged from the records and not reported in telling the story of the famous 15th century explorer after whom our city is named.

Thus we believe the early stories we learn as being the “official” truth and the only right way to think about the accounts of, in this case, how the New World was discovered. Others were here first, but they didn’t establish permanent settlements nor did they record their adventures for posterity. If they had, we would all have learned more about the Vikings, the Polynesians and, perhaps, even the Chinese explorers who came before. And if the Chinese emperor hadn’t decided to pull his society inwards, perhaps the entire world would have had a greater Chinese influence and this city would go by a different name! Indeed, much of history would have unfolded quite differently if the Chinese were truly here first.

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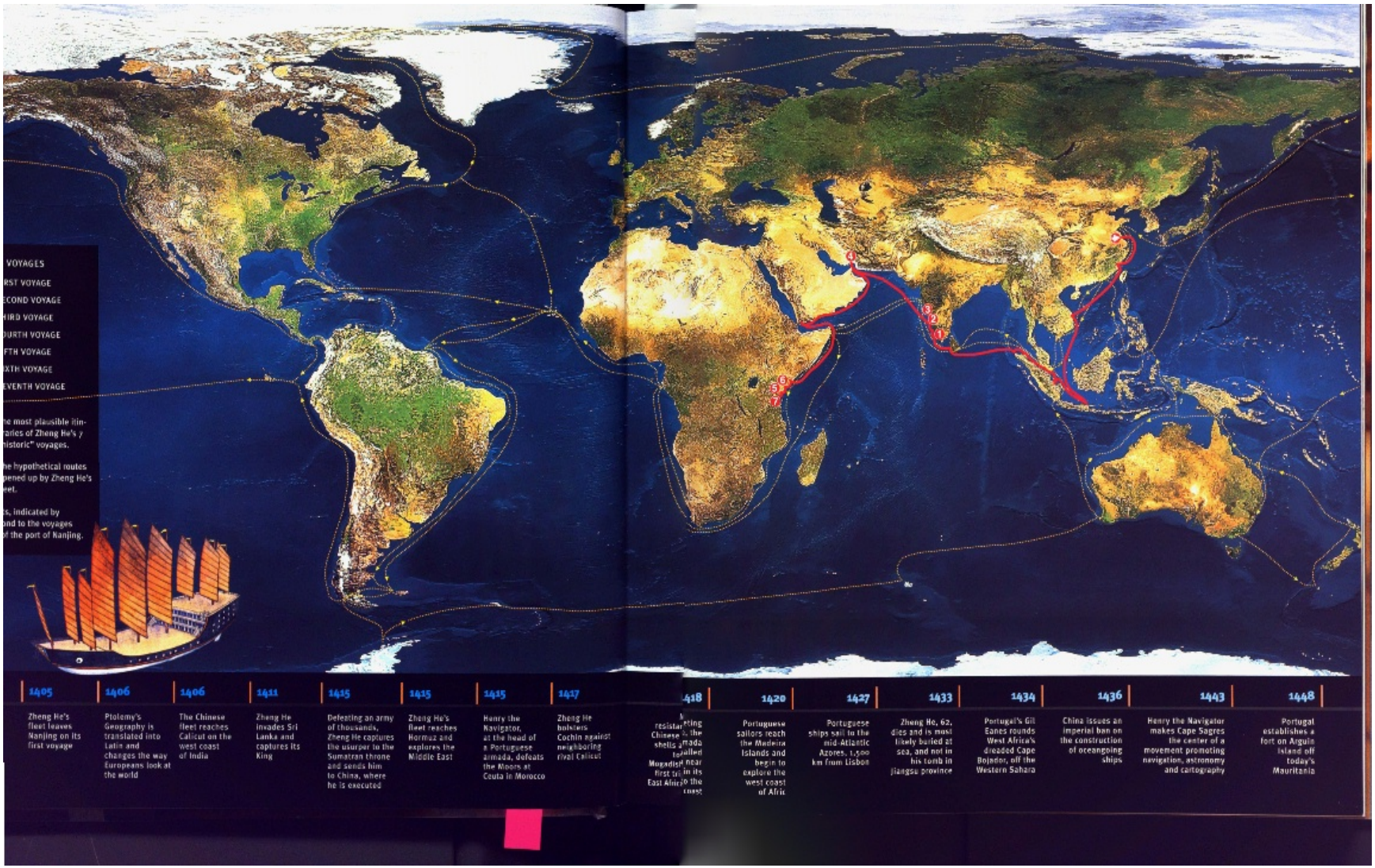
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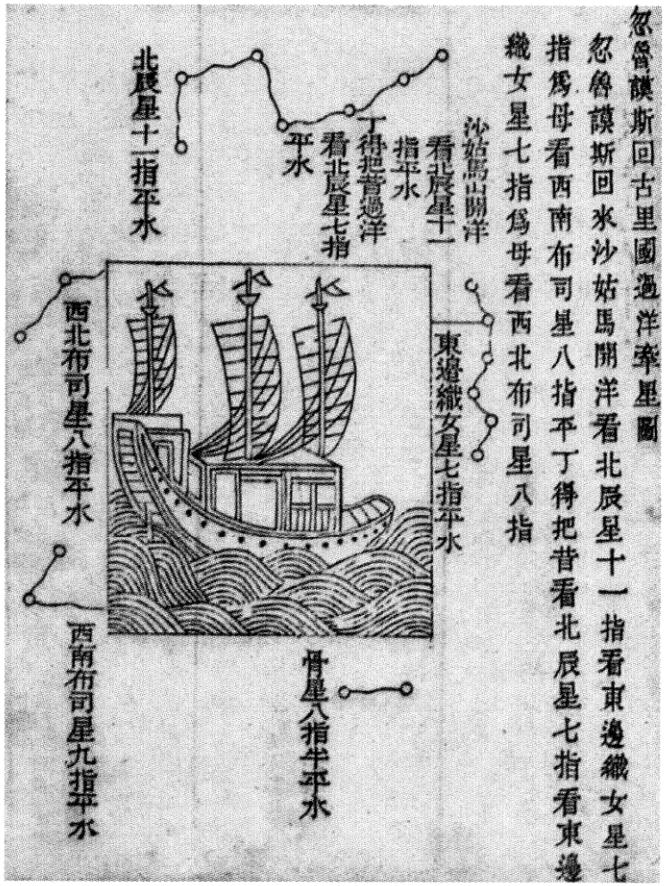
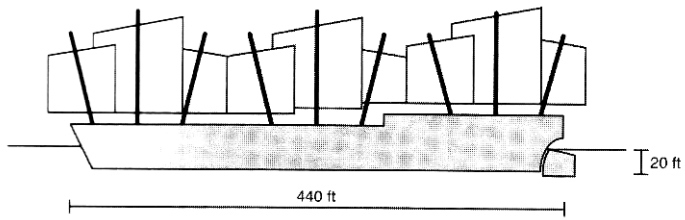
f the port of Nanjing.
1405
Zheng He's fleet leaves Nanjing on its first voyage
1406
Ptolemy's Geography is translated into Latin and changes the way Europeans look at the world
1406
The Chinese fleet reaches Calicut on the west coast of India
1411
Zheng He invades Sri Lanka and captures its King
1415
Defeating an army of thousands, Zheng He captures the usurper to the Sumatran throne and sends him to China, where he is executed
1415
Zheng He's fleet reaches Hormuz and explores the Middle East
1415
Henry the Navigator, at the head of a Portuguese armada, defeats the Moors at Ceuta in Morocco
1417
Zheng He bolsters Cochin against neighboring rival Calicut
1418
1420
Portuguese sailors reach the Madeira Islands and begin to explore the west coast of Afric
1427
Portuguese ships sail to the mid-Atlantic Azores, 1,500 km from Lisbon
1433
Zheng He, 62, dies and is most likely buried at sea, and not in his tomb in Jiangsu province
1434
Portugal's Gil Eanes rounds West Africa's dreaded Cape Bojador, off the Western Sahara
1436
China issues an imperial ban on the construction of oceangoing ships
1443
Henry the Navigator makes Cape Sagres the center of a movement promoting navigation, astronomy and cartography
1448
Portugal establishes a fort on Arguin Island off today's Mauritania


鄭和
ZHENG HE

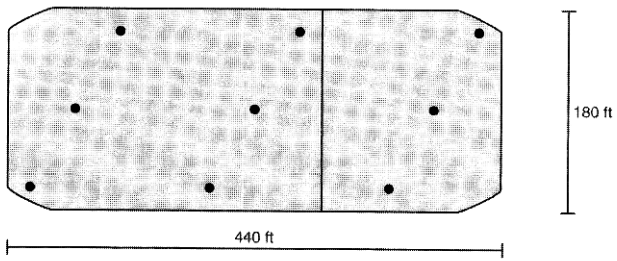


35 A Chinese map drawn up in 1621, known as the Wu Bei Zhi, shows several of the diagrams used for stellar navigation by Zheng He's fleet, such as this one, dedicated to the return route from Hormuz to India.

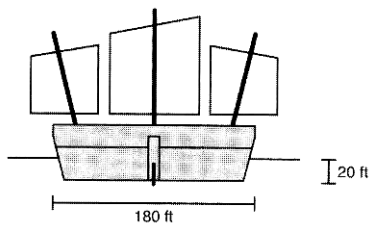
Port Elevation, length in proportion to draught



Beam, in proportion to length

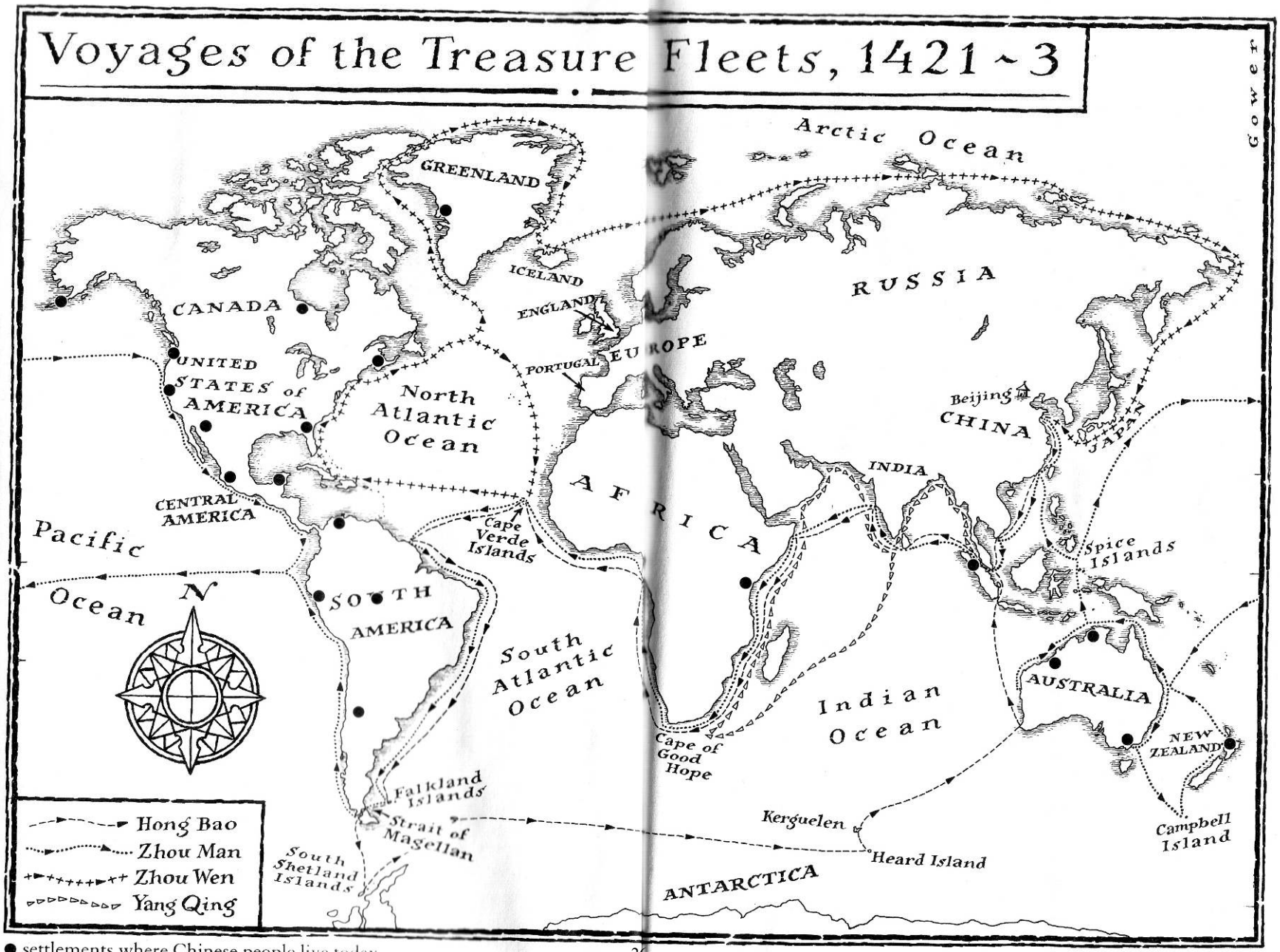


Aft elevation, showing beam in proportion to draught

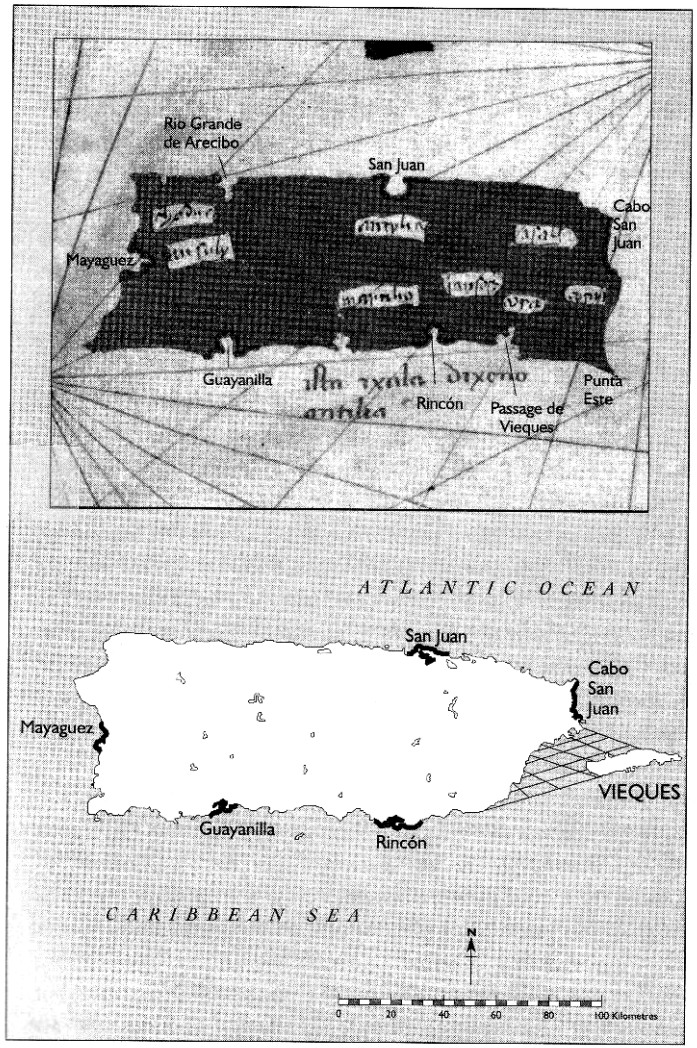


The actual appearance of Zheng He's treasure ships is unknown, but this drawing illustrates the dimensions reported in the sources, along with the possible off-center and off-vertical arrangement of the nine masts. With their broad beams and flat bottoms, the treasure ships would have resembled enormous river barges rather than true oceangoing ships.

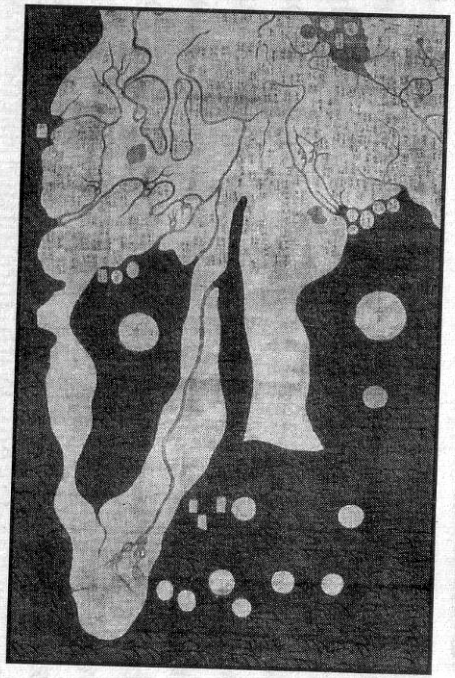
ZHENG HE	CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS	VASCO DA GAMA	FERDINAND MAGELLAN	FRANCIS DRAKE
NATIONALITY **Chinese**	NATIONALITY **Italian by birth - sailed for Spain**	NATIONALITY **Portuguese**	NATIONALITY **Portuguese by birth - sailed for Spain**	NATIONALITY **English**
NUMBER OF VOYAGES **7**	NUMBER OF VOYAGES **4**	NUMBER OF VOYAGES **3**	NUMBER OF VOYAGES **1**	NUMBER OF VOYAGES **9**
DATES OF VOYAGES **1405 -1433**	DATES OF VOYAGES **1492 -1504**	DATES OF VOYAGES **1497 -1524**	DATES OF VOYAGES **1519 -1522**	DATES OF VOYAGES **1567 -1596**
NUMBER OF SHIPS **41 - 317**	NUMBER OF SHIPS **3 - 17**	NUMBER OF SHIPS **4 - 14**	NUMBER OF SHIPS **5**	NUMBER OF SHIPS **2 - 30**
NUMBER OF MEN **27,550-30,000**	NUMBER OF MEN **104-1,200**	NUMBER OF MEN **Unknown**	NUMBER OF MEN **270**	NUMBER OF MEN **166**



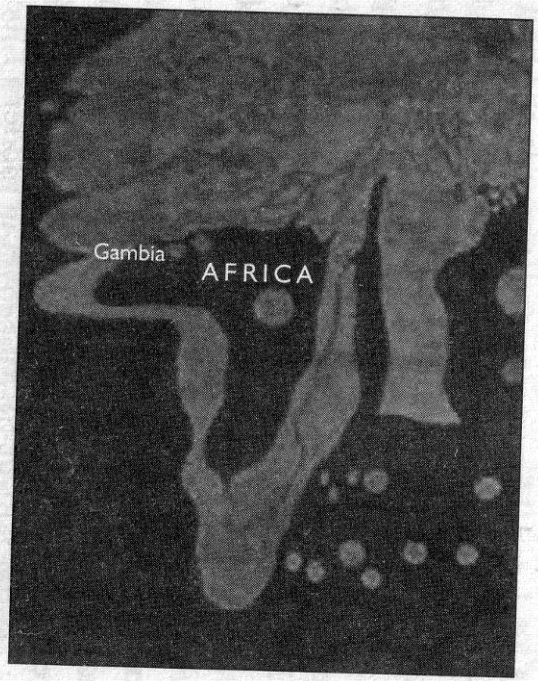
● settlements where Chinese people live today



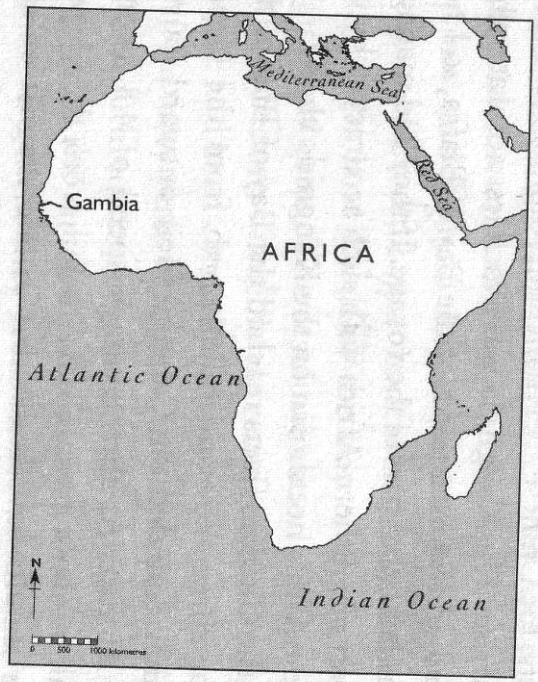
Puerto Rico shown on the Pizzigano map, compared with a modern map.



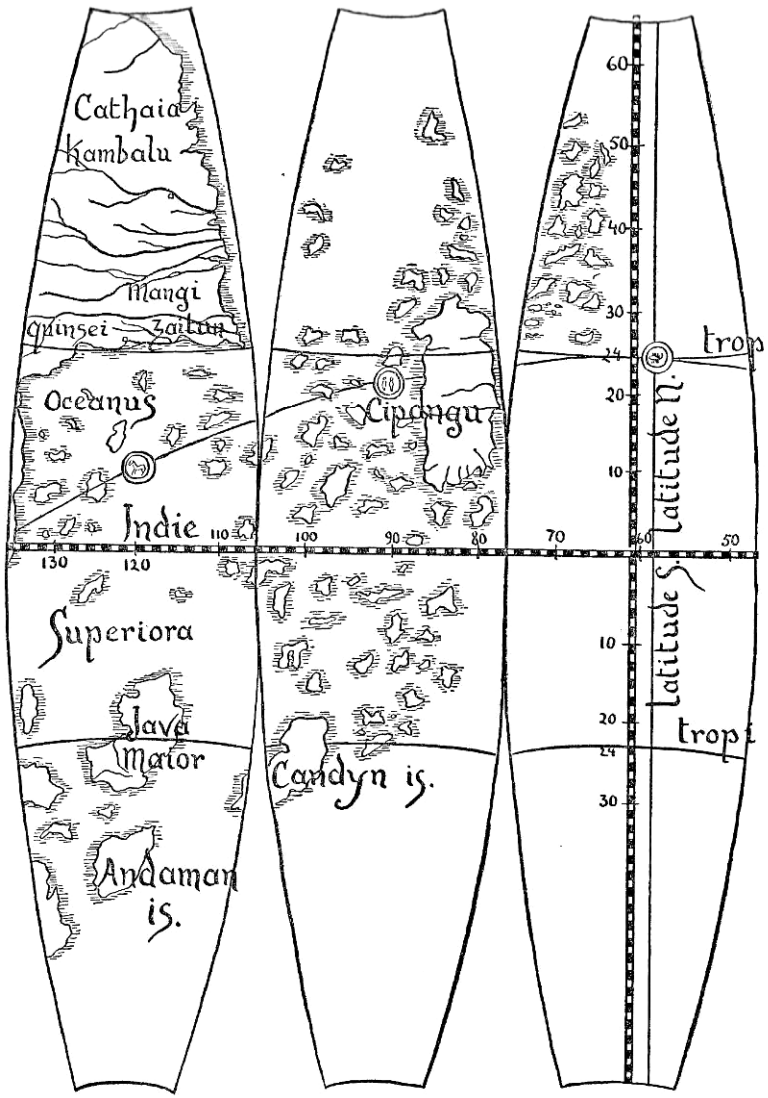
(i) The Kangnido map showingAfrica.



(ii) The Kangnido map corrected for longitude.

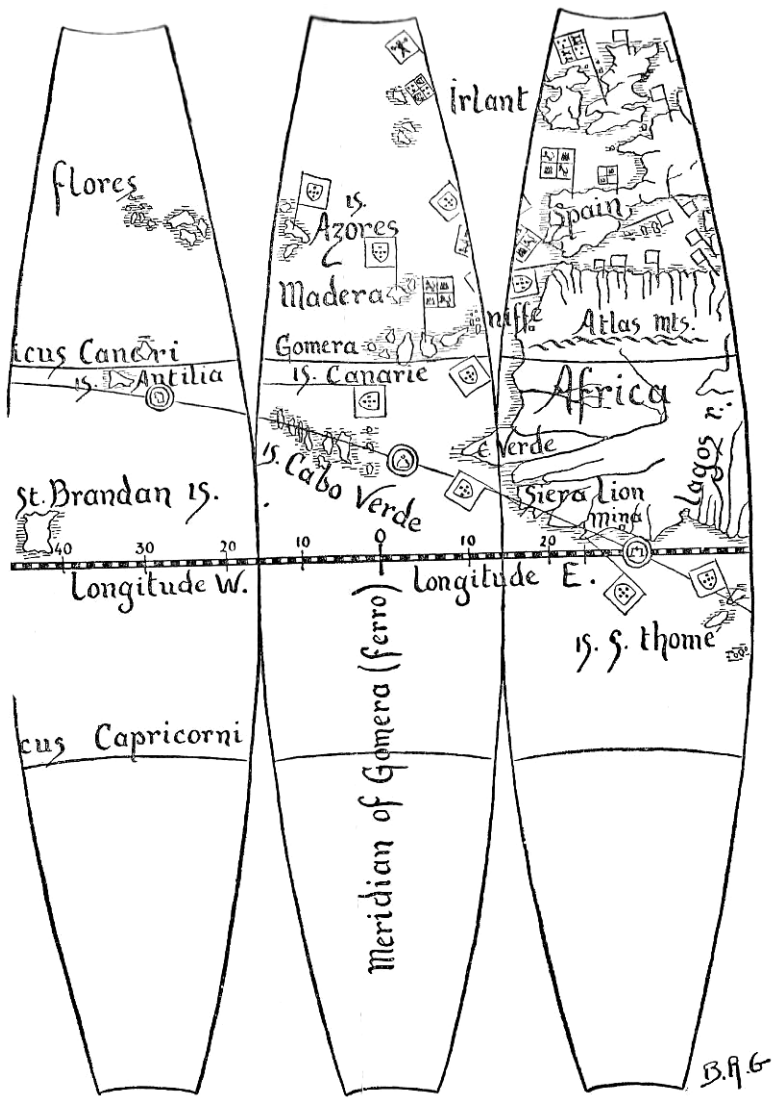


(iii) Modern Africa.



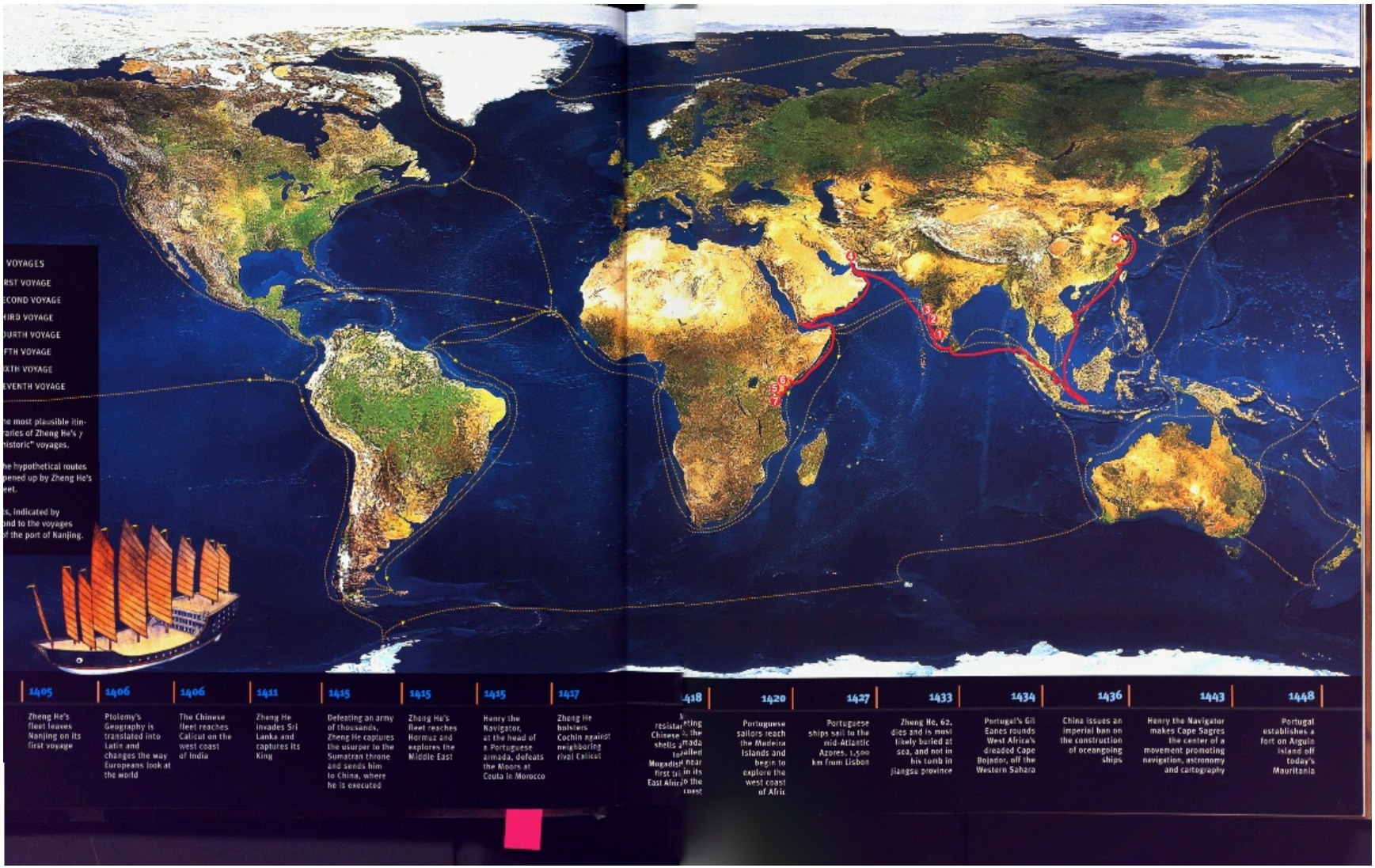
OCEAN SECTION OF MARTIN

Equator and Latitude Meridian as in



BEHAIM'S GLOBE OF 1492

Original. Degree Numbers Added.


VOYAGES
RST VOYAGE
ECOND VOYAGE
HIRD VOYAGE
URTH VOYAGE
FTH VOYAGE
XTH VOYAGE
EVENTH VOYAGE
he most plausible itin-
raries of Zheng He's y
istoric" voyages.
he hypothetical routes
pened up by Zheng He's
eet.
s, indicated by
nd to the voyages
f the port of Nanjing.
1405
Zheng He's fleet leaves Nanjing on its first voyage
1406
Ptolemy's Geography is translated into Latin and changes the way Europeans look at the world
1406
The Chinese fleet reaches Calicut on the west coast of India
1411
Zheng He invades Sri Lanka and captures its King
1415
Defeating an army of thousands, Zheng He captures the usurper to the Sumatran throne and sends him to China, where he is executed
1415
Zheng He's fleet reaches Hormuz and explores the Middle East
1415
Henry the Navigator, at the head of a Portuguese armada, defeats the Moors at Ceuta in Morocco
1417
Zheng He bolsters Cochin against neighboring rival Calicut
418
1420
Portuguese sailors reach the Madeira Islands and begin to explore the west coast of Afric
1427
Portuguese ships sail to the mid-Atlantic Azores, 1,500 km from Lisbon
1433
Zheng He, 62, dies and is most likely buried at sea, and not in his tomb in Jiangsu province
1434
Portugal's Gil Eanes rounds West Africa's dreaded Cape Bojador, off the Western Sahara
1436
China issues an imperial ban on the construction of oceangoing ships
1443
Henry the Navigator makes Cape Sagres the center of a movement promoting navigation, astronomy and cartography
1448
Portugal establishes a fort on Arguin Island off today's Mauritania