

HISTORY OF GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERY

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Geographical discovery plainly must have begun with man himself in pushing away from the centre where he originated. Where that centre was, no one knows, nor do we know how man reached the various parts of the earth, scholars being at variance in regard to the way by which he reached America. It may have been by Behring, which was doubtless in time past, joined to Asia. But by what route and by what means is wrapped in mystery.

The earliest record of geographical discovery that we have comes from Herodotus. Much reliance cannot be placed on many of his statements. From him we get the idea of the extreme coldness and darkness of the North, and of the intense heat of the South, a false idea but, being natural, it served its purpose. He also gives us many ideas, at once interesting and misleading, of the inhabitants of the world.

It was not until the time of Alexander the Great that discoveries along this line were undertaken in earnest. He took a great interest in this branch of learning, and went about its study in a systematic way. He sent out explorers, for the most part in ships, in order that he might gain some knowledge of the shape and dimensions of the earth, and to find out the forms of life (if any) which existed elsewhere. At this time the Phoenicians also began to extend and they enlarged the boundaries of the then known world. They found the islands which are now called the British Isles, and all those surrounding them. Some believe that they circumnavigated Africa, but this is doubtful. Broadly speaking, the ancients knew well only the Mediterranean and its environs. The Phoenicians, like all other early races, were at a great disadvantage in exploring as they had no effective instruments to guide them. As the compass had not been invented, they had to get their bearings by simple observations of the sun.

When we come to the middle ages, we come to men who travelled far and wide. Among the most famous travellers of this time was a Phoenician Marco Polo. He has given us an account