The Liahona

Miracles by Small Means

Chapter 9

CHAPTER 9

The European Chroniclers

Chapter 9: European Chroniclers. When the natives of Mexico and Central America were conquered by the European Conquistadors, the European chroniclers learned from the Natives of their origins. Although at first these chroniclers noted down the native origin accounts of their ancestors coming from across the sea with a special navigating instrument, the chroniclers soon began to make negative comments about such stories because the prevailing European opinions of the time were that there were no ancient long-distance voyages and that the magnetic compass did not originate until 1300 AD. Because of this European bias, eventually most chroniclers just stopped recording the native tales of their ancestors crossing the sea with a special navigating instrument.

Peter Martyr 1492

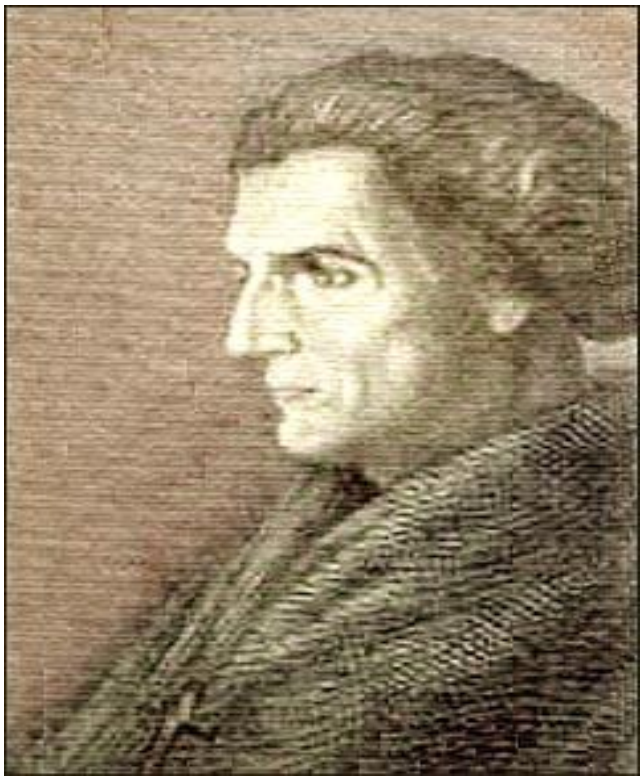
Mentioned “Ophir”

Peter Martyr was one of the first chroniclers of the New World. Because he was the personal Chaplain to Queen Isabella of Spain in 1492, he received and studied the reports from Columbus. Martyr writes that according to Columbus, Hispaniola was the legendary land of Ophir associated with King Solomon, whose ships took three years to go there and come back, laden with gold and other valuable items. Most writers subsequently attributed Martyr's statements about Ophir to the discovery of gold in the New World by Columbus's men, and dismissed them. However, I tend to focus on Martyr's Ophir comments from a different perspective. If Columbus, one of the most knowledgeable mariners of his time, made statements about Ophir being located in Hispaniola, then he was apparently comfortable with the required long distance across the oceans that King Solomon's ships would have had to travel to reach Hispaniola. Thus supporting the idea of early transoceanic navigation.

Bernardino de Sahagun

Native Ancestors Came by Sea with Special Instrument

Bernardo de Sahagun was a Franciscan missionary that spent 60 years living with the Indians of Mexico. In about 1550, Sahagun wrote his *History of New Spain* in which he repeated the Native traditions that their ancestors came by sea with a special navigating instrument



Jose de Acosta 1590

Rejected Native Ancestors Coming by Sea

Jose de Acosta was a Spanish Jesuit priest who lived 17 years in Peru and Mexico. In about 1590 (or 40 years after Sahagun) he wrote his *Natural and Moral History of the Indians*. In his writings he rejects the Native traditions that their ancestors migrated by sea. His reasoning is that the magnetic compass was not known anciently in his Mediterranean region of the world. He notes that he had not known of any QUOTE "approved author" (that is any approved Mediterranean author) that had proposed the idea that lodestone or a magnetic compass was used for maritime navigation in ancient times.

ORIGEN
DE LOS INDIOS
DE EL NUEVO MUNDO,
E INDIAS OCCIDENTALES,
AVERIGUADO CON DISCURSO DE OPINIONES
por el Padre Presentado FR. GREGORIO GARCIA,
de la Orden de Predicadores.

TRATANSE EN ESTE LIBRO VARIAS COSAS, Y PUNTOS curiosos, tocantes à diversas Ciencias, i Facultades, con que se hace varia Historia, de mucho gusto para el Ingenio, i Entretenimiento de Hombres agudos, i curiosos.

SEGUNDA IMPRESION:

ENMENDADA, Y AÑADIDA DE ALGUNAS OPINIONES, à cosas notables, en mayor prueba de lo que contiene, con Tres Tablas muy puntuales de los Capitulos, de las Materias, y Autores, que los tratan.

DIRIGIDO
AL ANGELICO DOCT. S.TO TOMAS
DE AQUINO.

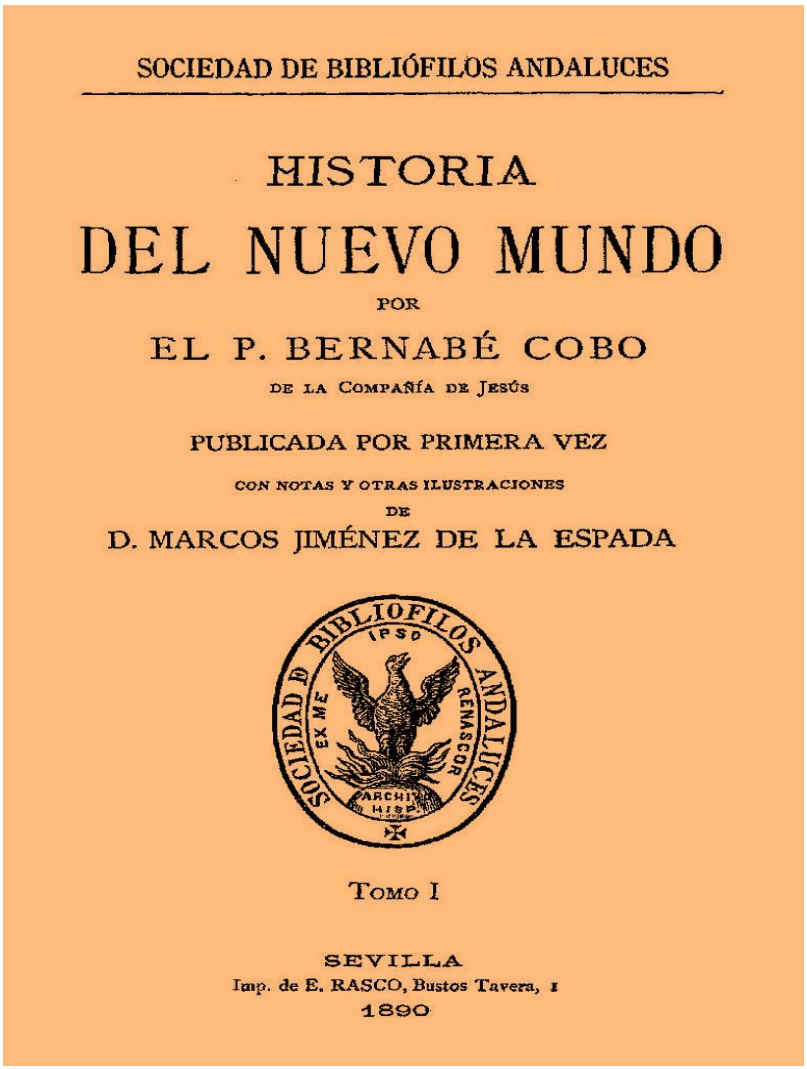
CON PRIVILEGIO REAL.

En Madrid: En la Imprenta de Francisco Martinez Año. Año de 1729.

Gregorio Garcia 1607

Rejected Phoenician Navigation to the New World

Acosta's writings were followed in about 1607 (or about 17 years later) with the writings of Gregorio Garcia. In his book *Origin of the Indians of the New World*, Garcia rejected Phoenician navigation to the Americas. He also rejected Israelites coming to America. Interestingly, Acosta and Garcia apparently established a standard of ideas which, in general, were followed by most subsequent authors.


SOCIEDAD DE BIBLIÓFILOS ANDALUCES

HISTORIA

DEL NUEVO MUNDO

POR

EL P. BERNABÉ COBO

DE LA COMPAÑÍA DE JESÚS

PUBLICADA POR PRIMERA VEZ

CON NOTAS Y OTRAS ILUSTRACIONES

DE

D. MARCOS JIMÉNEZ DE LA ESPADA

TOMO I

SEVILLA

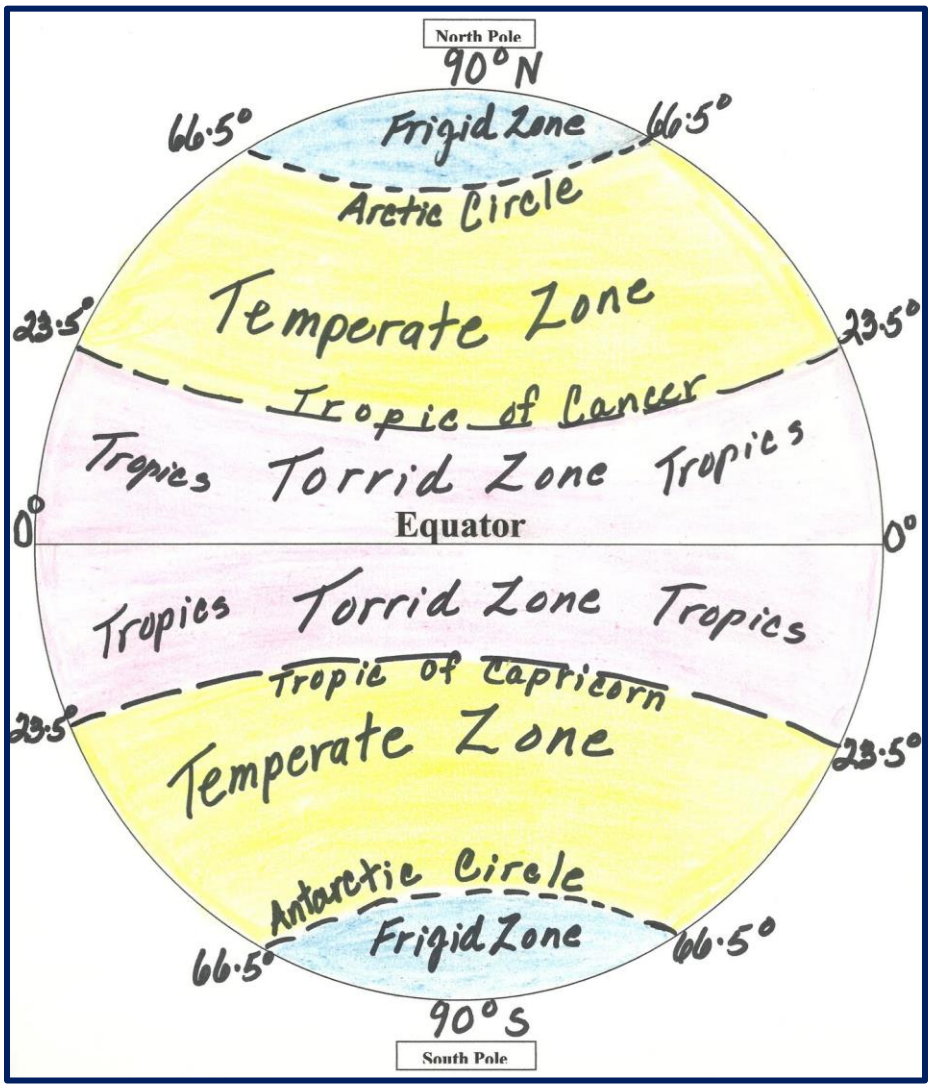
Imp. de E. RASCO, Bustos Tavera, 1

1890

Bernabe de Cobo

Noted Dilemma with Greek Philosophers

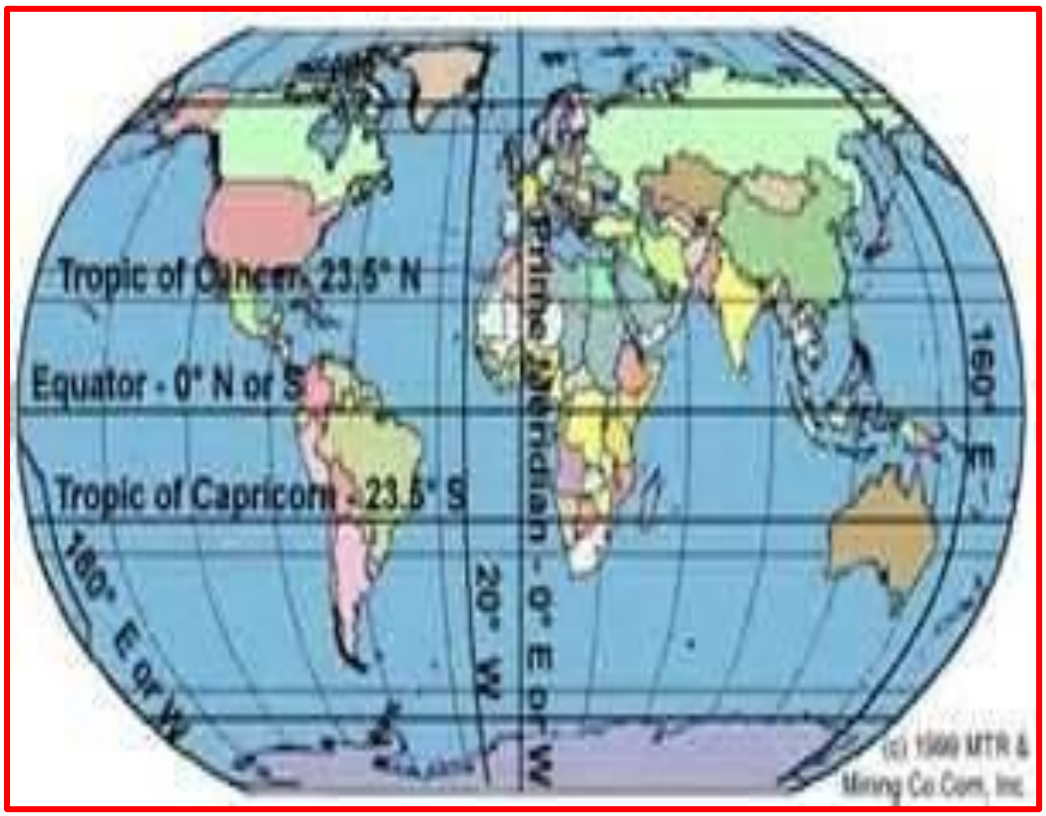
One of those subsequent authors was Bernabe de Cobo. Cobo served as a Catholic Father in Peru for many years. Intriguingly, in his 1640 book *History of the New World*, Cobo gives us a glimpse as to his reasoning for not accepting the Native American Indians's own legends of ancient travel by sea. And in so doing, he exposes his European bias. Cobo mentions the story of the Phoenicians navigating around Africa in 600 BC, but he rejects that story as a myth or fable because he says the ancient Mediterranean scholars didn't believe it. He says that if they had believed it, they would not have continued to maintain their model of the world, which would have forbidden such travel. Yet Cobo had to know by the middle of the 1600s that these ancient Mediterranean scholars were wrong, and that he was misrepresenting the facts. Let me illustrate here.



Greek Philosopher's Model of the World

People only lived in Temperate Zone

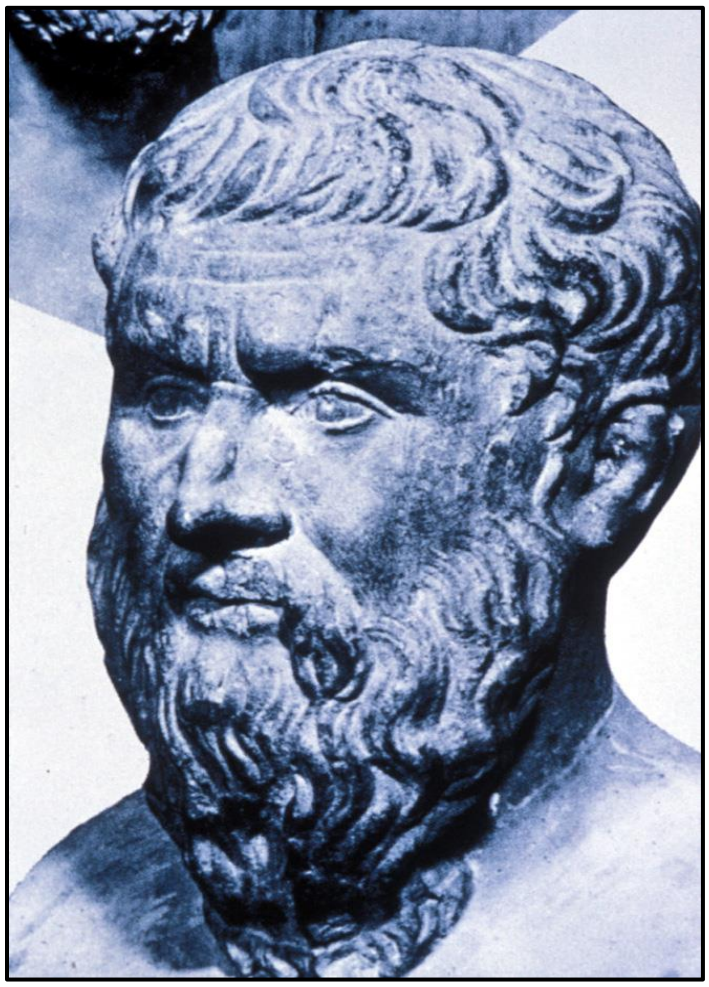
According to the ancient Greek philosopher's model of the world, there was a Frigid Zone, a Temperate Zone, and a Torrid Zone. They believed that no people could survive except in the Temperate Zone. Now according to this map, notice how the Torrid Zone encapsulates the equator.



Cobo knew the extent of Africa

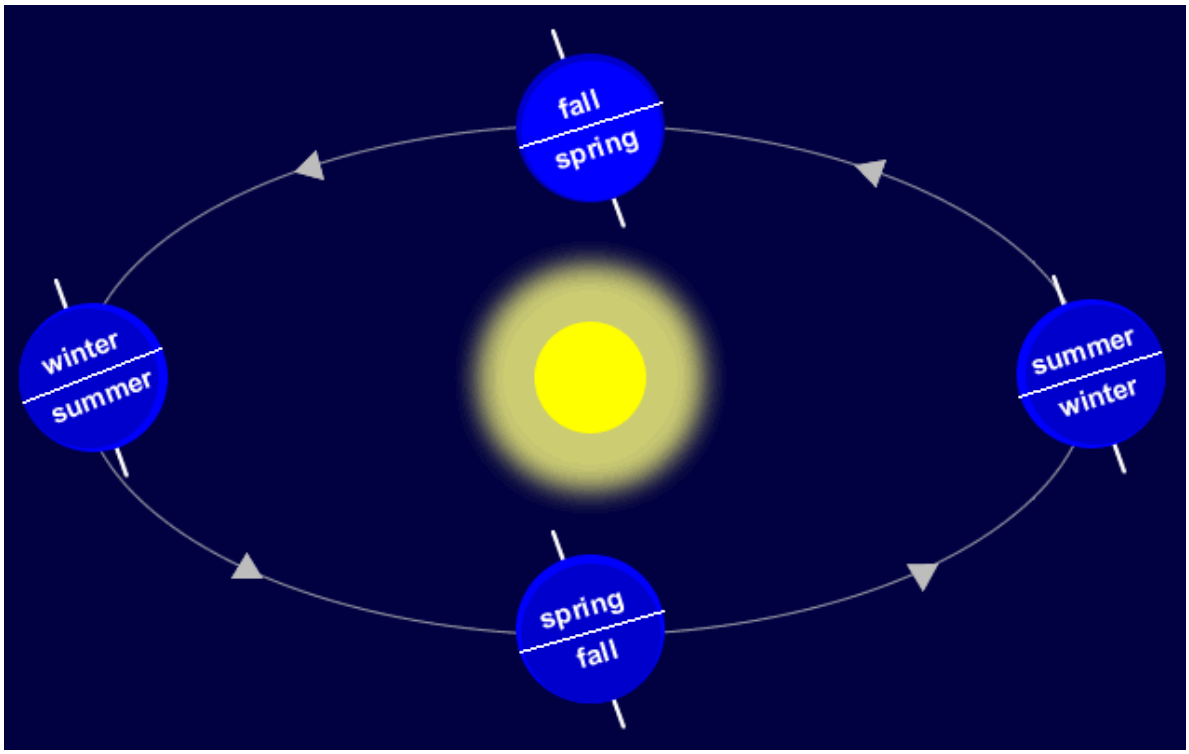
And that Herodotus had drawn it incorrectly

By the 1600s Bernabe de Cobo knew that the Torrid Zone theory was false because he now knew from QUOTE "approved" European sources that Africa extended below the equator or well into the Torrid Zone. By 1488, Bartolomeus Diaz had reached the Cape of Good Hope and by 1498, Vasco de Gama had reached India. Note on the map how far Africa extends southward. Even Jose de Acosta had written that as he had crossed the equator in cool weather, he had laughed at Aristotle and his philosophy of the Torrid Zone. Yet Cobo refused to accept the notion that the Phoenicians would have previously discovered this because (1) Greek philosophers had refused to accept it. (2) The Greeks had continued to maintain their model of the world that forbid such a voyage. and (3) Greek philosophers would not be biased. But let me clarify his mistake.



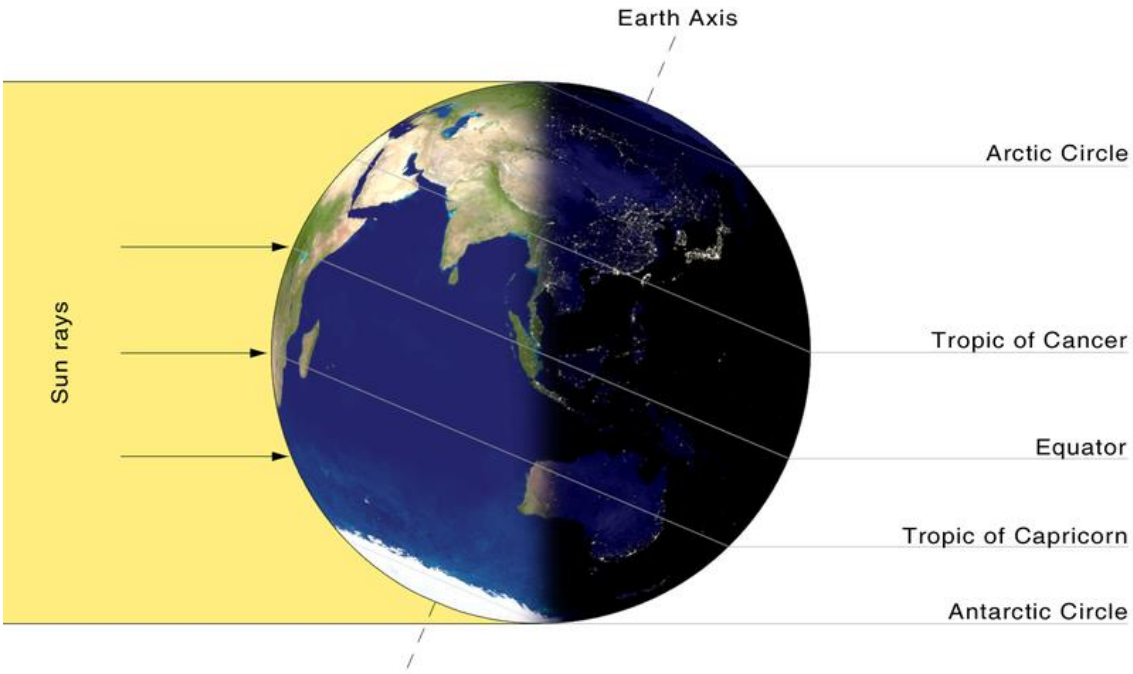
Herodotus

Herodotus was an ancient Greek historian who lived from 484 to 425 BC. That is some 175 years AFTER the 600 BC Phoenician voyage around Africa--and long enough for Herodotus to have learned the details of such a voyage. In fact, Herodotus reports in his *Histories* (vol 4:42) on the Phoenician voyage, noting that QUOTE "Libya [or Africa] is washed on all sides by the sea except where it joins Asia, as was first demonstrated, so far as our knowledge goes, by the Egyptian king Necho who . . . sent a fleet manned by a Phoenician crew with orders to sail [south and] west about [southern Libya] and return to Egypt and the Mediterranean by way of the Straits of Gibraltar."



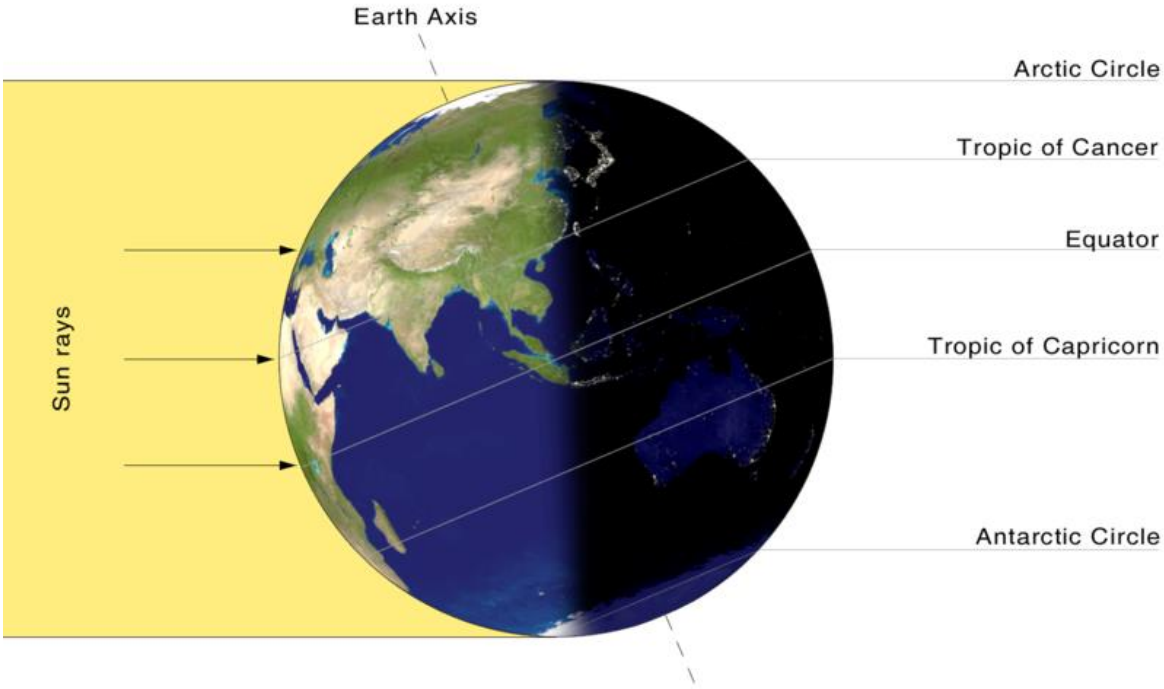
Earth's Axis and Rotation around the Sun

But then Herodotus adds the following: QUOTE "These men made a statement which I do not myself believe, though others may, to the effect that as they sailed on a westerly course round the southern end of Libya, they had the sun on their right - to the northward of them." So Herodotus refused to accept truth because although the Greeks had developed the spherical-earth theory by the sixth century BC, Herodotus did not understand that the earth spun on an axis, and that the earth rotated around the sun.



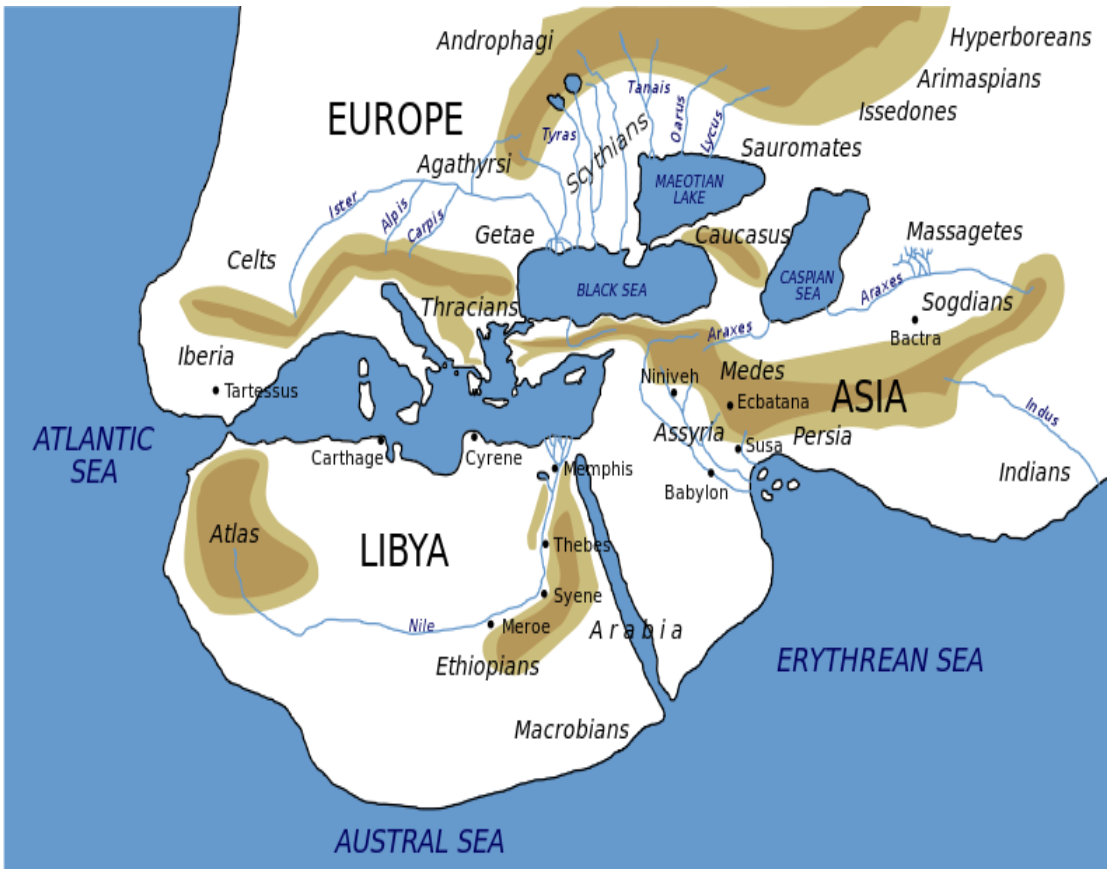
Winter Solstice – Northern Hemisphere

To us it is apparent in our Northern Hemisphere that during the winter months, or winter solstice, although the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, it does so from a southward position.



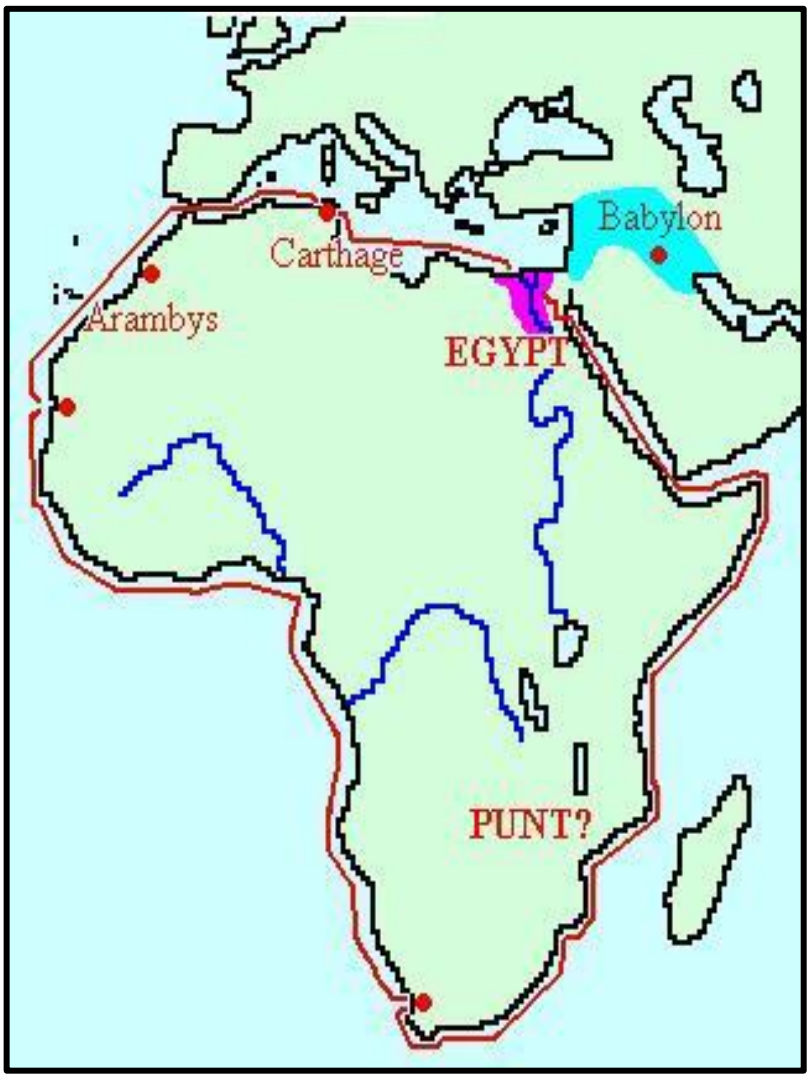
Winter Solstice – Southern Hemisphere

Herodotus failed to comprehend that in the Southern Hemisphere, the opposite would happen. That is, the sun would rise and set from a northward position, or as the Phoenician sailor said, on his right--to the northward of them, as they rounded the southern end of Africa going west. Although at this time Herodotus, as well as other Greek scholars, acknowledged that the Phoenicians had known much more about maritime matters than the Greeks did, he still refused to believe the Phoenician story.



Herodotus Map of the World

Herodotus had become famous not only for his historical writings, but because he made a map of the world. In this map his bias is illustrated very nicely. Holding fast to his belief in the Greek philosophy of the Temperate Zone and the Torrid Zone, notice how Herodotus fails to extend the southern part of Africa into the Torrid Zone. He incorrectly aligns the southern end of Africa with the southern coast of Arabia.



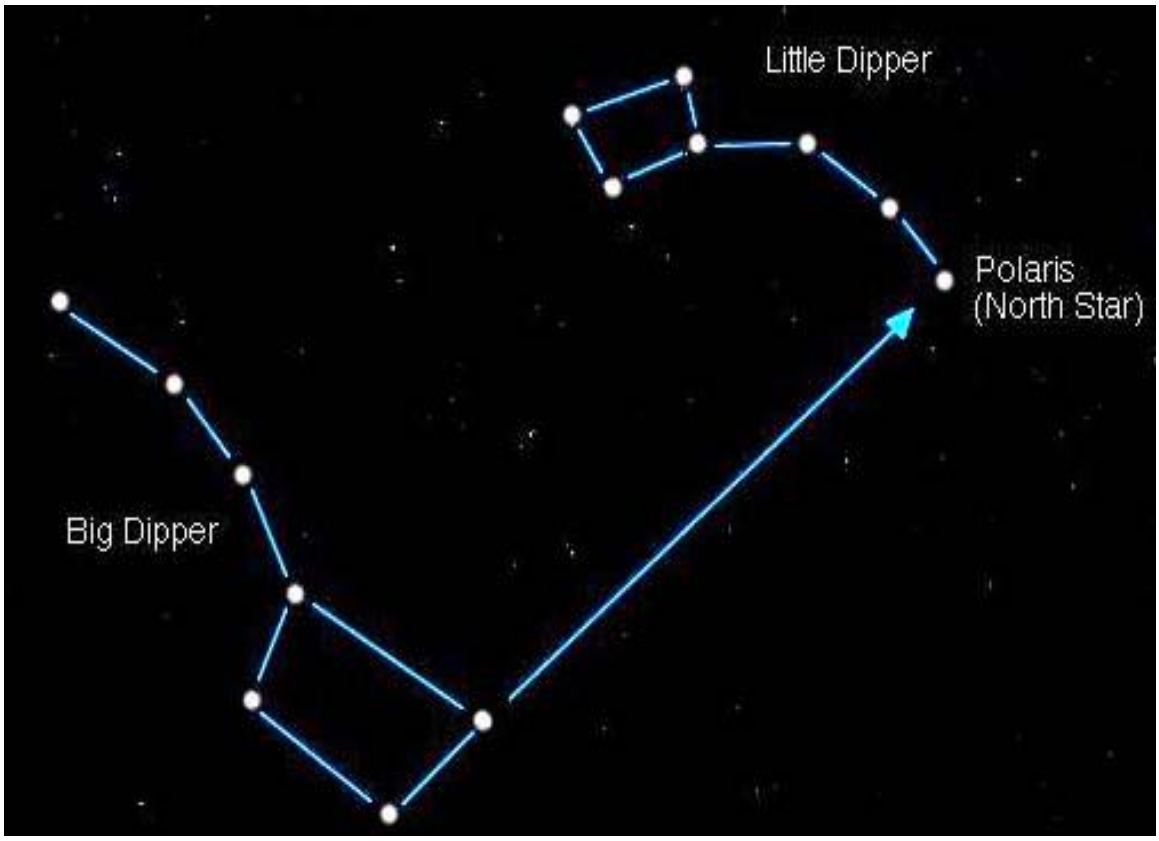
Cobo Disbelieved 600 BC Phoenician Expedition

WESTERN BIAS

Now notice this diagram of the reported 600 BC Phoenician expedition, and how far south Africa extended beyond Arabia. It is easy to see that the Phoenicians were correct, and Herodotus was wrong. Sadly in the 2nd century AD, the famous Roman geographer Ptolemy was also wrong about the Phoenicians. So much for the bias of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Europeans, for not accepting that the Phoenicians had traveled 20,000 miles around Africa in 600 BC and then denying ancient long-distance ocean travel after rejecting the evidence.

Joseph Smith Reading

Now in summary, it is interesting to note the evolving European chroniclers' bias relative to Native Indian origins, and a special navigating instrument. One might wonder, however, if Joseph Smith ever read any of these accounts--more specifically those that spoke of a special navigating instrument.



The North Star

One note before we leave this subject. The Phoenicians used the Pole Star (Polaris) to help them navigate. Once they passed into the southern hemisphere, the heavens were full of new stars. Not only was Polaris not visible any more, but there was not an equivalent southern pole star. So how did they determine which way was north, especially when the sun had changed position? Could it be that they carried with them a lodestone compass?