



EDUCATION KIT

Ptolemy's *Geography* and Renaissance Mapmakers

A Newberry Library Exhibition Nov. 3, 2007—Feb. 16, 2008

PTOLEMY TRANSPARENCY #4

“Hispania novella”

Ptolemy, Claudius. *Geographia*. Florence: Nicolo Todescho, 1480-82.

Newberry Library (Gift of Edward E. Ayer): Ayer *6 P9 B5 1480b

EXHIBIT TEXT:

Between 1480 and 1482, Francesco Berlinghieri prepared the first printed edition of the *Geography* with significant alterations to Ptolemy's text and maps. To begin with, Berlinghieri translated the Latin text into Italian *terza rima*, a style of verse commonly used in pedagogical texts in the Renaissance. Furthermore, he included *tabulae modernae*—four new maps covering the areas of the Ptolemaic maps of Europe 1 (British Isles), Europe 2 (Iberia), Europe 6 (Italy), and a portion of Asia 4 (the Holy Land).

Berlinghieri's “Hispania novella” and other new maps of Mediterranean countries clearly benefited from the highly accurate coastal information conveyed by portolan charts. Another useful innovation was the replacement of the ancient Roman provincial divisions with the names and outlines of modern kingdoms and principalities, including Granada, the last Islamic kingdom on the peninsula (conquered by Christian Spain in 1492).

TEACHER NOTES:

- This is a *tabulae modernae*, meaning a new map, that covers the Iberian peninsula (present day Spain and Portugal); this is the same area covered in the 2nd Ptolemaic map of Europe (see Ptolemy Transparency #3).
- This map was made between 1480 and 1482, approximately four years after the 2nd Ptolemaic map of the Iberian Peninsula, yet the shape of the landmass is much more accurate. The mapmaker used Ptolemy's coordinates, but modified them to identify areas of “improvement” in the knowledge base. Many of these advancements are to the coastal areas, in large part to the records necessary to make coastal maps, commonly called *portolan charts*.
- The trapezoidal shape of the map is intended to help convey the round shape of the earth. The map widens at the bottom (its southern edge) because the distance between meridians of longitude is greater at the equator than it is at the poles.
- The large, brown blobs are used to indicate mountains.
- Some important translations [NOTE: this map is printed in Italian]:
 - Barzalona = Barcelona
 - Givbilterra Mote = Strait of Gibraltar
 - Madret = Madrid
 - Maiorica = Majorca

DISCUSSION PROMPTS/SUGGESTED CLASS ACTIVITIES:

- Identify as many places as possible through *absolute location*, *relative location*, shape, symbol, or written identifications.
- Identify beliefs or geographic understandings of the time that have since been modified or changed.
- Why do you think the coastal areas have greater detail as compared to inland areas? Explain how this may indicate the purpose of the map.