Geography: herodotus and strabo

Science, Geography

As humans, it is estimated that we travel upwards to more than fifty different locations per week. Whether it is a business trip or even a quick trip to the grocery store, we travel a lot. Though travelling might sound trivial and just a part of our daily lives, it is crucial to acknowledge and not overlook the idea of the act of travelling itself. How do we know where the grocery is? Where is Minnesota on a map? Most importantly, Where are we? The knowledge and ability to travel to cities, countries and even miniscule landmarks like grocery stores can be accredited to the subject of geography.

To get to these places, you see, we had to at one point use a mental map or a physically drawn out map. Of course, maps have a strong association with the subject of geography but we must recognize the subject of geography didn't develop maps on their own nor any geographical methods that we so freely use without knowing the arduous process that produced these methods. It is rather scholars who seeked to understand their world a bit better and to expand, in addition to marking, the obvious knowledge their were many other locations in the world besides the part they were standing on.

It is also important to note that these scholars hoped to discover the mysteries of the world they knew so little about at the time but also passing on their knowledge collectively with each other piecing the world to what it is today. It is not only maps that help us learn to travel but also the understanding of geographical elements like the weather that these scholars have contributed to the knowledge we all know of today that play a part in knowing how and when to travel. Today, we are going to focus on two

scholars who were a vital piece in the field of geography, Herodotus and Strabo.

Often called the father of history, Herodotus was a greek historian who is referred to as one of the most reliable sources of history in the era of the 5th century that also revolutionized the world geographically. Not much is known of his youth but what made him so reliable was his method of travelling around the existing world to write in more of a in-depth account. This not only solidified his historical accounts but it also taught him a lot about the world geographically. First, through his travels, he realized that all places were divided in terms of culture and politics.

From that thought, he developed the an organization to the concept of ecumene. An ecumene refers to the parts of the Earth that are inhabited. In Herodotus' ecumene, he encompassed the entire known world based on culture that he studied and along political lines. This creation of his ecumene led to one of the world's first few maps. In his map, he did something no other historian had done which was depicting the estimation of a total population size, the vegetation and understanding the ecosystem through anthropology.

He recognized that in every part of his ecumene from Libya to Asia, the climate varied and was one of the first to understand the relationship between ecosystem to vegatation and people. He used the information he gathered to not only recount historical events but also helped developed a map that was used to discover furthur now Europe and Africa. His findings are still used today in comparative research of climate and vegetation and

understanding the vast changes in that region in terms of population and expansion.

One of the biggest contribution by Herodotus to geography are his historical descriptions of the existing world such as Egypt, Scythia, Persia, Asia Minor and India. The descriptions were useful in understanding the life that people led and the impact nature and co-existing had on their lives. In one instance, people in Persia had to strengthen their homes with wooden plys, which solidified the foundation of their homes due to the strong sand winds. Moreover, Herodotus' descriptions also led to some noteworthy observations.

He was the first to understand the processes of how deltas were made due to his observations of the Nile. He noticed the severe rain that contributed to its overflow that led to erosions and abrasions causing deltas. In addition, he recognized a relationship with the overflow of the Nile with climate and wind. Simply put, heat creates precipitation which causes an overflow in the summer time and as heat decreases a little bit in the latter half of the year through heavier and somewhat cooler sand winds decreases precipitation.

Holding the precipitation off, it is still somewhat hot and that helps vaporize the overflow of water and causes rivers to come back down to normal levels. The work of Herodotus has helped lay a foundation in which has helped later scholars understand elements like weather and its relationship to the impact it has on the people and their lives. His work had also expanded the world through his organization of the ecumene in mapping. It shed light on parts of society that not everyone knew about and made the known world exist physically and not by word of mouth.

Strabo continues to be one of the most prominent geographers of time as he was one of the faces that made the genre of geography more prominent in the eyes of society. He did this through mainly his literary work. Among them, the most famous and still used today is Geographica. Simply put, Geographica served as a ``all you need to know about geography`` book in that era. It acted as an encyclopedia on all perspectives of geography known in that period from Homer, the founder of Geography, to the impact of the greek gods on Earth. Strabo provided critiques of all geographers including Poseiden, a greek god.

In one instance, Poseiden believed that the gods controlled how ocean and river water flowed but Strabo critiqued the god saying that oceans and rivers flowed through precipitation and erosions caused by weather. Strabo put more of a rationality in a time when the greek mythcism was being questioned for its validity. He is considered the first to use the stars to create lines of parellels and meridiens to properly assess the latitudes and longitudes of each location which helped provide a proper axis when creating a map of Europe which became the most accurate in his time.

This map became extremely useful as for first time, one can locate the exact location of a city or town based on a simple calculation whether then heading north, west, east and south. Moreover, Strabo very much believed that the cosmos had a very big impact on life on Earth. For example, he hypothesized where ``the moon and sun don`t meet are where the worlds are inhabited``. We can conclude then that Strabo placed great emphasis on

modern geography rather than having the rationality that ``the gods were responsible for all natural occurences``.

In chapter 3, Strabo grasps the concepts of plate tectonics to explain natural disasters such as earthquakes. His geographic rational was a departure that caused controversy as all of life`s activities was credited to the gods. Beyond the critiques, Strabo also used several scholars` maps and visited all arond Europe: learning their way of life based on their location. Dictating the history of the people and their way of life based on their different ecosystems, he eventually came up with a more ecumenial method by creating a more updated accurate map in chapter 15 of Geographica.

He also dictated geographical accounts and methods that he came across and tried to provide a rational for it. For example, he dictated Ilbina, a greek town, was prone to earthquakes. They would think Zeus, the king of gods, would part their land causing earthquakes when really they were located between a very volatile plate. Strabo rationalized and developed his theory of plate tectonics in Ilbina. In the same chapter, he listed all of the different known ecosystems as well as the relationship the vegetation and climate had on their respective locations.

Overall, Strabo modernized the way we view the world in terms of our rationale for the way we live whether it be explaining natural disasters and on that, where would be a desirable place to live. In doing so, he created also a more accurate map which would expand our world some more in learning where everything is geographically while providing us with accounts of other geographical concepts created on his expeditions such as the development

of the theory of plate tectonics. The theory of plate tectonics would later be the foundation to how mountains form and influence deltas.

Today, it is more than accessible to just get on a plane to go half the way across the world for a vacation. It is even more accessible to get a GPS to go to the grocery store to get some vegetables. However, we don`t realize the effort that it took scholars to pave the world with knowledge and creating that final detailed map that allows us to do it today. We equally don`t realize how if it weren`t for their tireless observations about our climate and ecosystems, we wouldn`t realize where the full potential of our nourishments would best thrive.