

## THE CHINESE WORLD

### THE NAME OF EUROPE

The name of China was not the only one to be on slippery grounds until the 16th century. In fact this was also the case for the name of Europe. The Classical world had provided a mythical name for the Western end of Eurasia, that of a Phoenician princess abducted by Zeus and transported by him to the opposite shore to which it gave her name, Europe. It was a beautiful Mediterranean story, where sex and sea were intermingled and that carried with it the everlasting appeal of the beauty and the beast. Albert Dürer caught the moment in which a startled but unfrightened Europe quits satyrs and nymphs and rides defiant on her beautiful and powerful divine bull.

But Europe's name didn't attain a distinct geographical meaning until well entered Renaissance times. For most of Antiquity, the reference name for those living in Europe was Rome, and they strived for to become Romans, the most privileged citizenship of the time.

Even so, in the Middle ages, the name of Europe was preserved, in some monastic scriptoriums, from where it went to the highly sketchy and religious maps of medieval ages, as it was the case for instance in the book of 7th century Isidor. These were the so called T in O maps, that provided a schema of the world divided in three parts, Asia occupying the whole upper half, and Europe and Africa sharing the lower one. Those were schematic maps preserved by the elite for the elite, of Seville.

Europe's name also occasionally pierces through the maps that come thereafter as a sophisticated outgrowth of the earlier T & O maps, with more topographic and toponymic detail. This was the case of the 8th century Beatus of Liebana's manuscript showing the tripartite division and the global encirclement by the ocean characteristic of T & O maps, even if in it the name of Europe is nowhere to be seen.

In this same 8th century, Charlemagne's chronicles treated Europe as a specific cultural sphere and they referred to the forces fighting Islam's advance as the Europeans (Europenses), but this was the first and only time in which this word was used. Charlemagne could have a dream, but Europe didn't become a widespread name, and was certainly unknown to the vast majority of its inhabitants, bound as peasants to a very limited stretch of land.

That didn't prevent them to foster a sense of belonging to a more general community, but its name was not Europe but Christendom, and they thought of themselves as Christians, the name with which the clergy harangued them from the pulpit, and not as Europeans.

But from the 15th century onwards, Christendom plummeted as a unique inclusive category. The incapacity of the European reigns to stand up together against the Ottoman Turks, that took Constantinople in 1453, came as a shock. And the religious split of Reformation and Counterreformation demolished the very idea of a united Christendom.

The nominal shift from Christendom to Europe gained momentum since the mid 16th century, notwithstanding the strong missionary activity deployed at the time. Its epitaph can be seen in the Geographic Encyclopedia of the great geographer Abraham Ortelius: his entry "for Christians, see Europeans", is in tune with the title page of his 1572 *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, (Representation of the lands of the world). In top of it sits an enthroned Europe, with a scepter in one hand, while the other hand holds the cross that is about to dominate the world. Below Europe stand a richly dressed Asia with a ceremonial vessel in hand, that offers a strong contrast with the semi-naked Africa, and the nude and cannibal America. Notice that for Ortelius, who although being an enthusiastic traveler had never been outside Europe, Amerindians, Africans and Asians looked all like Mediterranean Europeans.

And what about the Chinese name for Europe? By the 2nd century BCE the Chinese began to gather some knowledge about what they called the Western regions. A Chinese envoy, Zhang Qian, brought back a report that covered most of Central Asia and west to Mesopotamia. The first lengthy version of a powerful country laying in the utmost Far West is to be found in the Official History that covers the Second Han dynasty, but that was written in the 5th century. By then, the Roman Empire was approaching its end, and the country that the Official History describes is probably the Eastern Roman Empire, mostly Roman Siria. The Chinese called it Da Qin, that is great Qin, because the Official History says, the inhabitants of that country are tall and well proportioned, somewhat like the Chinese, whence they are called Da Qin. This is the same name that was used in the 8th century to identify the place of origin of the Nestorian missionaries that had arrived to China.

Other names like Fulin, identified with Byzantium, came to be used in further centuries. Both Daqin and Fulin are still to be found in the Official History of the Ming dynasty. And a compressed profile of Europe is recognizable in a silhouette of the 1405 Korean Kangnido map.

But the name of Europe entered China with Matteo Ricci's map, drawn at the very end of the 16th century.

The map, that showed to the Chinese for the first time the place of China in the world, showed a transcription of Europe as Ouluoba, a name that will remain until today.

In fact, what Chinese cartographers retained from Ricci's map were mostly some names, as can be seen in this map, drawn by a Chinese a few years after Ricci's map. Note that the shapes of the continents have dissolved until becoming hardly recognizable. But the basic names remain.

As you can see in this transcription of the map, Europe and the Mediterranean are clearly labeled.

It was in the 16th century that both the names of Europe and China acquired finally a universal geographical meaning.