

BOOK OF THE KNOWLEDGE

Updated Analysis Summary

Cartographic Intent + Voyage Reconstruction

Executive Summary

This updated analysis incorporates new observations: the Franciscan author likely wrote with the intention that his text could be converted back into a map, and that the geographic sequence of his voyage can therefore be tracked and reconstructed. Additional context from the Piri Reis map (1513) is included as a later data point in the same geographic tradition.

Core Findings (Condensed)

- **Hybrid Nature:** The book combines personal travel with collected reports and contemporary 14th-century geographic knowledge. Reliability is highest near familiar European territory and declines farther east and north.
- **Marvels Were Normal:** Elements such as the Golden Fleece, Blemmyes, and Labyrinth appear on major medieval maps (e.g., Hereford Mappa Mundi). Their presence does not discredit the text.
- **Pillars of Hercules Continuity:** Both Plato and later medieval sources treat the Strait of Gibraltar as a stable western boundary. The author operates with the same practical boundary.
- **Calendar Discrepancy:** The two-year error in the Hijri date at birth is most likely a transmission issue.

Cartographic Intent of the Text

The level of detail strongly suggests the author wrote expecting his work to be turned back into a map:

- Heavy emphasis on flags, heraldry, and political boundaries — information that is inherently visual.
- Detailed lists of cities, rivers, mountain ranges, and provinces with clear geographic relationships.
- Consistent structure organized by travel sequence rather than pure narrative.
- Mirrors how contemporary maps (e.g., Hereford) were constructed.

This supports the view that the text was a deliberate geographic intelligence document meant to preserve knowledge in a form that could be reconstructed visually.

Voyage Reconstruction Potential

If the author intended his book to be converted into a map, then the geographic order should reflect the actual route:

- **Strong sections** (Chapters 1–3): Spain → Portugal → France → Italy → Germany → Hungary → Dalmatia. High detail and consistency.
- **Mixed sections** (Chapter 4): Greece → Turkey → Armenia → Cyprus → Syria. Still usable but increasing second-hand material.
- **Weaker sections** (Chapters 5–6): Egypt, Persia, Black Sea, Central Asia. Heavily second-hand. Harder for precise route tracking.
- The overall structure moves outward from familiar territory and back again, suggesting a deliberate geographic arc.

This approach treats the text as a linguistic precursor to a map. The sequence of places mentioned allows us to distinguish between places the author likely visited personally and places described through reports.

Piri Reis Map (1513) as Later Context

The Piri Reis map provides a later data point in the same tradition of Atlantic geographic knowledge:

- Created by Ottoman admiral Piri Reis in 1513.

- Shows the Atlantic, Europe, Africa, and parts of the Americas with surprising accuracy.
- Piri Reis stated he used older source maps, including some from the time of Alexander the Great.
- Demonstrates that knowledge of lands beyond the Pillars of Hercules continued to be preserved and transmitted.

While later than our author, it shows the persistence of the geographic tradition that began with classical sources and continued through medieval texts and maps.

Conclusion

The Book of the Knowledge gains additional value when viewed as a text written with cartographic intent. The geographic sequence, level of detail on heraldry and boundaries, and the clear reliability gradient suggest the author expected his work to be turned back into a map. This opens a methodological path: we can attempt to reconstruct the voyage by treating the stronger sections as primary route data and the weaker sections as secondary reports. Combined with earlier findings on the hybrid nature of the text and the continuity of the Pillars of Hercules, the book remains a valuable source for 14th-century geographic knowledge and the transmission of older traditions.

Updated: July 2026

Includes cartographic intent and voyage reconstruction analysis