

## Re: Question

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Martyn Harrison wrote in message

<796bf0pq1vjilvfg8je06ruac7bvf0320a@4ax.com>...

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>> <http://www.trochos.plus.com/primesauce/latet.htm#84>

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>What I'm getting at is the question of whether Mercator projection was actually

>a new idea as such, or just an existing idea popularised via that name.

To the best of my recollection, the specific mathematics of the Mercator projection (actually very slightly wrong as he drew it, but soon fixed) were his idea. He was after all working only a generation after the very first documented circumnavigation of the planet. Previous world maps had been most concerned with representing the shapes of the continents, to which end they used all sorts of exotic projections but Mercator addressed the problem of navigation, which had gone way beyond the old portolan techniques.

>I reckon the conical projection does have some real advantages in estimating

>distance within a northern hemisphere ocean voyage such as an Atlantic

>crossing. In that sense, I'm wondering whether Mercator was something nobody

>had thought of (I find this rather unlikely, although obviously it may be the

>way of it), or whether it was adopted for some reason (and what reasons those

>might be.)

>

>The obvious thing is it reflects an entire globe moderately well and is

>extremely easy to map lat and long into a rectangular space.

It's not just lat and long; the brilliant thing about the Mercator projection is that it gives a good representation of directions— take a bearing on the map and, despite the fact that you're sailing on a globe, steering in that direction will get you pretty close to where the map says you're headed. To do that, distances have to be sacrificed— which is why it

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was a dumb idea to use the Mercator projection as a standard representation of the world in household atlases.

David B.