

# **THE VOYAGES AND TRAVELS**

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The voyages and travels by Sir John Mandeville

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**SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE**

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AND TRAVELS**





SIR JOHN MANNERSVILLE

1919.

The  
Voyages and Travels  
of  
Sir John Maundeville, K<sup>t</sup>.



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## INTRODUCTION

SIR JOHN MAUNDEVILLE was born at St. Albans in the beginning of the fourteenth century, and set out on his travels on Michaelmas Day, 1322. How many places he says that he visited, during an absence from home of more than thirty years, the book will tell. Rheumatic gout at last obliged him to return and rest. On his way home he showed to the Pope what he had written, in Latin, about the marvels and customs he had seen. Then, we are told, he turned his Latin book into French, and then again, in 1356, into English.

Modern criticism has made it clear that the original text was French, and only French. In the days of Maundeville Latin, French, and English were the three languages written in this country. Latin was then and long afterwards the common language of the educated, and it united them into a European Republic of Letters; French was the courtly language; English was the language of the people. John Gower, the poet, Maundeville's contemporary, rested his fame upon three books, one in Latin, one in French, and one in English. The use, therefore, of French does not prove Maundeville a Frenchman. The writer says in the original French version that he *should have* written it in Latin but had written it in French, "jeo usse mis ceste liverette en latyn . . . mès . . . jeo l'ai mys en romanz," which is mistranslated into the statement that he *had* written it in Latin; with the addition made



by the English translator that assigns the English version to the hand of Maundeville himself. As in several places the French is mistranslated into English in a way that would have been impossible if Maundeville had been his own interpreter, and the same is true of the Latin, the most we can believe is that Maundeville wrote in French, and claimed as his own the other translations because he had caused them to be made for him. He could not have done without a Latin version if he meant to submit the book to the Pope; and he might naturally wish, when he came home, that his book should be read—as it became widely read—also in English. The oldest remaining manuscript of the book in French is dated 1371, and the oldest known MSS. of the English version cannot be placed very much later. They belong, at latest, to the first quarter of the fifteenth century.

The book was planned as a guide to pilgrims to the Holy Places at Jerusalem, but, for the purpose of including as full an account of travel as could be given, roundabout ways to Jerusalem were conceived, as well as the direct way. Maundeville told facts as matter of knowledge, marvels and miracles as matter of hearsay or of faith. He said that he and his men served the Sultan of Babylon in war against the Bedouins, and had from him letters that gave admission to the least accessible of the Holy Places. He said also that for fifteen months he and his men served the great Khan in China. What he tells of Cathay and India corresponds very closely with what is to be found in the record of Friar Odoric of Pordenone, the story of whose travels in Western India and Northern China was set down in Latin just before the time of the Friar's death in 1331. Maundeville's record of

adventure in the Perilous Valley is, for example, borrowed from Odoric; but Maundeville's account suggests travelling companionship in that adventure with "two worthy men, friars of Lombardy." Possibly, the purpose of the book being to tell as much as possible of travel in the world as it then was, in the form of personal adventure, contributions of good matter from the books of other travellers were, for this reason, interwoven in the story of one who had travelled much himself. In whatever way he did it, Maundeville produced what became the most popular book of travel for some generations after his own time. Of no other such book, Mr. Halliwell ventured to say, "of no book, with the exception of the Scriptures," can more MSS. be found of the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth century. It may well be that his travellers' tales were more widely enjoyed than believed. But travellers see strange things, and have often been credited with readiness to tell more strange things than they see.

The text as here given, in modern spelling, is taken, with permission of Messrs. George Bell and Sons, from a volume of *Early Travels in Palestine*, in "Belin's Antiquarian Library." That volume includes also Wilibald, Sæwulf, Benjamin of Tudela, La Brocquiere, and Maundrell.

