

13 Vespucci and the Coterie of Saint-Dié-Des-Vosges; the Waldseemüller Map and Vespucci's Contribution; the Name America is Proposed

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While in the years 1505-1506 the many events narrated in the previous pages took place, in Lorraine Waldseemüller and Ringmann had worked on the printed *Planisphere*, a great masterpiece of Renaissance cartography, whose content, here, must be examined. I will reconstruct their derivation of materials for the map from Vespucci, as it is important to understand why and how this material travelled from Lisbon to Lorraine.

13.1 The Emissary from the Gymnasium of Lorraine Meets Amerigo

At the beginning of the 16th century, there was a cultural centre, the Gymnasium, in the town of Saint-Dié in the Franco-German Duchy of Lorraine, which promoted excellent studies in the field of New World geography, so much so that in the 1800s the title of 'Godmother of America' was conferred on the town. The Gymnasium was directed by three scholars: the elderly Vautrin Lud (1448-1527), secretary to the Duke of Lorraine and director of the duchy's mines, the young Matthias Ringmann (~1482-1511), a Hellenist, poet and above all cosmographer with a good background in mathematics, and Martin Waldseemüller (1470-1521), a German cartographer and theo-

logian who also used the name *Ilacomylus*, derived from the ancient Greek according to the fashion at the time.

Martin Waldseemüller had begun the preparation of a very large map that included all of the known world, to be printed using xylography, something that had never been attempted for maps of that size. Precisely at the time he arrived in Lorraine between 1503 and 1504, the letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, *Mundus Novus*, in which Amerigo Vespucci explicitly announced that on the western side of the Ocean Sea there was a new continent, not Asia, was printed in Rome, Venice and Augusta.¹ The scholars who directed the Gymnasium judged that, in order to insert such novelty into the map in preparation, the necessary material and information had to be obtained from Amerigo himself. The question was how to persuade the author to agree to the request. Making use of the unreliable postal systems of the time was not opportune, also because they could not foresee the way in which Amerigo would react. A much better alternative was to send a messenger to Lisbon with a sum of money for the possible acquisition of the material, which the Florentine would be unable to refuse. Whom to entrust with this delicate commission? It is likely, but not certain, that Matthias Ringmann was chosen. He was the youngest and liveliest of the group, and, more importantly, he was a correspondent and friend of Valentim Fernandes the well-known humanist who lived in that city, was a travel-lover and knew Vespucci directly or indirectly.²

Vespucci had returned to Lisbon from his fourth voyage and he immediately informed Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco about it, complaining, once again, that the King had not given him the manuscript of his astronomical observations.³ When he learned of the sudden and precocious death of his dear friend and trusted protector, he was deeply saddened. Indeed, the prospects of his future changed.

Some time later, there arrived the letter from his former classmate, Piero Soderini, who in the meantime had become 'perpetual *gonfaloniere*', i.e. lifetime president of the Republic of Florence, who asked him about his experiences as a navigator. He prepared the reply, extracting from the draft of *The Four Journeys* the famous "Lettera a Soderini". He had sent it when, at the beginning of 1505, the emissary from Lorraine arrived unexpectedly. The meeting was very propitious. One can imagine that they talked for a long time in French, the language in which they understood each other best. Then, Amerigo handed over a copy of the "Lettera", omitting the name of the person to whom it was written, and showed the emissary the maps of the New World, carefully excluding the lands belonging to Spain situated below the 40° South parallel. The emissary from Lorraine had a portrait of Amerigo painted, a fortunate initiative for posterity, as it is the only authentic adult portrait of the Florentine navigator that has come down to us. In the portrait, Amerigo has a beard and holds a large cartographer's compass. In the image, probably by an artist specialised in making portraits for traveller's identification documents as was the custom then, several small

¹ The Latin name for Augsburg, the Bavarian city situated on the border with Swabia; a 1505 edition of the *Mundus Novus*, which appeared in Strasbourg the capital of Lorraine, is also known. See Omodeo, "The Authenticity of Amerigo Vespucci's *Mundus Novus*".

² I may be mistaken about the chosen emissary's name, but not about the fact that the negotiations with Vespucci were carried out via an emissary.

³ See Bandini, *Vita e lettere di Amerigo Vespucci*, LIV and following.

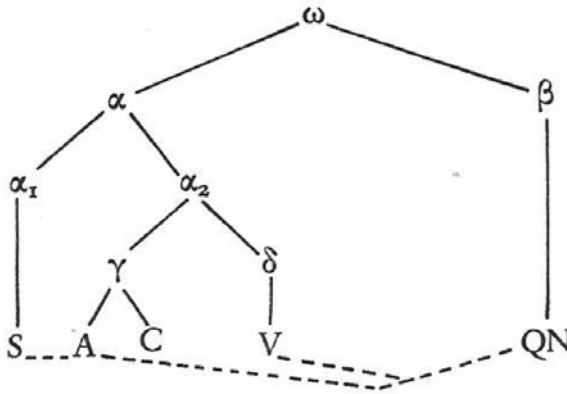


Figure 13.1. The figure represents the 'family tree' or diagram of the descent of the five surviving antique copies of the "Lettera a Soderini" indicated by the letters S, C, A, V and QN. S and QN are printed copies; QN indicates the copy translated into Latin in Lorraine. The Greek letters α - δ indicate hypothetical intermediate copies, while ω indicates the original example. This diagram was created by Luciano Formisano and published in 1985 in his *Amerigo Vespucci, Lettere di viaggio*, 11, note 10 (by kind permission of the author). Note that the QN copy from Lorraine is the closest to the last original ω

distinctive characteristics are clear, such as the shadows around the eyes and the warts on the nose and cheek.

My reconstruction fits very well, perhaps too well, so much so that it raises some perplexities. However, it can be verified, or refuted, through research and the study of the letters between Ringmann and Fernandes. Fortunately, there is another way to confirm the hypothesis that the relationship between Vespucci and the scholars from Lorraine was established thanks to a meeting: the path indicated by philology.

13.2 Philology's Contribution to the Historiography of Vespucci

Philology, the ancient science that tends to restore legibility to documents and remove any falsities, is of inestimable value to the data processing a historiographer must undertake. It can provide answers in terms of certainty, and not of lesser or greater probability as occurs with those who only proceed using inductive logic. Not only does philology provide clear and reliable tools, it can also provide solutions to apparently inextricable problems. To those who study Vespucci, philology offers a quiet certainty regarding the debated "Lettera a Soderini", which it would be better to call the "Lettera al gonfaloniere Piero Soderini e al duca René II di Lorena". Five different copies have come down to us from the distant past, four in Italian and one in Latin, indicated respectively by the letters S, A, C, V and QN (the last being the initials for the Latin copy).

Luciano Formisano has created a 'family tree' of these five copies, which shows a diagram of the derivations and relationships between the five documents and their genesis through time. The procedure used was rendered particularly laborious by the fact that the copies of the text were not made by professional copiers, whose methods are known, but by occasional, disordered and erratic copiers. One copy is in Latin, fortunately the work of a very skilled translator.

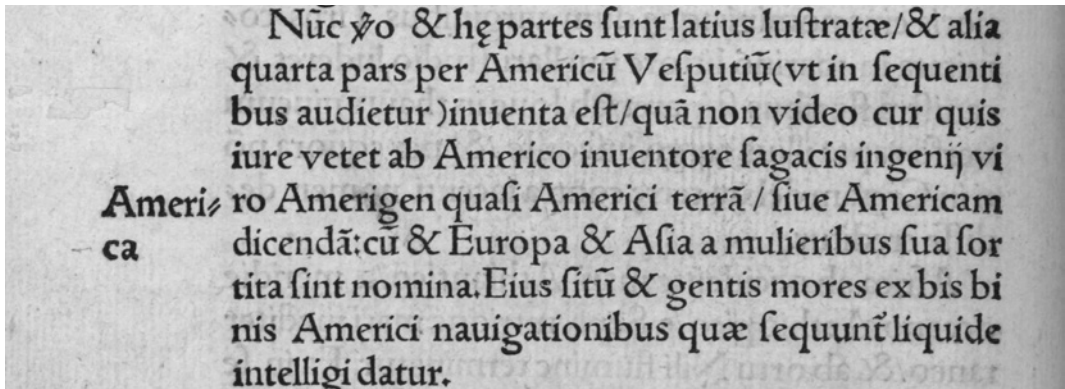


Figure 13.2 Facsimile of a passage from the *Cosmographiae introductio* in which, with great enthusiasm for Amerigo's success, the name 'America' is proposed for the New World

This 'family tree' tells us that the printed copy in Latin (QN), made by the scholars of the Gymnasium in Lorraine, is the closest to the original copy (ω) (in this case written by Vespucci) via at least one other copy (β) that came from Lisbon. The only fact that is not demonstrated by this conclusion is that ω was written by Vespucci (but this can be deduced from the context) and that between copies ω and β there were intermediate copies, a fact of little importance which remains conjectural.

13.3 The Name America is Proposed for the New World

When the material obtained by the emissary reached the three scholars at Saint-Dié, it seemed appropriate to present the "Lettera" to their Duke as a personal gift from Amerigo Vespucci, which was plausible given that the Duke had been a pupil of his uncle Giorgio Antonio Vespucci in Florence.⁴ The "Lettera" was written in incorrect Italian and there was no dedication, so the scholars of Saint-Dié gave it to a monk, Johannes Basin de Sendacourt, who was a good Latinist and poet, to translate into Latin. He also adapted the letter to the new circumstances.⁵

Martin Waldseemüller quickly got to work on the new material. Firstly, he created a small globe on which the New World was identified with the name 'America', according to what was agreed with Ringmann who had been strongly and positively influenced by Amerigo's personality. The two cartographers wrote a brief paper in which they explained how the large map had been planned and made. To this, they added the Latin translation of the "Lettera", this time with a dedication to Duke René II of Lorraine. This work was published in 1507 with the title *Cosmographiae introductio cum quibusdam geometriae ac astronomiae principijs* (Introduction to Cos-

⁴ Bogdan, *La Lorraine des ducs*.

⁵ The "Lettera" was also published in Italian in Florence in about 1505.

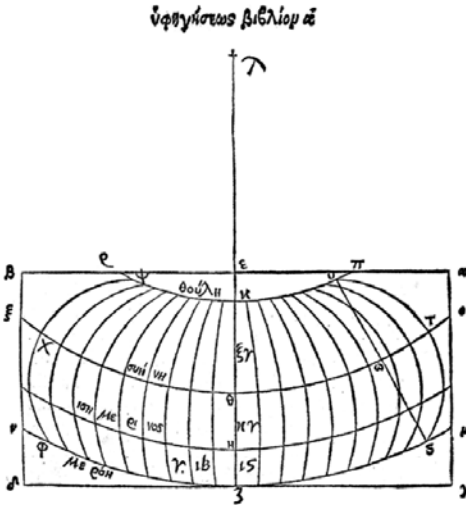


Figure 13.3 The grid of meridians and parallels according to Ptolemy's 'second conic projection', from the first Greek edition of his *Geography* edited by Erasmus of Rotterdam. This projection was used by Waldseemüller for his great map, with some variations. From *The Naming of America* by J.W. Hessler, D. Giles (London, 2008, 47)

mography with *Elements of Geometry and Astronomy*),⁶ in which the introduction of the name America is justified as follows:

In effect, these parts of the world [Europe, Asia and Africa] are well illustrated, while another fourth part was discovered by Amerigo Vespucci (as will be seen in the following pages), which I cannot see why someone could reasonably prevent it being named after its discoverer – a man of shrewd intelligence – *Amerigen*, almost land of Amerigo, or better, *America*, given that Europe and Asia derive their names from women. Its position and the customs of its peoples are clearly understood from *The Four Journeys* which follows in the pages below.⁷

Ringmann and Waldseemüller truly believed that assigning the name 'America' would not give rise to any opposition; instead, it immediately aroused the displeasure of important people. It displeased King Manuel of Portugal, who had financed and arranged everything for that voyage of discovery and would never have accepted reigning over lands that were named after his humble servant. It also displeased Emperor Maximilian, or his courtiers, who had financed the preparation and printing of the great map. Later, Bartolomé de las Casas also objected, insisting on the fact that Christopher Columbus had discovered those lands, not Vespucci. He was right, even though his main argu-

⁶ The book was printed in Saint-Dié in 1507, had other mentions in Strasbourg and was reprinted in facsimile at the beginning of the 20th century (1907) with the addition of an English translation, with the title *The "Cosmographiae introductio" of Martin Waldseemüller in facsimile*.

⁷ *The "Cosmographiae introductio" of Martin Waldseemüller in facsimile*, xxx.

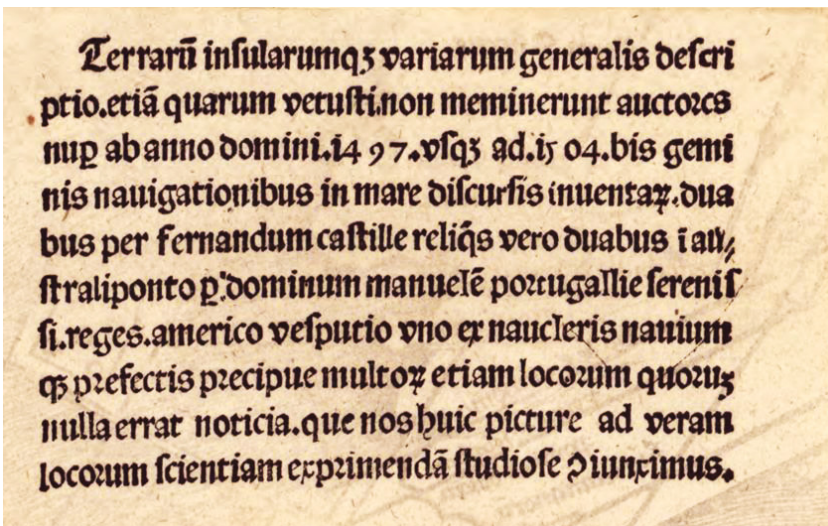


Figure 13.4 Cartouche at the lower left-hand corner of the Waldseemüller Map: "General description of the lands and various islands, including those the ancient authors did not record, recently discovered – from 1497 to 1504, during four journeys, two undertaken in the name of Ferdinand of Castile and the other two across the southern sea in the name of Manuel of Portugal, their Serene Highnesses – recounted by Amerigo Vespucci, one of the owners and commanders of the ships, above all [a description] of the many places about which there was no information and which we have carefully added to this drawing, to develop an authentic knowledge of the places". © Library of Congress, Washington DC (USA)

ment was that the Genoese navigator's success was dictated by Providence.⁸

Neither Columbus nor Vespucci were responsible for or aware of this controversy, although the latter almost certainly had a chance to see the great map with the continent that bore his name. However, the new name proposed by the cartographers of Saint-Dié was not accepted at the time, but only 80 years later.

13.4 Amerigo's contribution to the Waldseemüller Map

Waldseemüller designed his *Planisphere* in an innovative and modern way, making it much richer in information than the charts and pilot's books used at the time for navigation. Above all, it was printed and he introduced information about rivers, mountains and cities, indicated the areas of political influence and the growing colonies, information usually missing in the pilot's books. He also established the use of the graded scale on the edge of maps. He used Latin for the toponymy, but did not always manage to translate the incomprehensible names and left them as he read them. He glued on labels on which additional information was printed in a language that perhaps varied according to the customers.

He used Claudius Ptolemy's 'second conical projection' as the basis, which he then modified. A grid of meridians and parallels arranged according to geometric and mathematical rules formed the basis of this projection. For

⁸ Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, ch. 175.



Figure 13.5 Comparison of the cartographic representation of mountains in the various continents in the Waldseemüller Map (1507). Throughout Europe and Asia, the mountains are stylised as ‘mole tunnels’ (the detail at top left shows the Emodii Mons, that is, the Himalaya). In Africa the style is consistently ‘dune-like’ (the detail at bottom left shows the Moon Mountains, with the sources of the Nile). In the New World (on the right), the chains of North America and the Andes of Ecuador and Chile are drawn in the Tuscan style, as a ‘pile of mounds’, as stylised in the Monte dei Paschi logo and in the heraldic symbol of the Chigi family

simplicity, the grid excluded the polar caps and a wide band of the Southern Hemisphere below the 40° South parallel. Thus, the world took on the form of a long, flared cape laid out on a flat surface. Jerusalem was no longer at the centre of the oecumene, as was the case in the medieval period; the origin of the meridians was placed on the island of La Gomera, in the Canaries, as Ptolemy had done.⁹

The cartographers of the Gymnasium updated in various ways the image of the ‘Old World’ of Ptolemaic tradition, which was by then twelve centuries old. They showed the precise southern borders of Africa that had been ascertained by the Portuguese expeditions, adding Madagascar and the Mascarene Islands as Diogo Dias had described them. However, following

⁹ For those who wish to know more about this famous map, see *The “Cosmographiae introductio” of Martin Waldseemüller in facsimile*; also very useful is Hessler, *The Naming of America, Martin Waldseemüller 1507 World Map*. Jerry Brotton discusses it in *A History of the World in Twelve Maps*.

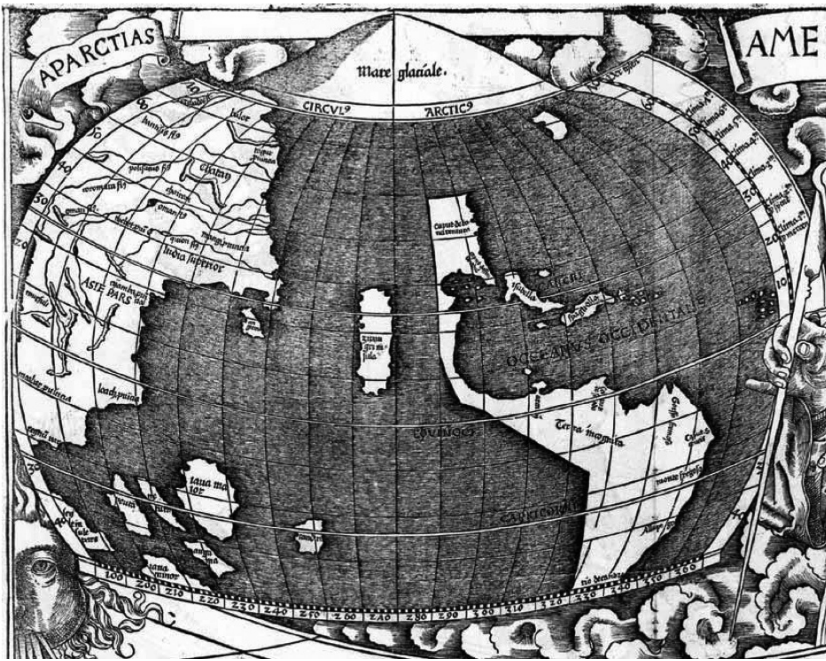


Figure 13.6 The ocean that would later be called the Pacific and South America according to Vespucci are shown on the small hemisphere placed above the Waldseemüller Map. Japan is at the centre and the large islands of present-day Indonesia are below left. An identical but enlarged version of this image appears on the “globe vert” attributed today to Waldseemüller, reproduced in the following figure. Library of Congress, Washington DC (USA)

Ptolemy they traced the Equator too far north by about ten degrees in Africa, repeating the error for the American continent, while on the *Padrão Real* (judging by the Cantino Planisphere) it is traced correctly¹⁰ and Vespucci gave the correct latitude for Cape Verde and Sierra Leone. The cartographers also introduced some details of the south-western part of Asia, provided by Vasco da Gama and Álvares Cabral. For Europe they added the names of cities and completed the outline of the Mediterranean, adding what had been drawn by the cartographers from Genoa, Venice and Majorca, but making the Gulf of Sirte too small; Scandinavia and Greenland were still represented in a less than rudimentary manner. It was Olaus Magnus who would provide a good illustration of Scandinavia on his excellent *Carta Marina*, printed in Venice in 1539 and formed by six sheets to be joined to form one, just as Waldseemüller had designed his *Planisphere*.

Thus, for the New World and the New Ocean, Waldseemüller and Ringmann had used what they had received from Vespucci, who had inserted his own discoveries in his copy of the *Padrão Real*. The image of South America on the great map is certainly the one drawn up by Amerigo, as is explicitly written at the bottom of the map and in the box at the bottom left hand side.¹¹ This can be deduced from the cordillera of the Andes and other moun-

¹⁰ Nunn dedicated the first chapter of *The Geographical Conceptions of Columbus* to the position of the Equator in Africa.

¹¹ The writing on the lower edge of the map reads: *Universalis cosmographica secundum Ptholomei traditionem et Americii aliorumque lustrationes* (Universal cosmography according to the tradition of Ptolemy and the illustrations of Amerigo Vespucci and others).

tain chains drawn in the Tuscan style, never used by other cartographers. It can also be deduced from the toponym *Abbatia Omnium Sanctorum*, the Latin translation of 'Badia di Tutti e' Santi' (All Saints' Abbey), the name of the church in Florence that was dear to Amerigo, as well as from islands with Italian names about which more will be said below.

All lands south of Brazil are missing from South America, for which Vespucci limits his comments to "we sailed so far on this wind [the sirocco] that we found ourselves [so] high that the southern celestial pole was 52 degrees above our horizon".¹² It may be presumed that Vespucci did not talk about what he had seen of the continent's coast during the navigation between January 26 and April 7, 1502 out of respect for the oath he had been forced to take.

Central America is represented in a way that is very similar to how it appears on the Portuguese *Padrão Real* of 1500.¹³ In particular, the southern coast and the Leeward Islands in the Caribbean Sea conform to the way in which Vespucci and de La Cosa had drawn them: the Guajira Peninsula appears as an island, while the Gulf of Urabá is not shown.

On the large map, the Isthmus of Panama is drawn in a new and revolutionary way on the basis of what was seen during the Voyage of the Four Merchants and on the basis of the information provided by the Indios. As I anticipated at the end of Chapter 4 (§ 4.6), the Author is about twenty years ahead of the correct understanding of this isthmus.

The new ocean west of the isthmus, unknown to Europeans, would only be seen in 1513 by Vasco Núñez de Balboa who named it the South Sea and then by Magellan who in 1520 called it the Pacific Ocean. It is very important to note that this ocean is on the map thanks to the fact that the cartographer constructed it assigning to the geographical degrees a greater length than that used previously, still however remaining a little below the measure accepted today (see § 7.7).

Cuba and the part of North America are represented according to the Portuguese *Padrão Real*, i.e. the way those coasts were seen during the first and second voyages of Columbus.¹⁴ It should be noted that, on the *Planisphere* by Niccolò Caveri, the illustrator added a forest to the west of the North American coast, while Vespucci, in his stylised manner, drew there the mountains that rise to the west of the great coastal plain of Georgia and South Carolina, which today are called the Allegheny Mountains. It can be presumed that he had been informed about these mountains by the natives, the same ones who had told him about the mountains that he depicted in the eastern part of the Yucatán and in Honduras.

One strange detail on the planisphere is constituted by a group of seven islands situated on the southern meridian of the Canaries, just below the 30° South parallel. The islands are marked with the Portuguese flag and the words "Insule.7. delle Pulzelle" are written on the central one. At the time, the island of Guadalupe in the Lesser Antilles was known as the Isola delle Pulzelle (or Isola delle Donne, i.e. Island of Women), as its inhabitants were all female. This may have been a note by Vespucci who aimed to improve the image of those islands, which the cartographer inserted in the wrong position

¹² "Lettera a Soderini". *Codice Vaglianti*, folio 117vb.

¹³ See the Cantino Planisphere, a copy of the *Padrão Real*.

¹⁴ See Chapter 3.



Figure 13.7 The globe once attributed to Schöner and today to Waldseemüller derives, as regards the images and size, from the hemisphere containing America and the Pacific Ocean (cf. preceding figure); Peru has been added and it shows the Antarctic which the Portuguese knew vaguely. This “globe vert” is preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France

and the engraver had to re-engrave and fit into the plate, thus damaging it. Why? Perhaps because news had just arrived of the discovery of the islands of Tristan da Cunha in 1506, which are situated more or less in that position.

Another strange correction appears on this map and regards the Canary Islands and the Cape Verde archipelago, which are too close to each other and out of proportion. The defect is due to the fact that in correspondence with Africa the line of the Equator is about 10° too far north according to the ancient geographer Ptolemy (as mentioned above) and the Cape Verde Islands are positioned too far north, while the Canaries are in the correct position. The correction does not remedy the error but renders it more obvious. Both these corrections regarding the Atlantic islands appear on a

much smaller and coloured map by Waldseemüller, which was created after the corrections were made to the large map that has come down to us. It is reproduced in Figure 1 of this volume.

13.5 The Idea of the New World is Accepted by the Cartographers Who Use for It the Names Proposed by Amerigo

The name America proposed by the scholars from Lorraine was not immediately successful, although the great map of the German cartographer widely circulated. Almost all cartographers in the first half of the 16th century received Amerigo's message and used the term *Mondo Nuovo* (New World) introduced by him and other equivalent terms he used. The name America appears for the first time on the *Planisfero di Pesaro*, dated 1508, while "Terra Sancte Crucis, sive Mundus novus" can be read on the *Planisphere* by Johannes Ruysch dated 1508. 'Terra S. Crucis sive Mundus Novus' is written on the *Planisphere* by Francesco Rosselli of the same year.

The extraordinary map of South America in polar projection, from 1519 (?) and attributed to Pedro Reinel, bears the words "Terra do Brasil". On the 1525 *Planisphere* by Niño García de Toreno, a cartouche placed at the height of present-day South America contains the words "Terra Firme" (*sic*). "Mundus Novus" can be read on the *Planisphere* by Diego Ribero *cosmógrafo de su Majestad* (1527); and it is also named in this way on the *Carta del Nuevo Mundo* in Battista Agnese's 1544 atlas. On the *Carta Marina* of 1516, the northern part of the new continent is called, as Christopher Columbus had done over 20 years earlier, the "Terra de Cuba Asiae Partis", but in a globe also attributed to Waldseemüller all the new concepts introduced by Amerigo are used.

No names appear on the map of Juan Vespuccio, Amerigo's nephew, which dates to 1523 and was perhaps incomplete, while "Tierra Firme" can be read on Salviati's one dated 1525.

Finally, we read "America sive India Nova" on a map of 1570 by Abraham Ortelius, in which the cordillera of the Andes is shown in almost the correct position. However, this is an exception, given that on the Portuguese *Planisphere* in four sheets by Bartolomeu Coelho, dated 1580, present-day North America is called "Mundus Novus", while South America is named "Quarta Pars Orbis" (both names used by Vespucci).

The list of cartographers who abandoned Columbus's idea that the new lands were parts of Asia and accepted Vespucci's idea that this was the New World can be lengthened, but it is not the case to bore the reader. If the cartographers did not accept the name America, one might think that to those who knew Amerigo, or had heard him spoken of as an ordinary person, it seemed inappropriate to use his name for a new continent.

Later, when Amerigo had been dead for about 70 years and by then had acquired mythical status, all except a few Spaniards and Portuguese used the name America. This choice was influenced by the opinion of Ortelius and even more so by that of Mercator, who adopted this name in his 1585 *Atlas*. Mercator felt great admiration for the protagonists of that period and indeed proposed the name Magellania for the lands south of the Magellan Strait, while he forgot Christopher Columbus, *Almirante del Mar Océano*, whose name did not appear on any map.

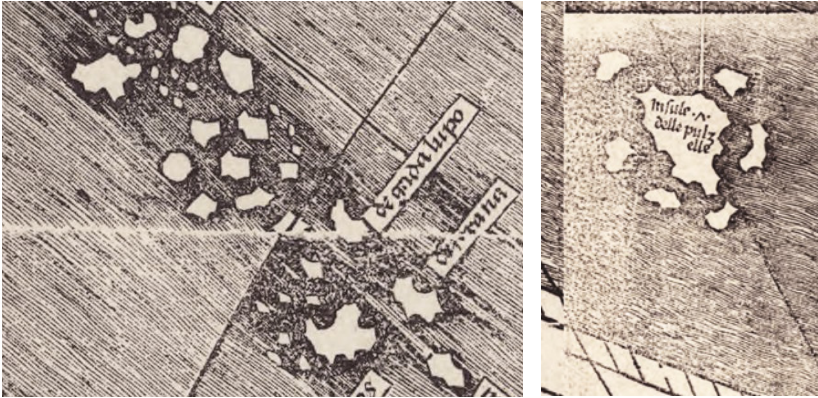


Figure 13.8 The same group of islands appear twice on the Waldseemüller Map. The first, at the centre of the left-hand image, is etched in a traditional way, the second, on the right, is more detailed and of different proportions. I presume that the geographers of the Gymnasium had inserted the second image by Vespucci in the wrong place (on the meridian of Gomera and at latitude 30°S), believing it to be of a different archipelago. Both images represent the island of Guadalupe, known as 'delle Pulzelle', and those that surround it, inhabited by a population of Indio Amazons. © Library of Congress, Washington DC (USA)

Amerigo's concept gained success both with cartographers and with other important Renaissance figures: Thomas More, Copernicus and Montaigne.

As I mentioned previously, Thomas More, politician as well as celebrated humanist, was struck upon reading the description of the Tupí society, free of conflicts and having universal respect for the needs and wishes of others. In his *Utopia*, he imagined a society that was far more developed in the knowledge of literature, the arts and sciences, with a pacific and fruitful internal coexistence. Its hero is one Raphael Hythlodæus, a well-educated man who had accompanied Vespucci on his first three voyages but not the fourth, as on that occasion he had travelled towards the islands of Asia and found Utopia, a non-existent island, of which he describes the perfect social and cultural organisation.¹⁵

From the first pages of his own masterpiece, Copernicus announced the discovery of a fourth continent, while Montaigne, often using Amerigo's own words, whom he did not mention, wrote widely about the Indios' behaviour, comparing it with that of the *conquistadores*.

In contrast, news of Columbus diminished in that period, even though his great enterprise is remembered in all works about geographical discoveries.

¹⁵ The exact title of the work, published in 1516, is *Libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus de optimo de rei publicae status, deque nova insula Utopia*.