

Teacher Notes: Waldseemüller Map: World 1507

Source: Hessler, John. *The Naming of America*. Washington DC: Library of Congress. 2007.

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Instructions for mounting a map in 1516:

If you want to mount the map sheets as one map for your own use and glue it in place securely, take some linen or some piece of clean cloth and place a firm board on a table or chest and stretch the sheet firmly by hammering nails all around the border. Next cut the pages of the map along the left or right side so that they fit next to each other without spaces. The middle sheets must also be cut lengthwise along the top and bottom. You should first definitely try to fit the sheets together before you begin to glue. After you have checked the positioning put some glue, but not too strong, into a small pan or pot. Warm it up, but not too hot. Then take a brush, one that is not too small but one that has soft hairs. Brush the back of the first sheet with glue and place it on the upper left. Employ an assistant so you can move fast and place the pages down so that they fit immediately. After the sheet is down put a clean paper over it and rub it with a piece of cloth until it is smooth..

Sheet 1. (Page 13)

Translation: *Many have regarded as an invention the words of a famous poet that “beyond the stars lies a land, beyond the path of the year and the sun, where Atlas, who supports the heavens, revolves on his shoulders the axis of the world, set with gleaming stars,” but now finally it proves clearly to be true. For there is a land, discovered by Columbus, a captain of the King of Castile, and by Americus Vesputius, both men of very great ability, which, though in great part it lies beneath “the path of the year and of the sun” and between the tropics, nevertheless extends about 19 degrees beyond the Tropic of Capricorn toward the Antarctic Pole, “beyond the path of the year and the sun.” Here a greater amount of gold has been found than of any other metal.*

Sheet 2. (Page 15)

- continent of South America separated from Asia,
- a new ocean
- changes/corrections having been made to the woodblocks

Sheet 3. (Page 17)

- the name America is placed on the lower part of what is now South America.
- Translation: *A general delineation of the various lands and islands, including some of which the ancients make no mention, discovered lately between 1497 and 1504 in four voyages over the seas, two commanded by Fernando of Castile, and two by Manuel of Portugal, most serene monarchs, with Amerigo Vespucci as one of the navigators and officers of the fleet; and especially a delineation of many places hitherto unknown. All this we have carefully drawn on the map, to furnish true and precise geographical knowledge.*

Sheet 4. (Page 19)

- portrait of Ptolemy
- inset map that describes Ptolemy’s knowledge of the world.

Sheet 5. (Page 21)

- Mediterranean, Europe and North Africa (based on Ptolemy)
- Schöner drew red lines over the Middle East north to the Black Sea region.

Sheet 6. (Page 23)

- lower region of Africa (unknown to Ptolemy and hence Waldseemüller’s representation of it is based on newer geographic information)
- Waldseemüller had to remove a portion of the map’s border in order to make room for the lower part of the continent—something he did not do in the case of South America.

Sheet 7. (Page 25)

- portrait of Amerigo Vespucci
- inset map showing Vespucci’s new discoveries.
- The representation of the New World is slightly different in this inset from that of the entire map in that North and South America remain connected.
- small wasp that sits off his left shoulder above the word Aquilo.

Sheet 8. (Page 27)

- part of the Middle East and South Asia,
- this sheet contains an area that must have interested Schöner a great deal, as he covered much of the region with a red coordinate grid.

Sheet 9. (Page 29)

- shows the many islands that Waldseemüller thought existed off the coast of India, some real and others fictional.

Sheet 10. (Page 31)

- Cathay (China).
- Translation: *In describing the general appearance of the whole world, it has seemed best to put down the discoveries of the ancients, and to add what has since been discovered by the moderns, for instance, the land of Cathay, so that those who are interested in such matters and wish to find out various things may gain their wishes and be grateful to us for our labor, when they see nearly everything that has been discovered here and there, or recently explored, carefully and clearly brought together, so as to be seen at a glance.*

Sheet 11. (Page 33)

- areas supposedly ruled over by Prester John, which Waldseemüller symbolized by placing the cross inside the small shields.

Sheet 12. (Page 35)

- Translation: *Although many of the ancients were interested in marking out the circumference of the world, things remained unknown to them in no slight degree; for instance, in the west, America, named after its discoverer, which is now known to be a fourth part of the world. Another is, to the south, a part of Africa, which begins about seven degrees this side of Capricorn and stretches in a large expanse southward, beyond the torrid zone and the Tropic of Capricorn. A third instance, in the east, is the land of Cathay, and all of southern India beyond 180 degrees of longitude. All these we have added to the earlier known places, so that those who are interested and love things of this sort may see all that is known to us of the present day, and may approve of our painstaking labors. **This one request we have to make, that those who are inexperienced and unacquainted with cosmography shall not condemn all this before they have learned what will surely be clearer to them later on, when they have come to understand it.***

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After the printing of the map it appears to have received little attention in cartographic circles even though it presented a radically new understanding of world geography based on the discoveries of Columbus and Vespucci. Waldseemüller himself recognized that the map was an important departure from previous cartographic views of the world and asked for the reader's patience when looking at the map. In the large text block found in the lower right-hand corner of the map we find him saying: **"This one request we have to make, that those who are inexperienced and unacquainted with cosmography shall not condemn all this before they have learned what will surely be clearer to them later on, when they have come to understand it."** Sadly, his radical new view of the world was noted by few references in contemporary geographic literature and, having been copied by only a few minor cartographers, it slipped into obscurity and disappeared.

Based on their reading of the *Cosmographiae Introductio* in the early and mid-nineteenth century, later scholars, such as Alexander von Humboldt and Marie d'Avezac-Macaya, speculated on the map's existence, on its importance to the early history of the New World, and on its crucial role in the naming of America, all without ever having laid eyes on a copy of the map itself.

The map, which displays the name America for the first time on any map, also represents the continents of North and South America with a shape that is geometrically similar in form to the outlines of the continents as we recognize them today. The two aspects of the shape and the location of the New World on the map, separated as it is from Asia, are chronologically and chronometrically problematic in that in 1507, the map's supposed creation date, neither Vasco Núñez de Balboa nor Ferdinand Magellan had reached the Pacific Ocean.