



AMERICA COMES FROM FREIBURG: Cartographer Waldseemüller from Freiburg was the first to show the New World as a Continent in 1507 and named it AMERICA

Authors: Rudolf-Werner Dreier
Submitted: 4. May 2015
Published: 4. May 2015
Volume: 2
Issue: 3
Keywords: America, Martin Waldseemüller, Cartography. Amerigo Vespucci, Matthias Ringmann, Freiburg
DOI: 10.17160/josha.2.3.37

JOSHA

josha.org

**Journal of Science,
Humanities and Arts**

JOSHA is a service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content



MARTIN WALDSEEMÜLLER'S WORLD MAP OF 1507

AMERICA COMES FROM FREIBURG

Cartographer Waldseemüller from Freiburg was the first to show the New World as a Continent in 1507 and named it AMERICA

Rudolf-Werner Dreier
Public Relations
Albert-Ludwigs-University
Fahnenbergplatz
79085 Freiburg, Germany

"America" is a word that is now part of our everyday language. We speak of "America" and the "Americans" rather than of the "United States". But where does this name come from? Very few people are aware of the fact that it was actually the work of a cartographer from Freiburg which led to the popularization of this name throughout the world.

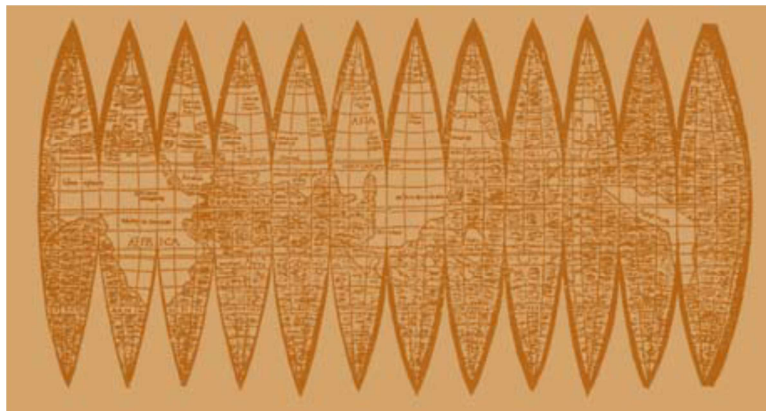
Martin Waldseemüller, born between 1470 and 1475, grew up within the walls of Freiburg, then still part of the Austrian Empire. Today, College Building III of the Albert-Ludwigs-University stands on the site of his parents' house, a house in Loewenstrasse which bore the name "Zum Hechtkopf" (the house with the sign of the pike-fish's head). For the young student Waldseemüller it was but a short walk to the lecture rooms of the university in the town center.

In English the entry in the rolls of the University of Freiburg for the year 1490 reads: "Martinus Walzemuller of Freiburg in the diocese of Constance: 7 December".

His mentor at the university was the Carthusian prior Gregor Reisch, father-confessor to the Emperor Maximilian I. He introduced the young student to the study of cosmography, the medieval equivalent of the disciplines geography and cartography. At that time the teaching material was still based on Ptolemy's ancient picture of the world.

During his studies in Freiburg Waldseemüller met his later colleague Matthias Ringmann from Alsace (France). After 1505 we find the two, Waldseemüller and Ringmann, working and teaching in the "Gymnasium Vosagense", a scholastic academy in St. Dié in Lorraine (France). The surname 'Waldseemüller' literally translated into English means: 'the miller from the forest lake'. As was usual at the time, Waldseemüller, like Ringmann, who called himself 'Philesius Vogesina', took a nom de plume. The name 'Waldseemüller' (his real surname was Waltzenmueller) was actually derived from this nome de plume - "Martinus Ilacomilus" (Ilacomilus = from gr. 'hyle' = forest; lat. 'lacus' = 'lake' and gr. 'mylos' = mill) - and the name "Waldseemüller" has stuck.

Under the patronage of Duke René II of Lorraine the two began preparing a new edition of Ptolemy's works. Waldseemüller acted as cartographer, preparing the maps and the woodcuts, while Ringmann took responsibility for the text. On 25 April 1507 his Master Piece was published. It consisted of a world map made up of 12 separate woodcuts which, put together, cover an area of three square meters, 12 strips to be mounted on a globe. It also contained the reports of Amerigo Vespucci's travels. The whole work was dedicated to Maximilian I, Emperor of Austria. Maximilian I (22 March 1459 – 12 January 1519). Perfect timing: On April 27, 1507, the Imperial Diet ("Reichstag") of the "Holy Roman Empire" opened in Constance, Germany.

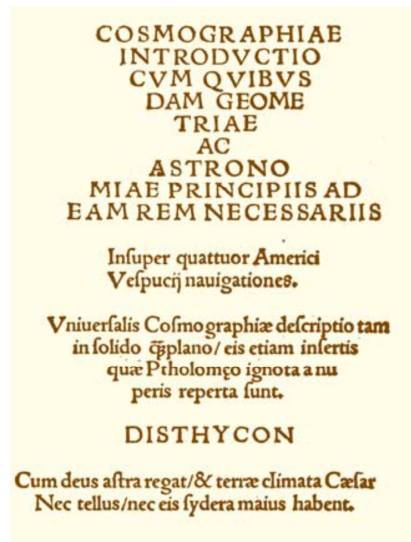


*MARTIN WALDSEEMÜLLER'S WORLD MAP OF 1507
12 Wood cut strips to be mounted on a globe*

A copy of the text can be found in the university library of the Albert-Ludwigs-University in Freiburg. The woodcuts and globe strips were rediscovered at the end of the 19th century. The globe strips are now kept in the James Ford Bell Collection in the U.S.A. and the only original world map in the U.S. congress library in Washington

The English translation of the description of the maps is as follows:

”Description of the whole world in globe and map form, including those lands, unknown to Ptolemy, which have been recently discovered”.



*'COSMOGRAPHIAE INTRODUCTIO': RINGMANN'S ACCOMPANYINGTEXT TO WALDSEEMÜLLER'S
MAPS OF 1507*

While writing the text, the 22-year-old Ringmann made a mistake as far as the name of the discoverer of the New World was concerned. This error was to have far-reaching consequences. He had read with fascination the travel journals of the Florentine explorer Amerigo Vespucci.



AMERIGO VESPUCCI

The supposed discoverer of America, Detail from the 1507 map of the world

Between 1499 and 1502 Vespucci had undertaken four voyages to the coasts of Central and South America and had discovered the mouth of the Amazon. However, in 1507 Ringmann took him to be the discoverer of the New World. Accordingly he suggested calling the new continent `America´ for - so he argued - , "I see no reason why (this continent) should not be called `Amerige´, the land of Americus, after its discoverer Amerigo, a man of estimable wisdom, or `America´, for the names of `Europa´ and `Asia´ are also derived from the names of women". It would seem that Waldseemüller was at first hesitant and that it was only at the insistence of his friend that he agreed to adopt the new name on his maps. After this, the name "America" spread like wildfire.



MARTIN WALDSEEMÜLLER'S WORLD MAP OF 1507, Detail showing the new continent named AMERICA

Waldseemüller's maps awakened a great deal of interest and thus helped popularize the new name. Later Waldseemüller tried, without success, to eradicate this error. In his largest map collection of 1513 the word `America´ does not reappear. In its place we find (in English translation): "This land and the surrounding islands were discovered by Christopher Columbus, the servant of the King of Castille". However, all Waldseemüller's attempts, up to his death in 1522, to re-name the newly discovered continent `Brazil´, or even `Parrotland´ came to nothing. `America´ was already on everyone's lips and had become an accepted part of the language.

The cartographer Waldseemüller from Freiburg was the first to show the New World as a continent. And he unvoluntarily propagated the error which gave the new continent its name:

AMERICA

Literature

1. Rudolf-Werner Dreier, America comes from Freiburg
<http://www.pr.uni-freiburg.de/publikationen/flyerbroschplak/1america-broschure.pdf>
2. „Cosmographiae Introductio“ von 1507 (UB Freiburg)
3. Franz Laubenberger, Ringmann oder Waldseemüller? Eine kritische Untersuchung über den Urheber des Namens America. In: Erdkunde, Archiv für wissenschaftliche Geographie, Band XIII, Lfg. 3, 1959, Bonn.
4. Franz Laubenberger America – Made in Germany. Vom deutschen Ursprung des Namens. In: Badische Heimat, 56. Jahrgang, Heft 2, Juni 1976.
5. Hermann Mayer, Der Freiburger Geograph Martin Waldseemüller und die neu entdeckten Weltkarten desselben. In: Schauinsland, 31 Jahrlauf, 1904.
6. Ute Obhof, Der Erdglobus, der Amerika benannte. Die Überlieferung der Globensegmente von Martin Waldseemüller aus dem Jahre 1507, ZfdA 135 (2006) Heft 4.
7. H. Wolff, Bedeutendster Kosmograph in einer Epoche forschenden Umbruchs, in: America [anlässlich der Ausstellung „America - Das Frühe Bild der Neuen Welt“ in der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München vom 10. April bis 27. Juni 1992], hrsg. von H. Wolff (Ausstellungskataloge, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek 58; Kulturstiftung der Länder 38), München 1992, S. 111-126.
8. Walter Preker, Martin Waldseemüller, in „Freiburger Biographien (P. Kalchthaler, W. Preker, Editors), Promo-Verlag, Freiburg 2002, pp 68 – 69
9. Martin Lehmann, Die Cosmographiae Introductio Matthias Ringmanns und die Weltkarte Martin Waldseemüllers aus dem Jahr 1507, Verlag Martin Meidenbauer, München 2010