

## THE EUROPEANS DISCOVERY OF XINA POMPEU FABRA UNIVERSITY BARCELONA

### CHINA IN THE SPOTLIGHT THE INCORPORATION OF AMERICA

And when did America appear in European and Asian maps? Probably the first world map that included the old and new worlds was the one drawn in 1500 by Juan de la Cosa, a Spanish cartographer that went with Columbus in his second voyage and was also well aware of the arrival of Vasco da Gama to India. This map, as can be better seen in the silhouette of the map, shows a very accurate knowledge of Africa and the Mediterranean, a firsthand knowledge of the American coasts and islands, but a very distorted rendition of East Asia, probably still gathered from very ancient hearsay. Even the three Magi are still wandering throughout Asia.

A few years later, in 1507, Waldsemüller's elongated silhouette of America introduced the Western Hemisphere in the World maps.

Waldsemüller genius came from his understanding that all the new discovered lands were not a sum of archipelagos, but stood together as a new continent.

While the Far East was still under the spell of medieval sources, the Far West now belonged to its recent conqueror, the kingdom of Castile, and a new name appeared, America, together with the image of its alleged discoverer, Amerigo Vespuccio.

At the beginning of the 16th century the Mediterranean world became increasingly familiar with the American coasts.

In 1513, a naval officer of the Turkish Ottoman empire, called Piri Reis, produced a delightful world map, of which only the western third survives today.

The delicious drawings in the map combine with a thorough knowledge of the Brazilian coast.

On the left side of the map a long text explains how the map was composed.

It mentions classical sources but also a map of the western part drawn by Columbus and four maps recently made by the Portuguese.

To the intense displeasure of the Lisboan court, cartography was also becoming global.

America didn't come to the Chinese horizon until the last decades of the 16th century, when the Castilians first landed in the Philippines coming from the East in 1564. The Manila Galleon soon established a direct and continuous contact between the two continents and provided a growing sense of the high economic value of the Pacific Ocean. Even so, the shape of America was first shown to the Chinese through the world map drawn by the Jesuit Matteo Ricci in 1584. He was smart enough as to place China in the center, which made the map much more palatable for his Chinese audience. The Chinese felt very curious about it, and it quickly went to print, but it didn't suppose a challenge to their global worldview.

For 15th Europe, on the contrary, the discoveries brought with them an everlasting challenge. Europe was living in a frenzy of maritime exploration, and to discover that they had completely wrong the proportion of lands and seas on the planet had a decisive impact on geographical thinking.

But the challenge went deeper than that. The discovery of new worlds was regarded with extreme caution, and it was not drawn in maps until after a decade of the discovery of America, because it challenged the knowledge inherited both from Classical writers and from the Bible. Ptolemy's map, circulating since the 14th century, was a definite authority, just recovered after centuries of oblivion. And then it became evident that its general outline was definitely wrong. Furthermore, the Bible that had been dictated by God and was the maximum repository for all knowledge, didn't say a word about those new worlds. And that was a challenge, because if the Bible didn't know about them it was most likely that the Bible didn't know about many other things. The discovery of America and of the East Asian worlds relegated Ptolemy's map to an antiquarian curiosity and, much more important, brought with it the discovery of how ignorant we were and how much we had to learn. And in doing so, the discoveries of the new worlds ignited the scientific revolution in Europe.