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## Amerigo Vespucci and the Four Finger (Kunstmann II) World Map

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### *Summary*

Is the anonymous painted map of the world, dated c. 1506 in the Bavarian State Library, also known as the "Four Finger" world chart, or as the Kunstmann II, authored by Amerigo Vespucci? The map was a privately-held, highly illuminated painted world map. Its execution implies a map-maker with access to up-to-date Spanish and Portuguese geographic knowledge, and who had likely travelled to the new world. This paper explores the evidence for attributing the authorship of the map to Amerigo Vespucci and asks if digital cartography can further resolve this question.

How important is it for historians to identify the hands and minds behind the making of a map? Does it matter who the map's maker is? The anonymous painted map of the world, dated c. 1506 in the Bavarian State Library, also known as the "Four-Finger" world chart, or Kunstmann II, provides a tantalizing example with which to explore this question. This map, which was most likely made in Spain in the first decade of the sixteenth century, is one of the most famous of the early European maps of the world, and it is loaded with visual signs and icons that project initial European interpretations of the new places that sea captains were bringing into an expanding Atlantic world of trade and colonization. The hypothesis presented in this paper is that Amerigo Vespucci might have been the cartographer of this map, but sufficient evidence is lacking. If digital cartography can provide historians with new tools with which to analyze anonymous maps, then new information, not only on Vespucci but on other early map-makers, could yield exciting new insights on the early perceptions and visual representations of the Americas.

In particular, I am interested in identifying cartographers in order to ascertain cartographic go-betweens; by cartographic go-between I mean the map-maker who is known to have travelled to the places he mapped. Elsewhere I have argued that there are three principle kinds of go-betweens in the early Atlantic World and that each is highly significant (Metcalf 2005; Duffy and Metcalf 2011). These go-betweens are: the physical go-between, such as the sailor, slave, or colonist, who physically connects worlds by crossing the ocean. The transactional go-between is more complex: he or she serves as the interpreter or the cultural broker; the third party who must be present for exchanges to take place. The third kind of go-between is representational: the one who makes sense of one world to peoples of another. It is here, with the representational go-between, that we find those who not only write chronicles, but who also draw maps. If we can separate out those cartographers who actually travelled and who saw the landscapes, peoples, and animals that they subsequently mapped, we will have, I believe, a unique impression and highly valuable construction of newly-encountered worlds. In particular, I am interested in knowing if the cartographic go-between will privilege eye-witness observation and attempt to recreate places as they were seen, not imagined, even when making maps for powerful patrons.

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That the Four-Finger world map might have been created by a map-maker who had travelled in the Atlantic world makes perfect sense. It was created at the beginning of the sixteenth century, at a time when maps were still created in small numbers (Wood, Fels, Krygier 2010: 21-38) and when geographical knowledge of the Americas was limited to mariners, merchants, and colonists of primarily Spain and Portugal. Its antecedents lie in the tradition of the portolan chart, the practical and utilitarian drawings that were used by sailors in the Mediterranean, usually in conjunction with *portolani* (portolan books) that gave descriptions of coasts, ports, and distances (Jourdin & La Roncière 1984; Campbell 1987). Yet it is clearly a work of art, illustrated and illuminated by an artist who worked alongside of the map-maker. Whether created by someone who traveled, or by a cartographer who did not, all maps, as J. B. Harley (2001) argues, are value-laden images that are easily manipulated by the powerful. Moreover, as Denis Wood and John Fels (1992) clearly show, no mapmaker can be an objective observer, for all maps exclude information; each map explicitly or implicitly favors the interests that lie behind the map. Each map, then has a "story in the map" that is its physical, social, and political depictions as well as a "story of the map" that is the history of its production and consumption (Short 2003: 24). These insights suggest the importance of analyzing who made maps in order to better understand what the messages of the map are.

To some extent it is possible to ignore individual map-makers and to analyze historical maps by classifying them into groups that reflect shared techniques, perceptions, iconography, and geographical information. Such analysis and classification underlies much of the sorting of maps into national "schools," such as the Portuguese school, the Spanish school, the Dutch school. While such sorting does enable historians to work with maps as a corpus of cultural information, there are obvious problems. For example, it is well known that many Portuguese map-makers went into the service of Spain, such as Diego Ribeiro, that Portuguese map-makers were highly influential in the development of the "Dieppe School" of northern France, and that perhaps the most important Renaissance cartographer, Martin Waldseemüller, made use of marine charts--none of which were German--in his creation of his world map of 1507 (Waldseemüller 2008: 106).

A focus on the cartographers, rather than on their nationalities, has certain advantages, that take into account the fluidity of map makers in the sixteenth century. In the present case, Amerigo Vespucci is difficult to assign to a single nation. Do we consider him primarily a Florentine? What about the fact that he was present on voyages for the crowns of Spain and Portugal? By royal decree, he became a citizen of the Spanish kingdoms of Castile and Leon in 1505, and subsequently, he was appointed to the office of Piloto Major in 1508. This fluidity is a characteristic of go-betweens. Go-betweens are always in motion, and this, along with the information they wield and their skills in communication, is part of what gives them their power.

Vespucci is in many ways the quintessential representational go-between for his published letters--the *Mundus Novus* and the *Soderini* (also known as the *Quatuor Navigationes* or *Lettera*)--profoundly shaped how Europeans viewed the Americas in the early sixteenth century. He has been long been mistrusted by historians, who view him as an unreliable, self-aggrandizing reporter (Gerbi 1985; Fernández-Armesto 2007). While historians once accepted the published letters, Magnaghi (1926) threw considerable doubt on their reliability. In the *Quatuor Navigationes*, for example, Vespucci claims to have made four trips to the Americas, but most historians reject the first voyage as a fabrication and can find little confirming evidence for the fourth. Felipe Fernández-Armesto, for example, argues that Vespucci made only two: the first, with Alonso de Hojeda and Juan de la Cosa in 1499

and a second in 1501-1502 that sailed along the Brazilian coast (Fernández-Armesto 2007: 62-93). Because of the controversy over Vespucci's published letters (*Mundus Novus* and *Quatuor Navigationes*) in this paper we shall only use information from what Alberto Magnaghi (1926: 16-17) and Luciano Formisano (1992: xix) calls his "familiar" letters. The three familiar letters (Seville 18 July 1500; Cape Verde 4 July 1501; and Lisbon 1502) were all addressed to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and circulated in manuscript form among merchants and others in Florence. Magnaghi (1926) argues that these letters are the only ones that can be accepted by scholars as genuine; even though they survive only as copies in the papers of Piero Vaglienti of Florence (Magnaghi 1926: 233).

Do we know of any cartographers who were physical or even transactional go-betweens? And is this knowledge significant? Juan de la Cosa, who was known to have made multiple voyages to the Americas, is a clear example of a cartographic go-between. La Cosa sailed with Columbus on the first voyage as the Master and pilot of the *Santa Maria*, while on the second voyage, La Cosa declared his profession to be a sailor and a master chartmaker on *La Niña* (Silió: 1995, 102 ). Later, La Cosa sailed with Alonso de Hojeda in 1499 as pilot major; on this voyage he sailed along the coastline of northern South America. In 1500, he signed a world map that he made in Puerto de Santa Maria. La Cosa sailed several more times to the Americas, and he received a lucrative royal appointment along the coast of modern-day Colombia. He died in the Americas, felled by arrows launched in resistance to a slaving expedition along the mainland of northern Spanish America (Silió: 1995: 65-69 ). Las Casas called him "the best pilot that there was in those seas because he had sailed on all of the Admiral's [Columbus'] voyages" (Las Casas: 1875 III: 10; 294-297) while Peter Martyr d'Anghiera called him an "illustrious navigator" and his maps the most valuable of the day (Anghiera 1912: I: 247 I: 272) .

La Cosas' world map is highly revealing in its use of historical tense and this suggests a perspective of one who had encountered the Americas first hand. In the map of 1500, only the northern coastline of Brazil appears, and its rough depiction shows that it had not been yet been explored in depth. A legend off the coast of Brazil reads "Ysla descubierta por portugal" [Island discovered by Portugal], while farther north a legend reads: "Este cavo se descubrio en año de mil y IIII XCIX por Castilla syendo descubridor vicentians" [This cape was discovered in the year 1499 for Castile, Vicentians [Vicente Yáñez] being the discoverer there of.] These two legends refer to expeditions led by Vicente Yáñez Pinzón and Pedro Álvares Cabral in 1500. Despite the use of the term "island" for Brazil, the visual representation on the map is more suggestive of "tierra firme" or mainland, for it is painted a deep green that suggests its depth. Several icons appear repeatedly on the map: flags and ships. One large icon is religious. All convey the idea of conquest through a continuing effort that will eventually yield results. Five British flags appear along the coast of north America; these reflect the voyage of John Cabot in 1497. Nine Spanish flags appear in the Caribbean and along the northern coast of South America, these refer to the voyages of Columbus, Hojeda, Yáñez Pinzón, Diego de Lepe, and others (Silió: 1995: 108). Many more flags appear on the eastern side of the Atlantic, such as Spanish and Portuguese flags marking the possession the Azores, the Canaries, or Cape Verde Islands. This positioning of flags over islands already claimed makes it clear that the flags placed over the newly discovered coastlines in the Americas are also meant to signify the beginning of possession. Just as flags posted over Atlantic islands tell a history of having been discovered, explored, claimed, and colonized, so too, the map says, will be the islands and mainland of the Americas. The two caravels drawn off the American coast, fly flags, as do other ships in the south Atlantic. These other ships hoist Por-

tuguese flags and signify the Portuguese possession of the sea routes to Africa and India. The religious icon is an image of St. Christopher, which is superimposed over central America and under which Juan La Cosa places his signature, shows the saint crossing water and carrying Christ on his shoulders. The icon is clearly marked with a cross, and thus signifies the intention to expand Christianity into the Americas.

La Cosa's map is fascinating for its use of tense in these visual icons of conquest. The icons do not necessarily declare that conquest has happened (i.e., in the past), rather they intimate how it will unfold in the future. The conquest of the Americas, as depicted through the visual icons on La Cosa's chart, will be the result of effort; the Americas will be acquired through the planting of flags, the domination of sea lanes, and the extension of Christianity. While the map's geographical information will be outdated quickly as new voyages document in better detail the coastlines, the narrative of how the conquest will advance will remain current. This perspective, it seems to me, is the result of the mapmaker knowing the lands being represented; it is a conceit that emerges from his status as a go-between. La Cosa had made multiple Atlantic crossings and he had experienced first hand the nature of contact and colonization. These shape his way of representing the Americas and depicting the process of contact and conquest unfolding on the map.

Columbus was another cartographic go-between, however none of his maps survive. Many references to his maps appear, including on other maps, such as the statements by Piri Reis that "I have also used a map drawn by Columbus (KOLOMBO) in the West" and "The coasts and islands that you can see on [my] map have all been copied from that of Columbus;" these statements appear on the surviving piece of his 1513 world map (Soucek 1996: 50, 59).

According to Bartolomé de Las Casas, Alonso de Hojeda had a map made by Columbus that outlined the coastline of the tierra firme of northern South America that was based on Columbus' outbound sailing on his third voyage of 1498. Columbus sent this "figura y pintura de la tierra" to the crown, and Hojeda came into possession of it through Bishop Juan Rodriguez de Fonseca who, according to Las Casas, greatly favored Hojeda (Las Casas: 1875 II: 269-270). With the aid of this map, Hojeda organized the first expedition that broke Columbus' monopoly. Amerigo Vespucci, who was living in Seville and working as an agent of Gianotto Berardi, the financial backer and outfitter of Columbus, sailed on this expedition led by Hojeda, along with Juan de La Cosa (Fernandez-Armesto 2007: 47-64). In the first of his familiar letters written to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, Vespucci claims to have led this expedition, or to be the captain of his own ship, a fact that seems unlikely, according to historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto, given his lack of expertise at sea. Rather, Fernández-Armesto following Las Casas, suggests that Vespucci was more akin to an adventurer who, by investing in the expedition, hoped to make a fortune from it (Fernández-Armesto 2007: 64-65; Las Casas 1875 II: 271). The expedition of four ships sailed from Cadiz in May of 1499, provisioned in the Canary Islands, then crossed the Atlantic, landing on the coast of northern Spanish America near a river that disgorged so much water that fifteen leagues from the beach the sailors could haul fresh water from the ocean and replenish their casks. Vespucci claims that he sailed south, crossing the Equator and sailing 6 degrees beyond, but eventually, finding a current so strong, turned north and sailed along the coast of present day Suriname and the Guayanas to Venezuela. The expedition visited Trinidad and Margarita; from Venezuela, they sailed to Española.

After returning from this expedition with Hojeda and La Cosa, Vespucci claimed to have made several maps. Vespucci explicitly makes reference to two maps in the first familiar letter to Lorenzo di

Pierfrancesco de' Medici (18 July 1500). He describes one as "una carta in figura piana" and the other as "uno apamundo in corpo sperico" (Vespucci 1985: 13). Vespucci writes, "I have resolved, Magnificent Lorenzo, that, just as I have given you an account by letter of what happened to me, I shall send you two depictions of the world, made and ordered by my own hand and knowledge: one chart will be a flat rendering and the other a map of the world in spherical form" (Vespucci 1992: 17). On this map Vespucci apparently depicted the coast of Africa, as well as the way to India, for, in his letter, he tells his patron how to read the map--"come vedrete per la figura" (Vespucci 1985: 14).

Vespucci went to sea for a second time in 1501-1502. He wrote his patron Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici from the Cape Verde Islands in 1501 and again after his return from Lisbon in 1502. In the 1502 familiar letter composed after his return, Vespucci stated that this expedition sailed for nine months and 27 days along the Brazilian coast from the Cabo Sto. Agostinho to well south of the Tropic of Capricorn. Vespucci described it as a expedition of exploration, and it is likely that it was the voyage sent to Brazil by the Portuguese King Manuel to follow up on Cabral's landing in 1500. Vespucci describes his own letter as brief and as covering only the main points, and it is devoid of any detailed geographic information. Vespucci refers twice to a larger and more detailed work that he has written, which is in the hands of the king of Portugal, and where we may assume, he recorded more detailed information on this voyage.

Despite the lack of a reference to a map drawn following this voyage to Brazil, there are other references to Vespucci as a cartographer. Anghiera notes when a map was consulted that Amerigo Vespucci had "assisted in its composition" and that "he is very skilled in this art." (Anghiera 1912 I: 271). Magnaghi (1926: 222-227) argues that Vespucci's geographical ideas influences Martin Waldseemüller, who, with a loose association of scholars under the patronage of René II, Duke of Lorraine, produced a small book (The *Cosmographiae Introductio*) that featured Vespucci's *Quatuor Navigationes* as well as the giant, magnificent world map printed from cut woodblocks (Waldseemüller 1507). The prominent position given to Vespucci at the top right of the map, opposite Ptolemy, as well as the fact that Vespucci is holding a cartographers compass, clearly indicates that Waldseemüller believed him to be the eminent cartographer of the time. This skill, in addition of the eyewitness descriptions that Vespucci offered in his letters, was deserving in Waldseemüller's mind, of the honor of the naming rights to the new fourth continent, which he names America, after Vespucci. Finally, Vespucci was appointed Piloto Mayor of Spain in 1508, with the right and obligation of training and examining future pilots. Among his responsibilities was to compile the "Padrón Real" from the many extant charts that were circulating among mariners.

Clearly, Vespucci had, by 1508, acquired a reputation as a prominent cartographer in Spain. On what could this reputation be based? A possibility is that it was based on the creation of a world map, such as the Four-Finger map, that synthesized and harmonized geographical information into a single view of the world. Let us now turn to the Four-Finger map.

What is known about the map is well summarized by Ivan Kupcík (2000). In terms of its cartographic technique, its average scale is 1:23 million; it does not have a projection, and the unlabeled equator and tropics are placed imprecisely. Two compass roses in the western Atlantic are turned 11° to indicate compass deviation. Kupcík describes it as a "colored parchment image," and the map today is very faded. In its day, it was certainly a richly illuminated map intended for someone of high rank. This can be deduced by its decorative border in red and brown, its illuminations many of which include gold leaf, and its interpretations on legends that describe key features (Kupcík 2000: 28-34).

As has been noted by David Quinn (1986: 244-246), elaborately colored maps, charts, and atlases were given as presents by monarchs and other men of high rank in the sixteenth century because they were esteemed as works of art. These are the maps and charts that largely survive to our day, and they exist precisely because they were valued as art objects, even when they passed out of the hands of the patrons to whom they were given. Such maps and charts survived the period when they were valued for their utility, whether as accurate representations or as strategic projects, because they were works of art. The crest that appears as part of the icon of the Garden of Eden placed over south Africa suggests that the map was commissioned or quickly came into the hands of Cardinal Bernardino Lopez de Carvajal (Treadway: 2008). Bernardino Lopez de Carvajal was a Spanish Bishop of Cartagena and was later made Cardinal in 1492. In Rome he lived at the palace of the Mellini. He was known for his learning (Weil-Garris and D'Amico 1980: 75; 101).

The map's execution implies two hands: a cartographer and an artist. The cartographer drew the map and included the geographical data, while the artist illustrated the map. The presence of an artist is not unusual for maps, charts, and atlases make use of essential techniques known to artists, be they painters, engravers, or woodcutters (Buisseret 2003: 29-48). To be sure, most charts that were taken to sea were not lavishly illustrated, but charts and maps created for wealthy patrons were embellished with visual imagery designed not only to please the patron but to recreate for the patron a vision and a feel for what the newly discovered lands were like.

The map is dated c. 1506 mainly owing to the absence of Madagascar, but also because of the way that the Americas are portrayed. In the north Atlantic, a scroll reading "Terra do Lavorador" appears over Greenland, as it does on the King Hamy map of 1502. A second scroll that reads "Terra de Corte Reall" appears over what is today Newfoundland and Labrador. Corte Reall refers to Miguel and Gaspar Corte Real, two Portuguese brothers who explored in the northern Atlantic (Harriss 1883; Hayes 2002: 20-21). The map is dubbed the "Four-Finger" Map because of the visual image that appears over Newfoundland/Labrador. The land has been divided into four fingers that suggest "the notion of America as an island . . . is illusory and that one must assume a mainland of hitherto unknown dimensions" (Kupcık 2000: 29).

Vespucci did not make a voyage to the north Atlantic, and the information on the Four-Finger map is suggestive rather than descriptive. There are few place names, for example, and the depiction of these lands follows the King Hamy map and the Cantino map. The Caribbean islands, on the other hand, do include place names. "Terra de Cuba" labels a long thin island with a pronounced northnorthwest-southsoutheast alignment that extends so far north that it nearly reaches the name parallel as Ireland (Kupcık 2000: 29-30). The Island of Española is named "Insula Spanola" and carries the place name "Punta de S. Maria," and shoals off the northern coast are marked with crosses. The coastline of Venezuela contains twelve place names.

The coast of Brazil, which ends with the Rio Cananea, matches Vespucci's voyage of 1501-1502. There are 37 place names. The scroll over Brazil gives the name of Brazil as Holy Cross and describes cassia, parrots, and cannibalism. The visual icon placed over the mainland of Brazil is one of the most famous representations of cannibalism on a map. This imagery is suggestive of Amerigo Vespucci's, whose descriptions of cannibalism were part of what sensationalized his two published letters: the *Mundus Novus* and the *Soderini*. However descriptions of cannibalism also appear in Vespucci's third familiar letter (Lisbon 1502) in which he describes the voyage to Brazil.

Was the image of cannibalism from the hand of the artist or the cartographer? Suzi Colin (1992) argues that the image of cannibalism on the Four Finger Map was drawn by an eyewitness, yet it clearly incorporates a European conceit of what cannibalism must be. The image on the map consists of a body impaled on a spit and does not recreate the rituals of cannibalism as described by later visitors to Brazil. An artist who had not seen but only imagined cannibalism might well come up with the image as it appears on the map.

How does knowing if Vespucci did or did not make this map affect our interpretation of it? The map projects a view of the world that is delivered by one who has sailed the seas. It contains not only information but a persuasion. It shows that in the world beyond Spain and Portugal Africa, the Middle East, and Asia are important, and it suggests that the Americas are not as. Notable is the fact that kings appear in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia, but not in the Americas. This, combined with the strange icon of cannibalism, and the haunting four fingers, convey the idea that the Americas may simply be claimed. No negotiations are necessary, as is the case for trade and settlement in West Africa or India, for the land is inhabited by peoples who do not live under the rule of kings. Settlement, the map implies, would be a positive for these new lands. The kings of Spain and Portugal, united and looking out across the Atlantic, are clearly the leaders who should undertake such a task. I close with a simple question: can methodologies derived from digital cartographic techniques help modern scholars determine the authorship of maps?

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