

Guillaume Le Testu, sometimes referred to as Guillaume Le Têtu (c. 1509-12 – April 29, 1573) was a French privateer, explorer and navigator. He was one of the foremost cartographers of his time and a contributor to the Dieppe school of maps. His maps were distinguished by their sophistication and detail; they influenced generations of cartographers, navigators and explorers.

Guillaume le Testu was born sometime around 1509-12, in either Le Havre, Normandy or Grasse, Provence. He was one of the last students to be taught cartography at the famed school of Dieppe. Le Testu subsequently took part in voyages of exploration throughout the Atlantic Ocean. In 1550, Le Testu was commissioned by King Henry II to create a map of the Americas, particularly where the French were trading. In June 1551, he sailed to Brazil on both an exploration and reconnaissance mission from Henry II, charting as far as the Rio de la Plata. His ship, the *Salamandre*, reached as far as 26° S, a fair distance past present-day Rio de Janeiro. In late December, he became involved in a firefight with two Portuguese ships near Trinidad and sustained heavy damage to his ship, although he was successful in mapping much of the South American coastline by the time of his return to Dieppe in July 1552. Le Testu was also involved in the founding of a French colony near Rio de Janeiro in 1555.

Le Testu was successful as a privateer during the early years of the French Wars of Religion. In 1573, he and Sir Francis Drake attacked a Spanish mule train escorting gold and silver to Nombre de Dios on the Atlantic coast of Panama, and he was subsequently killed following his capture by the Spanish.

Suggestions that Le Testu may have mapped (or even visited) Australia are based on: first, his maps' depiction of a large island (or continent), south of Java, which Le Testu identified as the *Jave la Grande* [Java Major or Great Java] mentioned by Marco Polo (and was otherwise known at the time as *Terra Australis*); and second, Le Testu's incorporation in these maps of birds that resemble black swans and cassowaries, which are both native to Australia. However, he did not claim to have seen *Jave la Grande* in person and many cartographers at the time incorporated hypothetical, mythological or fantastic elements, a practice that is clearly also true of Le Testu. His maps also showed unicorns and monstrous creatures such as 200 meter long giant snakes, basilisks, satyrs, *Blemmyes* (headless humans) and *Cynocephalics* (dog-headed humans).

In 1555 or 1556, Le Testu published a world atlas entitled *Cosmographie Universelle selon les Navigateurs, tant anciens que modernes* and was consequently awarded the title of *Pilote Royale* by Henry II. The *Cosmographie Universelle* contained 56 maps reportedly based on charts Le Testu had personally drawn by hand on his expeditions. This atlas was dedicated to his mentor and patron Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, who had become leader of the Huguenots three years earlier. The manuscript was based on charts from French, Spanish and Portuguese sources supplied by Coligny. Included in this atlas were twelve charts of *Jave le Grand/Terra Australis*, which Le Testu located southward of the Moluccas. Le Testu commented: "However, what I have marked and depicted is only by imagination, and I have not noted or remarked on any of the commodities or incommunities of the place, nor its mountains, rivers or other things; for there has never yet been any man who has made a certain discovery of it." Coligny subsequently supported a proposal from the d'Albaigno brothers, for an expedition to *Terra Australis* to investigate the possibility of a French colony there.

The work begins with a two-page dedication to de Coligny (fol. 1v-2r), followed by fifty-six maps. Six are world maps drawn using various projections (fols. 2v-7v), and

fifty are regional maps (fols. 8v-57v. The orientation in Le Testu's work varies from map to map. As arranged in the atlas, the regional maps pass from the Old World to the New World as follows: Europe (fols. 8v-14v), Africa (fols. 15v-22v), Asia (fols. 23v-30v), Jave la Grande (fols. 31v-33v), the southern continent (fols. 34v-42v) and the Americas (fols. 43v-57v). A consolidation of the maps presents a largely complete world map.



Composite image of Testu's atlas *Cosmographie Universelle*



The maps are painted in tones of blue and green, giving an impression of homogeneity and unity. They are richly decorated with trees and mountains, flags and escutcheons, castles and forts, animals both real and mythical, enthroned kings, subjects both white and dark skinned, some of whom are naked and others richly attired. Each map is accompanied by a handwritten commentary on its facing page. Here Le Testu comments on the climate, resources, customs and habits of the inhabitants, as well as the myths and legends about the regions represented.

Nearly a quarter of the maps are devoted to *Jave la Grande* and southern continent. Le Testu rendered this entire coastline with capes, headlands and deep indentations. He also depicted three large, northward-jutting landforms. One at the far west stretches towards a long island in the South Sea; a second reaches north to form Tierra del Fuego and the Strait of Magellan; and a third is south of the Cape of Good Hope. Further to the east is *Grande Jave*, reaching to just south of an island labeled *Petite Jave*. The viewer can only speculate on the southern boundary of the entire southern landmass.

Le Testu seems to be unconvinced about aspects of this representation. In one commentary (fol. 34r) he advises that 'some say that Great Java which is towards the east is the same land which forms the Strait of Magellan, towards the west; and that all this land is joined together'. Similarly, in another (fol. 39r) he writes: 'many are of the opinion that the land at Magellan's strait and Jave la Grande are joined together; which is not as yet certainly known'. Nevertheless, he presented an imaginary journey from the east coast of Jave la Grande west across the Indian Ocean to Tierra del Fuego and beyond.

Within the interior of the east coast, Le Testu presents a unicorn, a deer, a strange single-horned horse-like animal and two white-skinned semi-naked opponents in combat. Both combatants are dressed in feather skirts similar to those worn by others depicted in maps of the Americas.

Akeroyd points out that scenes of warring indigenes on Norman maps are more often depicted in Brazil but, in the *Cosmographie universelle* they are prevalent in maps of Africa, other maps of the southern continent and the Americas. The presentation of warring indigenes indicates disorder, unrest and beastliness, invoking the Christian duty of the French to bring them into its empire. The map's accompanying commentary (fol. 32r) affirms that the southern continent's inhabitants were 'idolaters and ignorant of God', indirectly affirming the obligation to convert them to the Roman Catholic faith. In addition to the prospects for proselytization, Le Testu noted that nutmeg, clove and a variety of other fruits and spices grew in the region, implicitly identifying trade opportunities.

Just off the northeast coast of *Jave la Grande*, a laden sailing boat is underway with baskets of produce and fish. Crewed by two men, it heads towards the Moluccas, implying an ability to transport these goods to the relatively nearby centre for spice trade, implicitly encouraging de Coligny to bear such opportunities in mind. Le Testu further encouraged the admiral to consider that the northeast coast of



Jave la Grande might also be an even more attractive location by declaring it the site of the mythical 'Terrede Offir' [Land of Ophir] (see circled area). Ophir was thought to be a source of gold for King Solomon. Its unknown location attracted the speculation of many, including Alfonse, who mentioned it was on the east coast of *Jave la Grande* in his 1544 *Cosmographie*.



This map (oriented with East at the top) contains a part of *Jave la Grande* [Java Major], which is situated in the southern part in the Temperate Zone. The inhabitants of it are Idolaters, ignorant of

God, and in it grows nutmeg with cloves, and several other kinds of fruits and spices... This is La Grant Jave [Java Major], and La Petite Jave [Java Minor] in which there are eight Kingdoms. The men of these two countries are idolaters and wicked.... This Land is part of the so-called Terra Australis, to us unknown, so that which is marked herein is only from imagination and uncertain opinion; for some say that La Grant Jave [Java Major] which is the eastern coast of it is the same land of which the western coast forms the Strait of Magellan, and that all of this land is joined together... This part is the same land of the south called Austral, which has never yet been discovered, for there is no account of anyone having yet found it, and therefore nothing has been remarked of it but from imagination. I have not been able to describe any of its resources, and for this reason I leave speaking further of it until more ample discovery has been made, and as much as I have written and annotated names to several of its capes this has only been to align the pieces depicted herein to the views of others and also so that those who navigate there be on their guard when they are of opinion that they are approaching the said Land... This piece is a part of the Southland or Terra Australis, from imagination situated under the Frigid Zone, forasmuch as some are of the opinion that the Land of the Strait of Magellan and La Grande Java [Java Major] are joined together. This is not yet known for certain, and for this reason I am unable to describe its resources. The map shows people clothed in lavishly colored garments not unlike those worn by the inhabitants presented in the map of India. Some carry a range of spices, nuts and plants. One aims a bow and arrow at a deer with horns in a forest. To his right is a bush laden with fruit or berries.

Akeroyd states that it seems Le Testu imagined the western part of *Jave la Grande* to be populated by a civilized mercantilist but non-Christian population with access to exotic, edible foods, whereas the eastern part in *Terre Australle* was populated by uncivilized, war-like heathens. These images, for different reasons, were perhaps intended to persuade de Coligny to consider trade and religious opportunities in this part of the world.

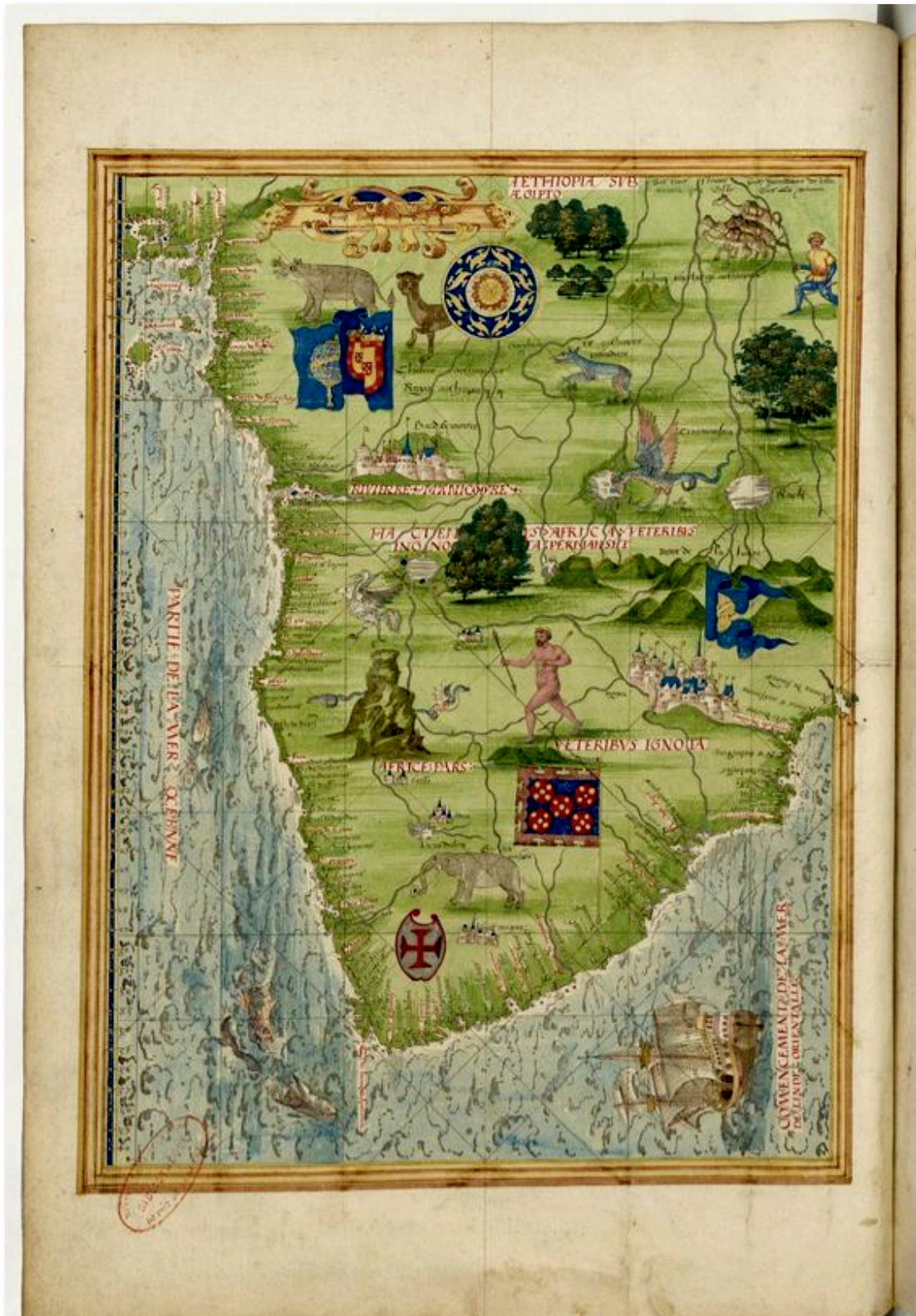
Three centuries later, the English scholar Edward Jenks suggested that a chart said to have been created in 1542 and later held by the British Museum may have been Le Testu's source for *Jave la Grande*. Le Testu's *Cosmographie Universelle* (1555) and world atlas (1556) are both in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (<http://expositions.bnf.fr/marine/livres/Testu/index.htm>).

The map, said Jenks, was said to have been "the property of a man named Rotz, a French sailor who passed some part of his life in England". Jenks commented: "this fact gives some color to the claim put forward by the French, that their countryman, Guillaume le Testu, was the true discoverer of Australia. The claim is based mainly upon the fact that Testu's name appears on a map dated 1555, on which a southern continent, styled *Jave la Grande*, is outlined. But this fact, of course, merely proves that Testu had heard of such a country..."

Aware that a *Cosmographie universelle* must out of necessity show a complete world, the southern continent created a dilemma for Le Testu. It had not been found and there was no certain knowledge of its existence. To resolve this 'empty space' of the world, he presented nine maps, all with accompanying commentaries except for fol. 41v.



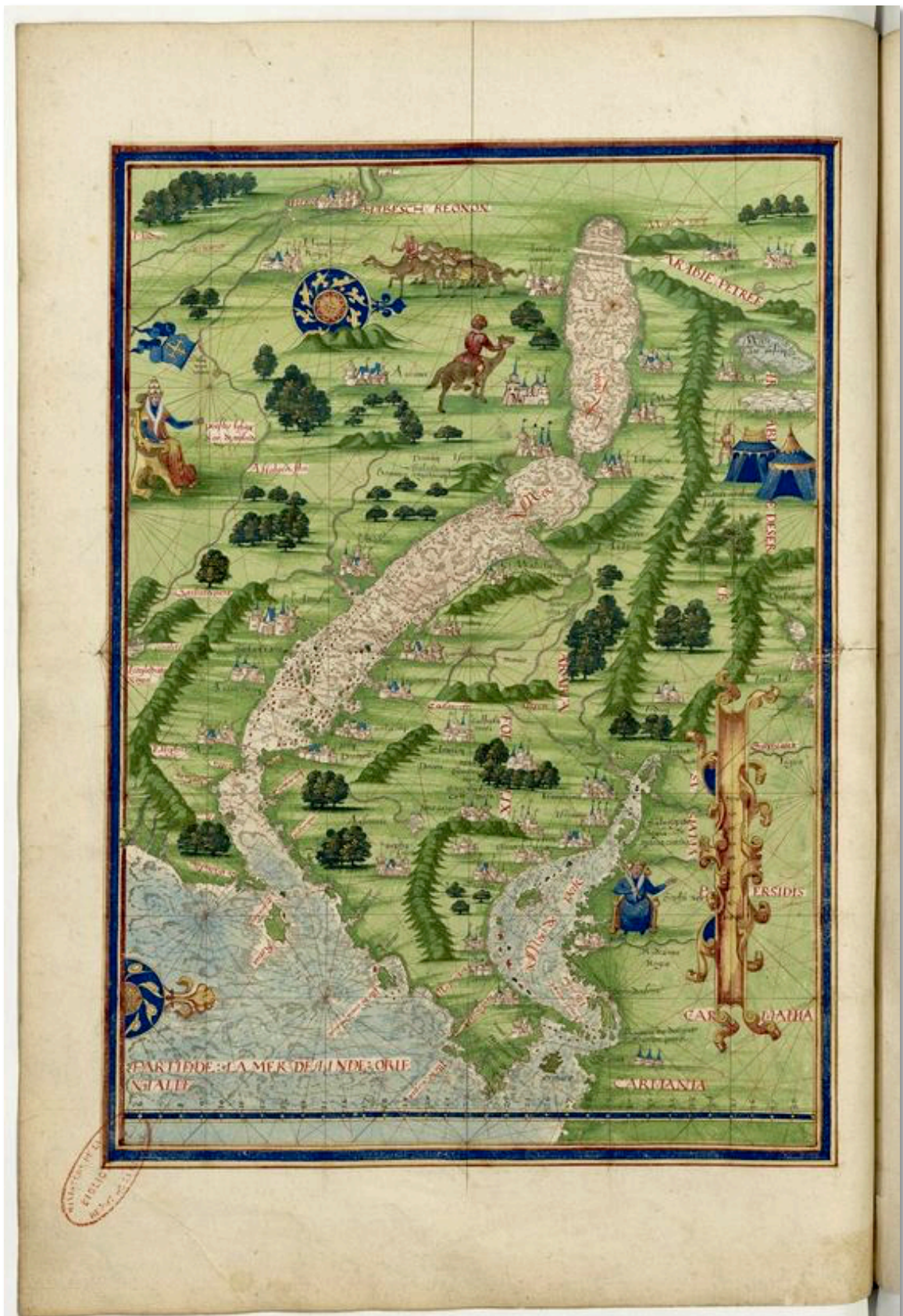
Fol.54v map of Florida from the Cosmographie Universelle by Guillaume Le Testu



South Africa



A 1555 map of South America straits of Magellan





A 1555 map of South America (Brazil, oriented with West at the top)
from the Cosmographie Universelle by Guillaume Le Testu



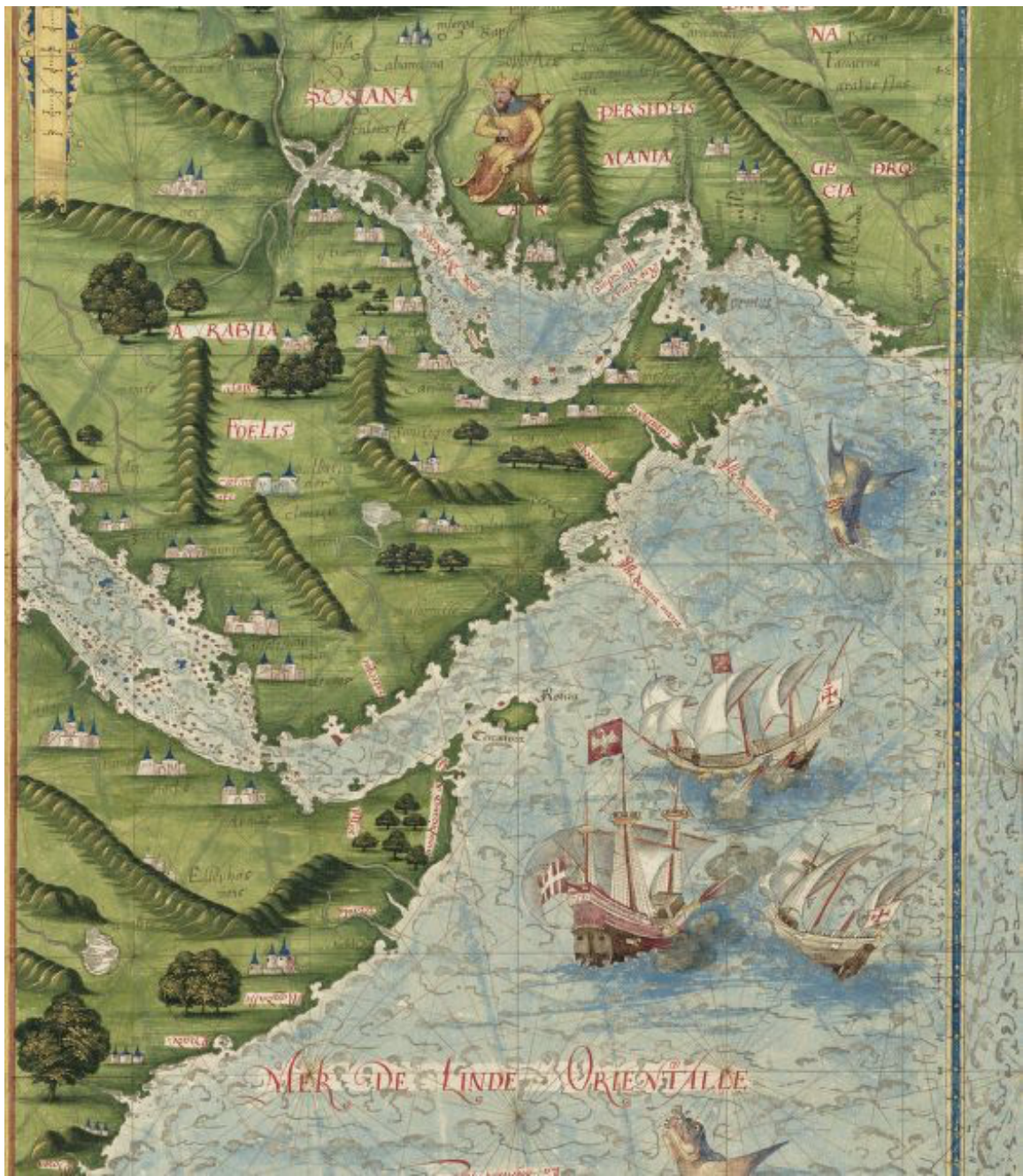
Fol.9v Map of Western Europe, from *Cosmographie Universelle*, 1555



Scandinavia, with the British Isles and Grovland [Greenland], oriented with west at the top



A 1555 map of South America (oriented with West at the top)
from the *Cosmographie Universelle* by Guillaume Le Testu
Amerique Du Royaume de Giganton a la rivere de la Plata



Arabian peninsula and the Indian Ocean



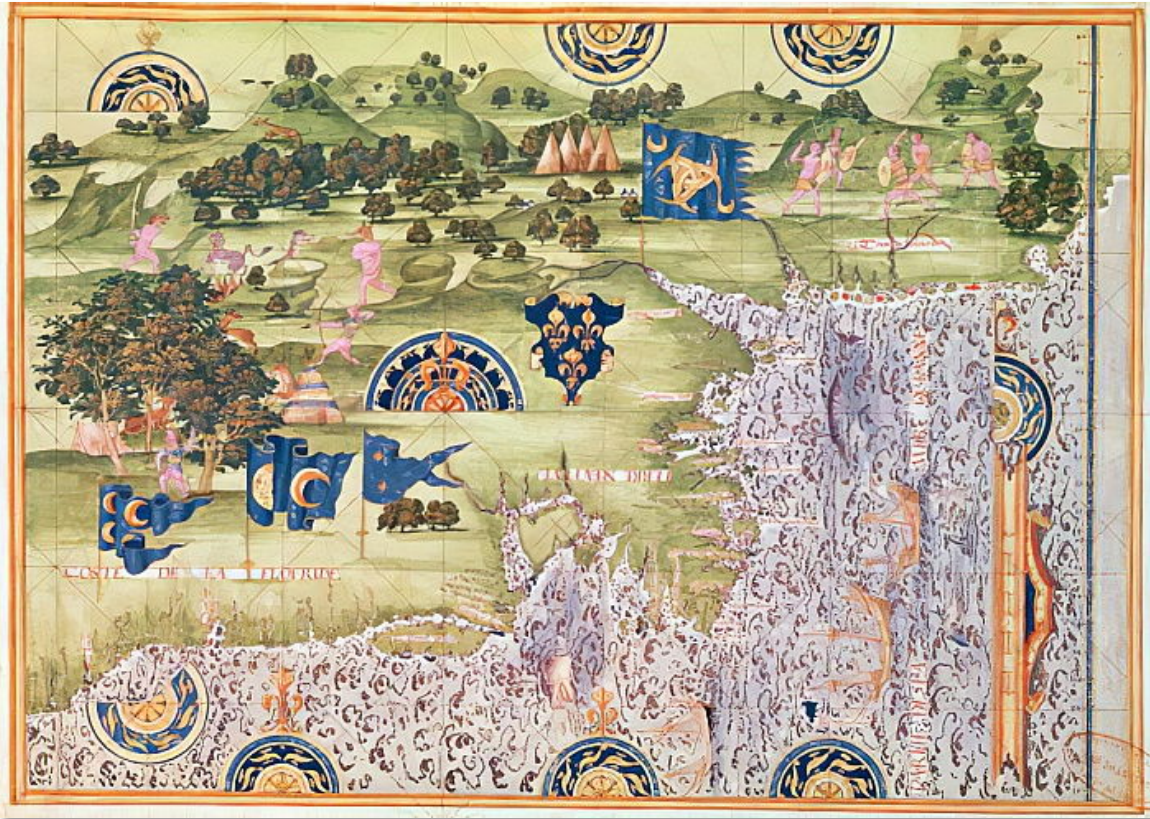
Petite Jave and Grande Jave



India, Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula



Eastern Africa and Madagascar from the Cosmographie Universelle by Guillaume Le Testu



Map of Florida, Canada and Labrador from the *Cosmographie Universelle* of Guillaume Le Testu, 1555. Paris, Ministère des Armees, D.I.Z.14, fo 56v.

This map of New France, showing the discoveries of Cartier and Roberval in the Gulf of St Lawrence and up the 'River of Canada', is in the *Cosmographie Universelle*, one of the great decorative atlases of the sixteenth century. Superbly illustrated, it was made for Admiral Coligny by Le Testu, a pilot of Havre de Grace. The names on this map show that Le Testu used an intermediary Portuguese source instead of basing his work directly upon Cartier's own charts, which were still in existence in France.

Le Testu, a Huguenot, had already crossed the Atlantic by 1550 as a pilot; he went on expeditions to Brazil, Africa and the East Indies, perhaps to Australia. In 1572 Drake encountered him on the Isthmus of Panama, where they briefly joined forces in the capture of Spanish booty.

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Fol.57v Map of Canada and Florida, from *Cosmographie Universelle*, 1555



Fol.54v Map of Florida, from *Cosmographie Universelle*, 1555

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