

Title: Maggiolo world map, polar

Date: 1511

Author: Vesconte Maiolo [de Maggiolo]

Description: Among the manuscript maps which followed very soon after those productions of 1506-1508 in which were summarized the results of the great voyages of Dias, Columbus, and Vasco da Gama was the beautifully drawn world map in the *portolan* atlas of Vesconte Maggiolo of 1511. Constructed upon a circumpolar projection, and therefore not in the *portolano* canon, this delineation of the world draws upon the Contarini map (#308) or a common Portuguese prototype for its geographical data and upon Portuguese maps or narratives for its nomenclature. It records with the greatest fullness the place names that mark the Portuguese voyages along the African coasts and the western coast of India. It is, indeed, its picture of Africa that makes this map important. A comparison of the place names upon the west and east coasts of Africa shows that in this particular of nomenclature the map is more closely related to the Cantino (#306) than to the Canerio chart (#307), but that neither Cantino nor any other map known to us is its direct prototype. It is a composite of several Portuguese and Spanish sources, displaying a combination of elements differing from that presented by any of its known contemporaries or predecessors. It thus takes on the character of an original compilation carrying to Europeans the knowledge of Africa and of the west coast of India newly acquired by the Portuguese. In the same year in which the map was made Malacca was to be captured and a new period of Portuguese exploration and expansion was to begin.

The Maggiolo world map repeats the error of Contarini and Ruysch (#313) in placing the North American discoveries of Cortereal, to which it adds the *Terra de los ingres* of Cabot, on the northeastern extremity of the continent of Asia, an early delineation of a misconception which generally prevailed concerning the true nature of the western discoveries. The omission by Maggiolo of 170 degrees of longitude between the South American continent and the Asiatic makes it difficult to determine what may have been his theory as to the intervening area, whether, indeed, he conceived of it as land or water. Its omissions in regard to Asia and its errors with regard to America, set forth several years after so much had been clarified through the several printed and manuscript maps of the early 16th century, indicate clearly that there was still confusion among the cartographers, still reluctance to accept what the bolder minds had suggested as the only possible arrangement of the lands and seas of the world, that is, the separation of the American continent from Asia by the great body of water soon to be known as the *Mar del Sur* or *South Sea*, and later as the Pacific Ocean.

Vesconte de Maggiolo was a prominent Genoese cartographer who produced important manuscript maps during the first half of the 16th century. From 1511 to 1518 he worked in Naples, where for a noble Corsican family he prepared the beautiful atlas that includes this map. It is signed and dated, *Vesconte de Maiolo, from Genoa composed it in Naples in the year 1511 on the 10th day of January.*

Maggiolo founded a school of chart makers for the Republic of Genoa. He had been summoned there by the doge of the city-state, who proclaimed that Maggiolo was "skillful in the making of nautical charts and other things requisite for navigation." According to the scholar Henry Harrisse, it is the earliest known Italian *portolano* that delineates the northernmost regions of the New World, although they were already indicated in the *mappamundi* of Ruysch published in 1508, but merely as Asiatic configurations of Ptolemaic origin. About twenty of de Maggiolo's *portolan* [nautical] charts and atlases

have survived. His descendants were mapmakers for more than a century after his death.

The world map shown here is drawn with a north polar projection that provides its distinctive fan shape. Its format resembles the maps of Contarini and Ruysch, which are derived from conical projections. Maggiolo has not attempted to display the full 360 degrees of the sphere; less than 200 degrees appear, leaving East Asia and the Ocean Sea incomplete. His interpretation of longitude within this projection continues the elongated east-west dimensions for the Mediterranean, Europe, and African areas seen on earlier maps. The farther south the area, the more pronounced this effect becomes.

The single Arctic and North Atlantic landmass at the top indicates that the location of the new discoveries was still thought to be in far northeastern Asia. Maggiolo's map shows a solid Eurasian continent running from *Noruega* [Scandinavia] around the North Pole, including Asia's arctic coast, to Newfoundland-Labrador and Greenland. On the extreme northeast promontory of North America, Maggiolo place-names include *Terra de los Ingres* [Land of the English], and *Terra de Lavorador de rey de portugall*. Further south, we notice *Terra de corte reale de rey de portugall* [Land of the Corte-Real and of the King of Portugal] and *terra de pescaria* [fishing grounds]. Just westward the presence of the name *India Occidentalis* [West Indies] appears for perhaps the first time on a map.

South America is annotated *lands found by Columbus for Spain* in Venezuela. Below the equator on the coast are the words, *Cape of the Holy Cross of the King of Portugal* and *land of Brazille*. In the West Indies *Coba* [Cuba] is named, but Hispaniola is called *Isabella*. The Lesser Antilles continue from the Virgin Islands south to Trinidad without the hiatus in some earlier maps. Indications of small islands appear in the area of the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos.

Drawn and decorated for a noble patron, signed and dated by the cartographer, this elegant production is a significant representation of the world just after Columbus's final voyage, which concluded the first phase of the Age of Discovery.

Location: John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island

Size: 39 X 56 cm

References:

*Caraci, G., "A Little Known Atlas by Vesconte de Maggiolo, 1518", *Imago Mundi*, 2:37-54.

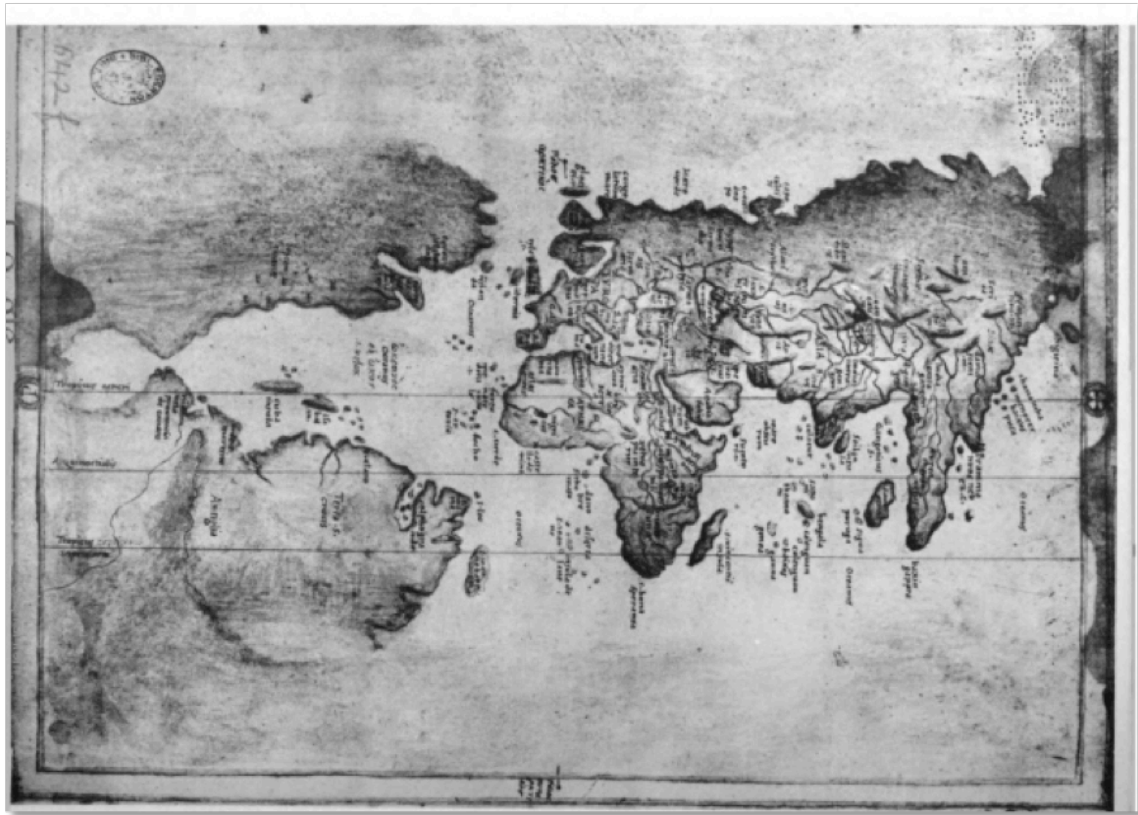
Harrisse, H., *The Discovery of North America*, pp. 468-69, #83.

*Nebenzahl, K., *Atlas of Columbus*, pp. 58-60, Plate 18.

*Wroth, L.C., *The Voyages of Giovanni da Verrazzano, 1524-1528*, No. 17, Plate 12.

*illustrated





Folio 1: a world map in the Egerton MS 2803, 1508, often attributed to Vesconte Maggiolo (#312)



World map by Vesconte Maggiolo, 1504 (#307.4)