Title: De Orbis Situ ac descriptione
Date: 1526-1530
Author: Franciscus Monarchus [Francois Le Moyne/Francis the Monk]
Description: Each of these two colored spheres measures 6.6 x 6.6 cm, and were engraved on separate wooden blocks. They belong to the treatise De Orbis Situ ac descriptione ad Reuerendiss D archiepiscopum Fanormitanum, Francisci, Monachi ordinis Franciscani, epistola sane qua luculenta . . . [A very exquisite letter from Francis, a monk of the Franciscan order, to the most reverend Archbishop of Palermo, touching the site and description of the globe]; with a colophon reading Excudebat Martinus Caesar, expensis honesti viri Rolandi Bollaert . . . [Martinus Caesar prepared this at the expense of the upright man Roland Bollert]. Wherein the misconceptions of Ptolemy and other geographers are dispelled. This work also concerns the newly-discovered lands, seas, and islands which was written during the period between 1526 and 1530, by a Belgian monk called Franciscus Monachus, but whose real name seems to have been Francois Le Moyne, and who is said to have been from Malines.

Its two small woodcut maps representing the world in hemispheres, respectively the Old and the New World, are of striking historical interest, while the text contains many references that are of importance for the light they cast upon the geographical opinions of the time respecting the New World. Here, as noted, the New World is first represented on a map as having distinctly an Asiatic connection, the southern continent (South America) being separated from the northern only by that narrow strait which we find so prominently represented on the Maiollo map of 1527 (#316), and there called streto dubitoso [doubtfully close]. It is also the first printed map to show the Strait of Magellan.

While these hemispheres cannot themselves be referred to as a “globe”, they may serve to give us a general idea of the geographical representations on the globe, which, as appears probable, was at that time constructed by the author of the text. To the Ecclesiastical Prince, to whom Franciscus dedicated his little volume, information was sent concerning his globe on which he had drawn by hand a map of the world as he said, the reply to his letter containing the following statement, Orbis globum, in quo terrae ac maria luculenter depicta sunt, una cum epistola accepinus [We accept the globe of the world on which the land and the seas are elegantly depicted, together with the epistle]. Being a gift it would seem reasonable to conclude that the globe was not duplicated and offered for sale and that the example referred to was therefore probably unique. The text of the De orbis situ . . . , as it appears, was printed because it was thought there was much contained therein that was new and not in harmony with geographical ideas hitherto expressed. The first edition was undated, nor was the second dated, but it agreed in practically all particulars with the first excepting a slight alteration in the title. A third edition was issued in the year 1565, and is still known in many copies, of which Gallois gives an excellent reprint in his biography of Orontius Finius. It is in the first and second editions that the hemispheres appear; they are wanting in the third, but as a substitute therefore a small globe resting on a base appears on the verso of the title page, which in its general features may be a representation of Francis’ globe.

In the mappamundi both North and South America are depicted from the Arctic regions to the Strait of Magellan, and westward; with no other break than a narrow strait which severs the Isthmus of Darien [present-day Panama]. But near the equator, the coastline, instead of continuing its course towards the north, is carried westwardly until the “New World”
discoveries are made to merge with Asia. This small and simple *mappamundi* is of some importance in the history of American maps, even though it is based upon retrograde notions which are so unexpected and was prompted by motives much more hypothetical than scientific. It must be said at the outset that Franciscus Monachus expresses his opinion, as regards the absolute connection alleged by him to exist between the New World and the Old, north of the equator, in opposition to the geographical configurations which are exhibited in the *Lusitano Germanic* maps of Caveri, Waldseemüller and Ruysch (#307, #310, #313) for the land area between Greenland and Central America. Monachus, for instance, describes the cartography of the German geographer Ruysch (as commented upon by Marcus Beneventanus) to be entirely erroneous with respect to the relationship between Asia and America, as well as the separation of North and South America about the Tropic of Capricorn. The following is an excerpt from the *De Orbis Situ*, in translation:

> Then we have Marcus Benevent. Although he pretends to have taken into account the new discoveries and data, and to have endeavored to complete and correct diverse accounts of voyages, I do not share his opinion; for he exhibits the sea as separating the lands situated beyond the zone of the Capricorn from the regions lately discovered. The majority of people entertain the same belief relative to the western countries recently found, which they think are separated from the eastern regions by a sea. I hold a contrary opinion, and in the present description, I demonstrate that all navigations which start from the west, lead to the eastern countries, and that, in general, Asia, Africa, Europa, and particularly the Culvacanian India [that is, the country discovered by Hernando Cortes], as well as at the north, Sweden, Russia, Tartaria, the Baccalaos and Terra Florida, all of which [although] vast regions separated by very great distances, are connected with each other by a continuous tract of country, and an uninterrupted route; and that America itself is joined to the eastern regions and to Calvacania; though the latter fact is not yet proved absolutely. Perhaps this is not today unknown to the Spaniards.

In other words, Franciscus Monachus rejects the configurations set forth by the *Lusitano Germanic* map tradition outlined by the historian Henry Harrisse, and especially as expressed by Ruysch in his *mappamundi* (#313); furthermore Monachus reproves Ruysch for separating North from South America in the latitude of the Tropic of Capricorn; and for placing an ocean between the west coast and the Asiatic regions. He further says that this disconnection between the two American continents, and the existence of a sea between the New World and the Old, are notions shared by the majority of people.

The erroneous idea that America was only a prolongation of Asia, sprung, according to Harrisse, not only from Columbus’ initial proclamations, but also from Peter Martyr’s descriptions, which Monachus at once interpreted as proving that the countries lately discovered by Cortes were not only connected westward with the Old World, but also at the north with the *Baccaalaos*. As to the identity existing between those new regions and the east coast of Asia, in the opinion of the Belgian monk, it is an absolute fact that:

> The *Culba* or *Culvacana* of Hernando [Cortes] is the province in which is situated the residence of the Emperor of the East. In other accounts of voyages, it is also called *Cataya* or *Cathay*. Its modern name is *Themistetam*, or *Tenostica*, formerly *Quinsay*, which Odoric calls *Themisan*. This author is nearer the truth.... North of *Culvacania* spreads *Thamacho*, formerly called *Tangut*. In former times, *Tevis* was known as *Tebet* or *Cibet*. The name of
the province of Messigo, was celebrated when the ancestors of Mansus were living.

We now understand why Mexico (i.e., Culvacana), in the family of maps initiated by Franciscus Monachus, forms part of the Asiatic world, and is placed between Cathay and Mansi, adjoining Tamacho and Tangut.

The western hemisphere contains nine names, two of which belong to Asia, viz.: [Mon]gallia, and Bergia, which is the Bargu of Marco Polo, placed by the Venetian traveler in the northeastern extremity of Cathay. The others are Tamago [Tamaho], Covacala [Calvacania, a name borrowed from Anghiera’s account of Yucatan], Barag [Veragua, from Columbus’ fourth voyage near present-day Panama], Dabaiba, and America.
Small and incomplete as the map is, it presents considerable interest as being one of the earliest maps now existing that shows North America, south of the parallel of Newfoundland, represented as a mere prolongation of Asia and where the northeast coast, according to true geographical conceptions, exhibits an unbroken coastline from Labrador to Florida.

In contrast to the previously outlined disagreement between Monachus and Ruysch, the former states on numerous occasions his conviction that Ruysch was his source for much of his cosmographical data, particularly for the northeastern regions. Harrisse also proposes that Monachus was familiar with and influenced by the now lost globe of 1523 by Schöner (#328), which doubtless united at the east, the entire coastline with the seaboards of the Gulf of Mexico, as that was a necessity after joining westward America with Asia. It should be added, however, that Schöner derived the idea of the connection imagined by him to exist between the two worlds from the account recently published of Magellan’s voyage; while Franciscus Monachus clearly says that the details of the conquest of Mexico just made known, are the source from which he inferred the identity supposed by him to exist between Asia and America.

On the verso of the 14th leaf Monachus presents the following passage: (in translation)

Moreover, in the year 1526, a land has been discovered by 0 degrees longitude, and 52 degrees south latitude, which is not inhabited. The other parts of that austral country are yet in the dark. What is that austral country beginning on a line with the initial meridian, and in such extreme southern latitude, which Monachus says was discovered in 1526? The latter date can only be a lapsus penneae, according to Harrisse, as no such discovery in that year is on record. As to the country itself, we have only to compare its delineation and position in Franciscus’ woodcuts with the Antarctic land in the various globes of Schöner, to see at a glance that it can only be the region on which the Nüremberg mathematician Schöner has inscribed, in 1533, the legend: Terra Australis recente inventa, sed nondum plene cognita [Terra Australis recently was found, but not yet fully known] (#328).

The difference is that Franciscus makes another lapsus in inserting in his map the following statement: This part of the world has not yet been discovered in our navigations. Franciscus evidently meant that the country had not been entirely explored or made known, since he says so explicitly in his text, adding even a latitude and a longitude, and configures the region in his map. That austral land is the one which Schöner had already depicted in his globes of 1515 and 1520, and named, first Brasilie Regio, and then Brasilie inferior (#328); but on which, in consequence of Magellan’s discovery, he inscribes afterwards - apparently so early as 1523 - the legend conveying the information that the country had been recently discovered, and was yet imperfectly known. Now, Schöner must have constructed a number of globes between 1523 and 1533; and it may be that Franciscus saw one, made in 1526, which led him to adopt the latter date as his interpretation of the recente inventa in connection with the austral land. If so, says Harrisse, the De Orbis situ may have been printed in or shortly after 1526.

This small production seems in more ways than one to have influenced Oronce Fine, whose Nova, et integra universi Orbis Descriptio, dated 1531 (#356), is normally found in the Grynaeus, Novus Orbis, of Paris, 1532 (#353). In that beautifully executed double-cordiform map of Fine, the southern continent is given the name by which it was to be generally known for more than two centuries, Terra Australis [Land of the South]. In many particulars, as in the portrayal of a Terra Australis, the double-cordiform Mercator world map of 1538 followed the example set by Fine, as at a later period did the great Mercator nautical chart of 1569 (#406). To
realize the extent to which belief in the Antarctic continent renewed itself in the imaginations of geographers after the Magellan voyage, it is necessary only to run through Nordenskiold’s *Periplus* and *Facsimile-Atlas*. An extraordinary statement of the theory at a relatively early period is found in its portrayal in the *Periplus* in the great world map of Pierre Desceliers, of 1546 (#378), formerly known as the *Mappemonde de Henri II*. In the *Facsimile-Atlas* one observes an extensive representation of the continent in the maps of Thomaso Porcacchi, 1572, Mercator, 1587, Joannes Myritius, 1590, Cornelis de Jode, 1593, and Matthias Quadus, 1608.

In the wake of Magellan’s voyage. Among the first wave of printed maps incorporating the new data was Franciscus Monachus’s world map of 1527 (#337). The most arresting element of the map is the southern section between Africa and South America where the southern continent is tentatively delineated by means of straight lines. By sectioning off this enormous grid of space Monachus is asserting that it is within this region that the southern continent exists, but that the necessary information to sketch the contours of its coast is yet to be attained. This message is conveyed visually as well as through the inscription annotating this part of the map, which translates as: “This part of the world, not yet discovered by navigators, exists.” If yet undiscovered, how does Monachus know it exists? The answer is in the image. Flanking the strait lines are the familiar irregularities of a coastline. In particular, the southern continent is depicted as the land to the south of the strait discovered by Magellan, clearly communicated by the fact the coastline is here contiguous with South America. It is that one piece of information that allowed Monachus to extrapolate an entire continent, occupying up to 50° of latitude and 360° of longitude. Thus, though Monachus adopts a cautious cartographical approach to depicting the unknown regions, the presence of that single item of empirical data transforms the southern continent from cosmographical fancy to geographical reality. Indeed, that single piece of empirical data was capable of standing in for the entire southern continent—it was a proxy for the rest of the southern continent’s geography then unavailable to Europeans.

**Location:** BL 568.b.23(1), British Library, London

**Size:** two spheres measuring 6.6 x 6.6 cm each

**References:**
*Nordenskiold, A.E.,* *Periplus and Facsimile-Atlas*
*Shirley, R.W.,* *The Mapping of the World,* p. 61, #57, Plate 54.
*Skelton, R.A.,* *Explorers’ Maps,* p. 73, Figure 45.
*Stallard, Avan Judd,* *Antipodes, In Search of the Southern Continent,* Figure 3.1, pp.72-73.
*Stevenson, E.L.,* *Terrestrial and Celestial Globes,* Volume I, pp. 96-97, Figure 48.
*Whitfield, P.,* *New Found Lands,* p. 94.
De Orbis Situ ac descriptione

CVM PRIVILEGIO INVICTISSIME ROMANORVM IMPERATORVM CAROLI QUINTI, AD QVITE QUOS QVAM QVAM DEqvite quos quod solis et terrae aequus est, aequa rura et aequa marina, aequa omnia in mundo.

HEC DEVS ORBIS
NAVIGATIONIBUS
MUNDVM

IS NOVVS
DETECTA
EXISTIT

GALLIA
BEROIA
TAMAGO
COVACALA
PERSEA
CAPTIVAR
AMAZONIA
AFRICA
BARBARIA
ASIA
TAPAR
MORIAE
PERSIA

DE ORBIS SITU AC DESCRIPTIONE.
AD REVÆRENDISS. D. ARCHIEPISCOPUM PANORMITANUM, FRÆCÆFÆLI, MONACHI ORDINIS FRÆCÆFÆLI, EPISCOPI AQUITANII, BURGOSANI, PORTUGALIS, EIVISSDENSI, ARXICAPITANI, EPISCOPI CÁDIZI, ALCANTARÆ, IBARRÆ, ALCOYÆ, SEVRÆ, GÉRÀLI, ET ALTIVS PATRONORVM EXPONENS, ET EXEMPLIS NOVÆ SPERÆE EXloquentia.

SITVS AC DESCRIPTIONE.

HEC DEVS ORBIS
NAVIGATIONIBUS
MUNDVM

IS NOVVS
DETECTA
EXISTIT

GALLIA
BEROIA
TAMAGO
COVACALA
PERSEA
CAPTIVAR
AMAZONIA
AFRICA
BARBARIA
ASIA
TAPAR
MORIAE
PERSIA

6