

Title: *World Map in Bordone's Isolario*

Date: 1528

Author: Benedetto Bordone

Description: This simple, colorful woodcut world map measures 32.5 x 16.5 cm (12.8 x 6.5 in.), was published in 1528 by Bordone in his *Libro di Benedetto Bordone . . .*, or *Isolario* [book of islands] in Venice. It was long considered to be the first use of this type of projection for a printed world map. However, an earlier world map by Francesco Rosselli (#315) from ca. 1508 also uses this oval projection and may have served as a major source for this relatively coarse example by Bordone. Underlining the geographic landmasses is a system of parallels and meridians. The perimeter oval in Bordone's map has an axial ratio of exactly 1:2, the meridians are drawn at intervals of 20°, the parallels at intervals of 11.25° (equal to a ratio of 180:16). The meridians are not, however, exact ellipses (an apparently difficult task for cartographers in the 16th century).

Bordone took into account the new discoveries, such as the connection of North and South America, the separation of North America from Asia and the spuriousness of an Arctic archipelago. However, this map also shows less than current geographical knowledge of the shape of South America, the lingering use of the "Tiger Leg" of southeast Asia along with the remnants of the Ptolemaic land-bridge between Africa and southeast Asia, the poor rendering of India and the complete elimination of the Antarctic landmass. North America bears the inscription *Terra del laboratore*; South America possesses the label *Mondo Novo*, the extremity of which is about 30° S latitude. While not shown on this world map, the termination of South America is only intended to represent the northern shores of a strait, which is absolutely marked in another small map in the *Isolario* and contains the legend: *Stretto p[ar]te del mondo novo* [narrow part of the new world]. The other names are replaced by graceful italic script and numerals that refer to a nomenclature on the back of one of the large maps.

It is an early example of an oval-shaped world map, thought to be based on the extremely rare Roselli map of c. 1508 (#315). It particularly resembles the Roselli in the distinctively distended shape of South America and in calling the most prominent part of North America *laboriore*. There are, however, important updates on the Bordone: America is shown as a single landmass (or nearly so); Japan is surprisingly well located (compare with Munster's world map, for example, #381); and the southern continent has been eliminated. This world map was included in Bordone's *Isolario* to aid in finding those islands whose locations would have been unfamiliar to the 16th century reader. These islands, including Japan and newly discovered ones in America, are keyed to the text of the atlas.

The *Isolario*, or 'book of islands,' was a cartographic form introduced and developed in Italy during the 15th and 16th centuries. Like the *portolano*, or pilot-book, to which it was related, it had its origin in the Mediterranean as an illustrated guide for travelers in the Aegean archipelago and the Levant. While Bordone's *Isolario* was the second such work to be printed, it was the first to give prominence to the transatlantic discoveries. R.A. Skelton, in the introduction to a facsimile edition, quotes Almagia as saying that it was, in fact, "the earliest complete work of its kind to have been produced by the printing-press in Italy or anywhere else."

Benedetto Bordone (1460-1531), a Paduan illuminator and wood engraver, was apparently established in Venice by 1494.

The cartographic scholar Joachim Lelewel expressed the opinion that the map may have been completed as early as 1521 based upon some text on the verso of the title

page of the *Isolario*. However, Henry Harrisse finds other evidence to reject this argument for this map, as well for the book as a whole. The *Isolario* was a cartographical form that had developed in Italy during the 15th century. Bordone's work was the second printed book to belong to this genre. It was modeled on various Ptolemy editions and on the *Isolario* by Bartolomeo dalli Sonetti of 1485. Bordone's book contains 107 maps, plans and drawings. The maps are all similar, with clearly drawn outlines, wind roses with eight broken lines and the maps placed in a square frame. This type of book form was followed by others such as Camocio and Porcacchi. There were also later editions of Bordone's work in 1534, 1547 and ca. 1565, all printed from the same wood blocks in Venice.

Location: British Library, Maps C.7.b.10

Size: 32.5 x 16.5 cm (12.8 x 6.5 in.)

References:

Harrisse, H., *The Discovery of North America*, pp. 447, 559-561, nos. 74 and 178.

Lelewel, Joachim, *Geographie du moyen age... accompagnée d'atlas et de cartes dans chaque*, Meridian Publications, 1966 reprint of 1852-57 Brussels: Pilliet edition, 5 vols., (atlas).

*Nordenskiöld, A.E., *Facsimile Atlas*, pp. 90, 10-104, Plate XXXIX.

The World Encompassed, no. 83.

*Shirley, R., *The Mapping of the World*, no. 59, Plate 55.

*Wolff, H., *America, Early Maps of the New World*, pp. 68-69, no. 84.



