

**Title:** Vatican MS Urb. Lat. 274

**Date:** 1530

**Author:** unknown

**Description:** This largely unstudied anonymous manuscript world map of c.1530 that is Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS Urb. Lat. 274, folios 73v–74r, has a hypothetical southern continent. This unusual feature forms an extravagant ring of land around the South Pole and is full of toponyms despite its designation as *Terra Incognita*. Chet van Duzer's paper "Cartographic Invention: The Southern Continent on Vatican MS Urb. Lat. 274, Folios 73v–74r (c.1530)" includes a discussion of the map's toponyms in the known world and provides a comprehensive transcription and analysis of those of the southern continent. Many of the latter names seem to have been pure invention on the part of the mapmaker, but some are identical with those given by Columbus to features in Central America during his Fourth Voyage to the New World. The reasons for the placement of New World toponyms on the land to the south of Asia are also discussed. The following is an excerpt from that article.

MS Urb. Lat. 274, which is written entirely on vellum and certainly originates in Italy, contains thirty-one maps: twenty-seven Ptolemaic, three modern (of Spain, Scandinavia and Italy), and the world map that is the subject of this monograph. The Ptolemaic maps are well executed and sumptuously colored, whereas the world map under discussion here is a later addition by a less expert artist, placed on pages that had originally been left blank between the text of Ptolemy's *Geography* (which ends on fol. 73r) and what had been the first map (fols. 74v–75r, a Ptolemaic world map). The map measures 37.5 by 59 cm spread across two folios that together measure 44 by 60 cm. In general, this manuscript has been studied very little, but Testimonio Compañía Editorial, S.A., of Madrid has published a detailed account of the manuscript by Louis Duval-Arnould and Didier Marcotte to accompany their facsimile of MS Urb. Lat. 274. (see <https://www.facsimilefinder.com>).

Noted is the mixture of Latin and Italian in the map's legends, and the variety of influences in the map itself: the exaggerated east–west extension of Eurasia and some of the place-names such as *Aurea Chersonesus*, *Sinus Gangeticus* and *Sinus Magnus* show a debt to Ptolemy, whereas the names *Cataio* and *Mangi* come from Marco Polo. The mapmaker used Ptolemaic toponyms in the interior of Africa, but modern names along the coast; other modern elements include the Strait of Magellan and an *arcipelago de mangalianes* (the Philippines) in the unnamed Pacific Ocean. He also made reference to the death of Giovanni da Verrazano: in the northern part of what is now North America we read *qui fu preso el uerazano fiorentino dai canibali* [Here Verrazano the Florentine was taken by cannibals]. Verrazano died in 1528, and so this year is a *terminus post quem* for the map.

**ASIA.** For northern Asia, the mapmaker made substantial use of Marco Polo, or of sources derived from the book of the famous 14<sup>th</sup> century Venetian traveler. Along the northern coast of Asia just east of the middle of the map we read in his *locis sunt ursi albi*, ['in these regions there are white bears']. To the east of this inscription on the Vatican map, we find in *[h]is montibus oriuntur girifalchi albi*, ['in these mountains white gerfalcons are born']. To the east of the reference to the falcons we find the words *In his nemoribus su[n]t multi armelinos et zebelinos*, ['In these woods there are many ermines and sables']. The source would seem to be Marco Polo, book 4, chapter 20.

Further east along the northern coast of Asia, another note informs us that *Incoli habitant nomi s. silvestre*, ['The inhabitants live in the name of St. Sylvester']. This

reference to St. Sylvester seems to be the result of some confusion, for the sources place *homines silvestres* [wild men] here and nothing is said about St. Sylvester. Further east still, we read (now in Italian rather than Latin) *In questo locho abita le zente soto terra per i gran fredì*, ['In this place the people live below the ground because of the great cold']. The source again is Marco Polo, book 4, chapter 20, 'But in that region the cold is so great that all the dwellings of the people are underground, and underground they always live'.

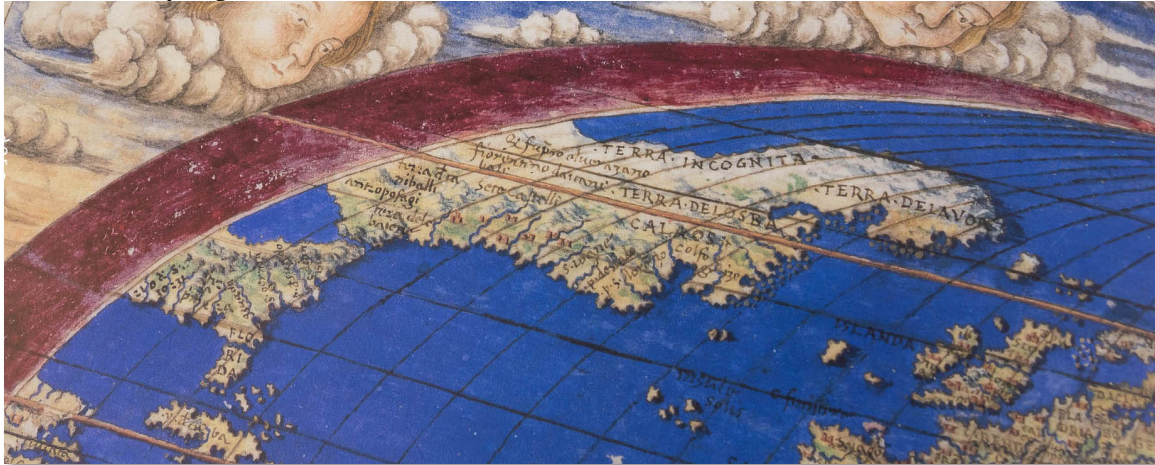


**Atlantic Islands.** The islands in the eastern Atlantic, reading north to south, are *Islanda, insule solis, madere, canarie* and *ye fortunate*. Iceland, Madeira and the Canary Islands; the application of the designation of fortunate to the Cape Verde islands rather than to the Canaries is unusual but not unprecedented.

**North America.** The shape of North America on the map is unusual in that the northern part of the continent is separated from the rest by a sea which is open to the west and communicates with the Atlantic by a narrow strait. This sea reflects the geographical concepts of Giovanni da Verrazano, which may also be seen in the 1529 map of Girolamo da Verrazano (#347) and in the Bailly globe of 1530 (#351). The connection between Verrazano's geographical concepts and MS Urb. Lat. 274, folios 73v-74r is corroborated by the above-mentioned legend in North America about the explorer's death. The strait depicted on the Vatican map would seem to represent a bit of optimistic *terra forming* by the unknown maker of the Vatican map, since the 1529 map and the globe show an unbroken isthmus in this spot, and in fact a legend on the map reads *Da questo mare orientale sive de il mare occidentale sono 6 miglia da terra infra l'uno e l'altro*, ['From this eastern sea or from the western sea there are six miles of land between the one and the other'].

The toponyms *Terra de Lavor* and *Terra de los Bacalaos* in northwestern North America are typical of contemporary maps. To the west of this inscription on the

southern coast of the land mass are seven red signs (which are used elsewhere on the map to represent cities) identified as the *sete castelli*. These are the seven cities of Christian refugees from the Moorish invasion of Spain in the eighth century. The cities were usually located on the mythical island of *Antillia*, but they are positioned in this same region of the New World (and labeled *Septem civitates*) on the world map which is British Library, Egerton MS 2803, fol. 1v, which dates from 1509–1513 (#312).

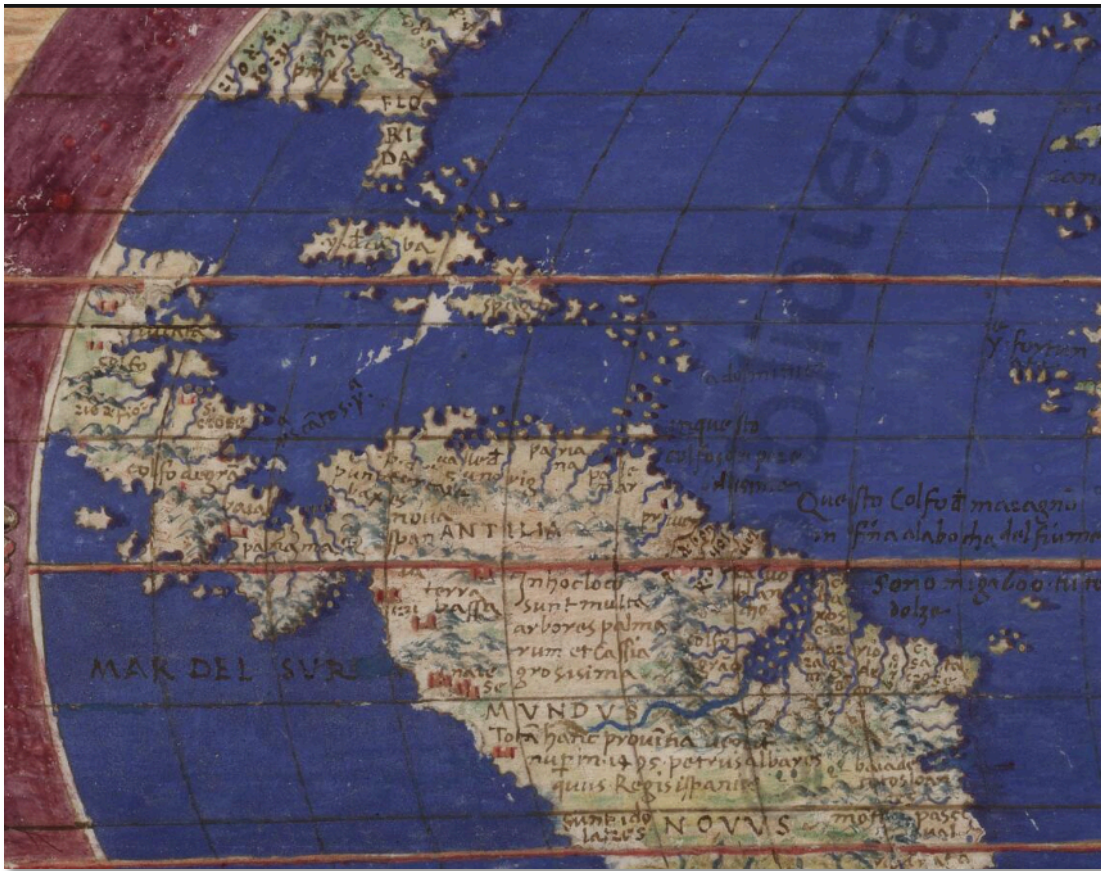


The Vatican map, however, places *Antilia* in the north-central part of South America, and the Egerton MS 2803 world map, as well as the maps on folios 8r and 9r of the same manuscript, place *Antiglia* in the same spot. The long inscription in what is now South America in the Piri Re's map of 1513 (#322), which the author claims was copied in part from a map made by Columbus, begins 'These coasts are called *Antillia shores*'. Also the Vesconte Maggiolo portolan chart of 1516 (#316) has the legend *terra de antilia* in the same part of South America as the Vatican map.

As we see while most of what is now North America is on the left-hand part of the map, some of the continent appears on the right-hand side. Here we find a small but distinct representation of two lakes with islands in them, one to the north of the other. The island in the northern lake, which has the red sign used on the map to indicate cities, is joined to the lake shore by four radial causeways. This is the island-city of *Tenochtitlán* (often called *Temistitan*), the ancestor of Mexico City (see #334). The inscription below the southern lake in the Vatican map, *Temeti* [Temistian], confirms the city's identity. The cartographer placed the city farther to the north than other contemporary maps: here its latitude is approximately 35° north, while most contemporary cartographers sited it between 20° and 25° north. West of *Tenochtitlán* a mountain range is aligned for much of its length along a meridian. Several rivers flow west from these mountains into the unnamed Pacific. To the north of these rivers an inscription states *in questi fiumi e oro e sa* [?], ['in these rivers there is gold and [?]', and just off the coast another records *in questi fiumi son mine doro*, ['in these rivers there are mines of gold'].

The Vatican map's depiction of what is now Central America is unusual, in part because the cartographer simplified and compressed the area. In the northern part of this region a narrow peninsula jutting eastward is labeled *iucata*, that is, the Yucatan. Further south is a river called *rio de fior*, which would seem to be a southern misplacement of the *Rio de flores*, which is located along what is now the Gulf Coast of the United States west of Florida.





Further south is a large gulf labeled *colfo di gran baia*, a name van Duzer had not seen on any other map of Central America. In the isthmus between North and South America a red castle sign represents a city that is clearly labeled *panama*. In the Caribbean just northeast of the isthmus is a mysterious island described as *y<sup>a</sup> scantos y<sup>a</sup>*. It is unclear why this small island is given a name when only three other islands in the Caribbean are accorded this status: *y. de cuba*, *y spaga* (Hispanola), and *a dominica* (Dominica, which Columbus named on 3 November 1493).

**South America.** On the northern coast of the *Mundus Novus* (as South America is inscribed on the map) is *Paria*, and to its east is a gulf with the legend *in questo colfo son pere belissime*, ['in this gulf there are very beautiful pearls'], a clear reference to the *Golfo de las Perlas* discovered by Columbus on his third voyage.

Further to the southeast, along the coast, a large river flowing from deep within the continent debouches into a huge island-filled gulf. A nearby inscription in the sea reads *Questo Colfo de maragnon in fina ala bocha del fiume granda sono mig[li]a 100 tuto aqua dolza*, ['This is the gulf of the Amazon; in the end at the mouth of the big river there are 100 miles of fresh water'].

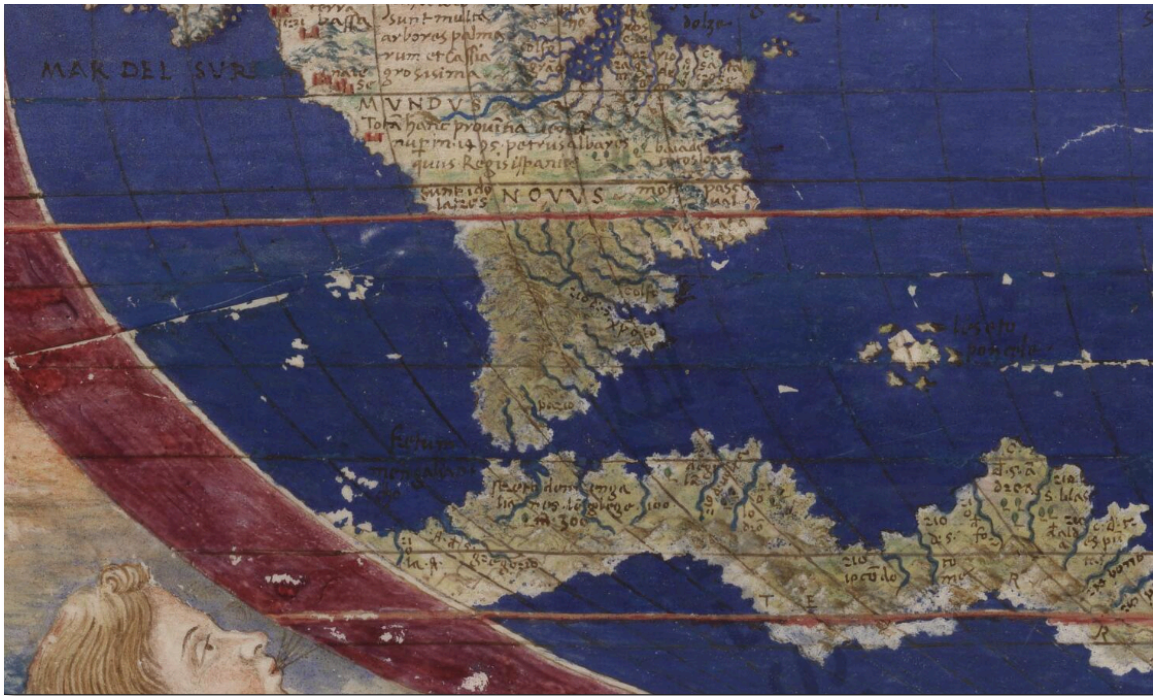
In the middle of the continent's eastern coast we have *baia de totos lo[?]*, evidently an abbreviation of *baia de todos los santos*. Further south on the east coast we read *mons pascual*. This is the *monte pascoal*, which was the first land in the continent seen on 22 April 1500 by Pedro Alvares Cabral and so named by him. Further south is an unnamed *colfo*, then a *rio de s. chroeo*, that is, the River of St. Christopher. This name (or its equivalent, *Rio San Cristóbal*) for the Rio de la Plata is quite rare but was used on the 'Salviati' map of c.1527 (#336), Vesconte Maggiolo's 1527 map (#340), and Robert



Thorne's 1527 map. It comes from the *Roteiro* of the anonymous Genoese Pilot who accompanied Magellan.

Toponyms are much more sparse in the southern and western parts of the continent. Nevertheless five cities are located along the west coast. The northernmost seems to be labeled *irri* and two of the others *natese*. Inland from the northern city of *irri* is a region called *terra bassa*. Further inland we read *In hoc loco sunt multos arbores palmarum et cassia grosissima*, ['Here there are many palm trees and very large cassia']. The source of this legend is perhaps an account of the voyage of Vicente Yáñez Pinzón to South America in 1498–1499.

Further south in the interior we read *Totam hanc provintia[m] [in]venit nuper in 1495 petrus albares [e]lquus Regis hispaniae*, ['Pedro Alvares, knight of the King of Spain, discovered this whole region recently in 1495']. As Roberto Almagia pointed out, this legend reflects the cartographer's confusion between Columbus's voyages sponsored by the King of Spain, one of which took place in 1495, and those of Pedro Alvares Cabral, who sailed to South America under the flag of Portugal in 1500. A little further south on the western coast we read *sunt idolatres*.



**Southern Africa.** One of the most unusual features of the Vatican map's depiction of Africa is the island separated from the southeastern tip of the continent by a narrow channel described as a *canal*. On this unnamed island is a red sign for a city and the label *loasle* [?]. Fra Mauro's 1459 world map (#249) has an island named *Diab* in much the same position as the island on the Vatican map, also separated from Africa by a narrow channel. The only other object van Duzer has found that shows a similar configuration is the *Laon* globe of c.1493 (#259), which is clearly dependent upon Fra Mauro in this region. This island on the Vatican map is not Madagascar, for the Vatican map has a *madagascar* (and *zanzibar*) further east of Africa, a placement quite typical of maps of this period. It seems that the cartographer of the Vatican map was simply relying (directly or indirectly) on the authority of Fra Mauro for the existence of this island with the city of *loasle*.



Further north along the eastern coast of Africa on the Vatican map is another substantial island. Unfortunately the map has been damaged in this area, and any toponyms that may have been on the island are missing. The *Laon* globe has a large island in this same area labeled *Memitias*, which is a misspelling of Ptolemy's *Menuthias* (*Geography* 4.8). This island is generally depicted in the maps that accompany manuscripts of Ptolemy's *Geography* as a small island on the eastern coast of Africa; it also appears as such in Waldseemüller's 1507 world map (#310). A substantial unlabeled island is in this same position on the *Lenox* globe of c.1510 (#314).

**Indian Ocean.** In the middle of the island of *Taprobana* [modern Sri Lanka] on the Vatican map is a large lake. This feature derives from Pliny's *Natural History* 6.84– 91, where Pliny recounts the visit to Rome of four ambassadors from *Taprobane*, who describe a vast lake called *Megisba* in the interior of *Taprobane*.

Just east of the tip of the southward-jutting *Catigara* peninsula in southeast Asia is an unnamed island. From its position we would expect it to be *Seilan*, that is, Ceylon, a doublet of *Taprobane* that is common on maps of this period, and the legends on the island prove this to be the case. In the northern part of the island we read *ichn Ad*, a reference to the footprint of Adam which was supposed to exist on a mountain on Ceylon called Adam's Peak. Marco Polo does not mention the footprint, but it is described by John Marignolli who visited the island in about 1349. Further south on the island we read *hic rubina*, a reference to the huge ruby owned by the King of Seilan



which is described by Marco Polo, book 3, chapter 14, and is also mentioned in Martin Behaim's globe legend on the island.



Northeast of Java Minor and Java Major on the Vatican map we come to the *arcipelago de mangalianes*, which represents the Philippines; and *Candi insula*, which appears on Waldseemüller's 1507 map, Schöner's 1515 and 1520 globes (#328) and many other contemporary maps. South and east of *Candi* are two mysterious islands, *Piap* (or perhaps *Diap*) and *Sori*.



**The Southern Continent.** The history of cartography contains other examples of the mapping of hypothetical or mythical geographical features, but the southern continent on MS Urb. Lat. 274, folios 73v–74r surely ranks as one of the most extraordinary instances of cartographic invention. For here there is not only an entire hypothetical continent, but also a profusion of named rivers, capes, cities and ports within it. By giving names to these invented features, the mapmaker evidently hoped to lend an aura of verisimilitude to his creation. It is worth noting that although many rivers are marked on the known continents, relatively few are named, in contrast with the situation in the unknown southern continent.

Three globes that are earlier than the Vatican map portray an annular southern continent: Johann Schöner's 1515 and 1520 globes (#328), and the anonymous Green globe of c.1515 (#342.1). The southern continents on these globes are all similar, but the 'ring continent' on the Vatican map differs in both the abundance of named features and its shape. On the globes, the continent has a large break or opening south of eastern Asia, while on the Vatican map the continent is unbroken. Moreover, the northern coastline of the continent on the Vatican map is much more sinuous and varied, with several peninsulas, including a large peninsula jutting northward toward the *Catigara* peninsula in Asia and a second northward-jutting peninsula labeled *Regno Patalis* near the eastern edge of the map. Neither of these features appears on the globes. Thus it seems clear that the maker of the Vatican map was not directly inspired by these globes, and either gave his southern continent a shape of his own devising or was using a source which is now lost. Van Duzer believes that the depiction of this continent on the Vatican map is based on theories that called for a balancing of land masses in the northern and southern hemispheres, and it is also possible that the continent was intended to represent the bounds God set on the waters during the creation of dry land (*Genesis* 1:9–10) and/or after the Noachian Flood (*Genesis* 7:11 and 8:2–5).

The Vatican map's southern continent is somewhat to the north of the Antarctic Circle, enclosing a sea with no islands. The whole continent bears the designation *Terra*



*Inchognita Australe*, while the part south of Africa is labeled *Terra Australe*, and the peninsula jutting northwards towards the *Catigara* peninsula is indicated as *Terra Incognita*. The two designations of the land as *inc(h)ognita* are curious given the many place-names. There are mountains along the entire southern coast of the continent, and the rivers in the main body of the continent (as opposed to the large northward-jutting peninsula) almost all flow north.

The sources for the toponyms are not easily identified; most seem to be pure inventions. But some of the toponyms in the eastern part of the continent do share a source, and it is a surprising one: an account of Columbus's Fourth Voyage to the Caribbean islands and Central America in 1502–1504. Columbus's *Letter on the Fourth Voyage* composed in Jamaica on 7 July 1503 contains some but not all of the details of his voyage that are given in the Vatican map.

But it is difficult to imagine a theory about Columbus's Fourth Voyage that would have led a cartographer in c.1530 to misplace these toponyms in this way—not only displacing them from the New World, which is reasonably well depicted on the Vatican map, but also locating them so far to the south. Van Duzer found one other cartographic object on which New World discoveries are located in precisely the same location as on the Vatican map: the *Jagiellonian* globe of c.1510 in the Jagiellonian University Museum, Krakow (#314). This globe shows a large island in precisely the same location—that is, aligned diagonally from southwest to northeast and almost touching the *Catigara* peninsula in southern Asia—as the large northward-jutting peninsula in the Vatican map. *Catigara* was the name given on earlier Ptolemaic maps to the land on the easternmost shore of the *Mare Indicum*, south of the equator.





*Replica of the Jagiellonian Globe made of gilded wood, c.1974.*

*Note the continent inscribed AMERICA NOVITER REPERTA in the southern part.*

The northwestern coasts of both the large island on the *Jagiellonian* globe and the peninsula on the Vatican map are plain and have little topographical detail, while the southern coasts have bays, capes and rivers. Further, both the large island and the peninsula have a prominent mountain chain—in fact the mountain chain on the Vatican map's peninsula is more pronounced than any other mountains in the map's southern continent.

On the Vatican map the peninsula is the locus of Columbian toponyms, and on the *Jagiellonian* globe the island is labeled *America noviter reperta*. Stevenson noted that the use of the name 'America' on the globe indicated its maker's familiarity with the *Cosmographiae introductio* by Martin Waldseemüller and Matthias Ringmann (1507), which was the source of this name for the newly discovered lands. He suggested that the



maker of the globe placed 'America' in this strange location through the influence of this passage in chapter 7 ('*De climatibus orbis*') of the *Cosmographiae introductio*:

In the sixth climate toward the Antarctic are located the farthest part of Africa, recently discovered, the islands of Zanzibar, the lesser Java, and Seula, and the fourth part of the earth, which, because Amerigo discovered it, we may call it Amerige, the land of Amerigo, so to speak, or America.

It seems likely that the *Cosmographiae introductio* was indeed the ultimate source of the Asian island of 'America' on the *Jagiellonian* globe but, as indicated above, it is difficult to imagine the maker of the Vatican map mis-locating Columbian toponyms in c.1530. Thus it seems likely that the maker of the Vatican map copied the toponyms from an earlier map no longer extant on which they were located in southern Asia, and that he did so without realizing that they represented places discovered by Columbus. Van Duzer suspects that this lost map was also the source of the large island labeled *America noviter reperta* on the *Jagiellonian* globe. Specifically, that the maker of this map placed the Columbian toponyms on a large island, similar to that in the *Jagiellonian* globe, and that the maker of the Vatican map joined this island to his southern continent, while the maker of the *Jagiellonian* globe copied the island and the legend *America noviter reperta*, but omitted the toponyms on his small globe (7.3 cm in diameter). In any case, the Vatican map is certainly to be added to the corpus of Columbian cartography, and specifically to the group of maps on which Columbus' discoveries are placed in Asia. A similarly shaped and positioned island appears on Pietro Coppo's woodcut world map of 1524 (#341), which is preserved in a codex of his works in Piran (Slovenia), 'Sergej Masera' Maritime Museum, Biblioteca civica, Inv. 1002307, fols. 72v–73r.

While the Columbian toponyms in the Vatican map's southern continent have an identifiable source and a certain geographical logic, however curious, to their location, the other place-names in the continent highlight the mapmaker's inventiveness. Ten of the features in the southern continent are given the names of saints. Explorers often named coastal features after the saint on whose feast day the cape or island or river was discovered.

The six named cities (*romas*, *elit*, *zripia*, *rissiou*, *basar* and *banfola*) located in the southern continent south of Africa are certainly one of the Vatican map's more remarkable features. Their names again point up the mapmaker's inventiveness: they have no apparent source and have the feeling of being random combinations of syllables. Yet these antipodal cities appear (without names) on two earlier maps, although their presence has not received any serious scholarly attention. Six signs representing cities are placed in the southern island-continent of Francesco Rosselli's c.1508 oval world map (#315), and five such signs are marked in the southern continent on the Rosselli world map at the end of the last edition of the *Isolario* of Bartolomeo dalli Sonetti (Venice, 1532). Rosselli did not use city signs liberally on his c.1508 or 1532 maps – there are no such signs in South America, for example – so it seems unlikely that he placed them in the southern continent out of mere *horror vacui*. While various earlier sources had indicated that the southern continent was inhabited or habitable, neither of Rosselli's maps gives any hint of the source that might have inspired him. The creator of the Vatican map went further than Rosselli in supplying names for each of the antipodal cities, but these are so enigmatic that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they were pure invention. Most of the other toponyms on the Vatican map's southern continent also seem to have been invented by the cartographer. Some are generic (e.g., *rio bono*, 'good river'; *rio grosso*, 'big river'); while others evidently received their names from their

This image shows a fragment of an ancient map, likely from the Ptolemy world map. The map is heavily damaged, with large sections missing, revealing the underlying parchment. The visible landmass is labeled 'TERRA AVS' and 'TERRA ALE'. The sea is labeled 'MARE'. The map is oriented with North at the top.

But the Vatican map's southern continent has one toponym whose source is well-known, and which appears in the southern continents of other contemporary maps: the *Regno Patalis*, a large bulbous peninsula south of eastern Asia. This place-name ultimately derives from a passage in Pliny, *Natural History* 2.75.184: *in eadem India Patalis, celeberrimo portu, sol dexter oritur, umbrae in meridiem cadunt*, [also in India at the famous port of Patale the sun rises on the right, and shadows fall to the south], which indicates that Patale is south of the equator. Other maps show rivers in the *Regno Patalis*, but the maker of the Vatican map is the only cartographer to have invented names for these rivers.



The southern continent on the world map on folios 73v and 74r of the Vatican Library's MS Urb. Lat. 274 is certainly one of the most spectacular and extravagant examples of cartographic invention in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, amid its abundant fanciful place-names, the continent contains a copy of part of a lost early map on which toponyms from Columbus's fourth voyage were located in southern Asia. No doubt the Vatican map carries other secrets which await future investigators.

**References:**

Van Duzer, Chet (2007), "Cartographic Invention: The Southern Continent on Vatican MS Urb. Lat. 274, Folios 73v-74r (c.1530)", *Imago Mundi*, 59:2, 193-222.









