



BRILL

JOURNAL OF EARLY  
MODERN HISTORY 23 (2019) 257-295

*Journal of*  
Early Modern  
History

brill.com/jemh

# Amerasia: European Reflections of an Emergent World, 1492-ca. 1700

*Elizabeth Horodowich*

New Mexico State University

*lizh@nmsu.edu*

*Alexander Nagel*

New York University

*an43@nyu.edu*

## Abstract

The association of America and Asia dominated the geographical imagination of Europe for well over a century after 1492. Narratives and representations of myriad texts, maps, objects, and images produced between 1450 and 1700 reveal a vision of a world where Mexico really was India, North America was an extension of China, South America was populated by a variety of biblical and Asian sites, and American cultural productions and ethnographic features colored conceptions of Asia. While the Amerasian imaginary was later suppressed by Eurocentric and colonialist narratives, here we consider various representations of Amerasia in order to bring it back into visibility. Doing so reveals various forms of mirroring at play, permitting us to understand one of the mechanisms by which Europeans assimilated a dizzying array of new knowledge to their pre-existing conceptual order, and also offering insights into early modern European conceptions of global geography and modernity.

## Keywords

Asia – Mexico – India – Christopher Columbus – geography – America – Vespucci – Waldseemüller – Caspar Vopel – New World – Europe

## Introduction

For over two centuries after 1492, Europeans understood the lands encountered across the Atlantic as Asian and used American identifiers to qualify Asia. By considering a plethora of texts, maps, objects, and images produced between 1450 and 1700, it becomes possible to imagine a coherent, if malleable, vision of a world where Mexico really was India, North America was an extension of China, South America was populated by a variety of biblical and Asian sites, and American cultural productions and ethnographic features colored conceptions of Asia. Assembling and scratching beneath the surface of this variety of sources brings into view a multifaceted, dynamic model of the world and the process of Europe's self-formation within it. The Amerasian model of the world was later eclipsed by the Eurocentric and colonialist narratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To rediscover this history and to make Amerasia visible again is, we believe, a necessary part of coming to terms with the emergent polyfocal global reality of our own period, when Europe's centrality is no longer a given and North American children learn Chinese in school. We are not merely proposing a later start for an otherwise unchanged story of European modernity. Instead, our proposed history contributes to a larger revision of the idea of European historical dominance over the centuries.<sup>1</sup>

Samuel Eliot Morison presciently understood that there was "no incompatibility between a new world and the Indies," and more recently, a series of studies sheds light directly and indirectly on Europe's early modern Amerasian mirror.<sup>2</sup> Scholars of Latin America in the colonial period, for example, have emphasized connections between the New World and the Middle East, as Serge Gruzinski did in *Quelle heure est-il là-bas?* (2008), his multi-focal study of the New World, Europe, and Islam in the sixteenth century. The research of Stephanie Leitch, who has studied illustrated accounts of European voyages along the African coast and to India in the early sixteenth century, has offered strong evidence to support the idea that our modern distinction between the two Indies is "largely anachronistic for the period," a premise that has become

1 Andre Gunder Frank, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley, 1998); and Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, 2000).

2 Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus*, 2 vols. (New York, 1942), 1: 371. On mirror iconography, see Rose Marie San Juan, *Vertiginous Mirrors: The Animation of the Visual Image and Early Modern Travel* (Manchester, 2011); and Elizabeth Horodowich, *The Venetian Discovery of America: Geographic Imagination and Print Culture in the Age of Encounters* (New York, 2018), 173-218.

standard in the field.<sup>3</sup> Christian Feest's studies offer clear-headed accounts of the intermixing of Indian and American motifs in sixteenth-century ethnographic prints and drawings.<sup>4</sup> In 1500, Asia was home to most of the world's population and the world's five largest cities, at the heart of the world's largest empires of the time. In the period of early modernity, Europe was—as global historians often put it—a mere peninsula of Asia, and the driving force of early modern globalism was the desire to obtain Chinese goods and Indian spices. Gunder Frank proclaimed in 1998 that “from a global perspective Asia and not Europe held center stage for most of early modern history.”<sup>5</sup> Asia loomed so large physically, economically, and culturally that we should not be surprised that Europeans were continually finding it in America.

The idea of “the world” emerged in the sixteenth century as a foundational category of modernity, making “worldmaking a ubiquitous cultural practice in the early modern period.”<sup>6</sup> As the art historian Sean Roberts explains, printed books and maps were forms of “connective tissue” that were crucial to this process in the way that they “bound readers and authors across distances” both temporal and spatial.<sup>7</sup> Between 1500 and 1700, Europeans developed and maintained a locally formed concept of global geography in which Asia and America overlapped. Asian and American, and sometimes African, toponyms, peoples, terrain, flora, fauna, atmospheres, and cultural productions mingled in the European consciousness long after Columbus, and even after the Pacific was being regularly traversed by European galleons. Amerasian visions persisted, as we shall see, even as prominent cartographers such as Abraham Ortelius and Gerardus Mercator began to establish a four-continent model of the world.

This paper sketches discursive notions and visual representations of Amerasia from its beginnings to about 1700. Throughout, our approach stresses the

3 Stephanie Leitch *Mapping Ethnography in Early Modern Germany: New Worlds in Print Culture* (New York, 2010), 12.

4 Christian Feest, “The People of Calicut: Objects, Texts, and Images in the Age of Proto-Ethnography,” *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, Ciências Humanas* 9 (2014): 287–303. See also Feest, “The Collecting of American Indian Artifacts in Europe, 1493–1750,” in *America in European Consciousness 1493–1750*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Chapel Hill, 1995), 324–60.

5 Gunder Frank, *ReORIENT*, xv.

6 Ayesha Ramachandran, *The Worldmakers: Global Imagining in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago, 2015), 6–7. See also Roland Greene, *Five Words: Critical Semantics in the Age of Cervantes and Shakespeare* (Chicago, 2013), “World,” 143–72.

7 See Sean Roberts, *Printing a Mediterranean World: Florence, Constantinople, and the Renaissance of Geography* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 14. See also Denis Cosgrove, “Mapping the World,” in *Maps: Finding Our Place in the World*, ed. James R. Akerman and Robert W. Karrow Jr. (Chicago, 2007), 65–115; and the wide-ranging essays in *The History of Cartography, Volume 3: Cartography in the European Renaissance*, ed. David Woodward, 2 vols. (Chicago, 2007).

primacy of point of view. Global consciousness takes shape from specific positions and at specific times; it is not magically brought into being by expanding trade networks or by objects and people having been set in motion.<sup>8</sup> We propose that the Amerasian worldview was sustained by intersecting conceptual formations: cosmological principles, cartographic conventions, narrative forms, and protocols of collecting and display. Amerasia was a crucial component of early modern European worldmaking; it fundamentally undergirded Europeans' evolving understanding of global geography and allowed them to assimilate a dizzying array of new knowledge using both traditional conceptual architectures as well as new representational practices.

### India beyond the Ganges: Emergent Amerasia

In an account from the first book of Peter Martyr of Anghiera's widely read 1510 compilation *De orbe novo*, dated November 13, 1493, we read that when Christopher Columbus landed on Hispaniola he saw the natives gathering fleeces from trees "just as among the Chinese."<sup>9</sup> In another report from April 23, 1501 (collected by Peter Martyr in the third book of the first Ocean Decade), Columbus claimed that Hispaniola was the far-eastern capital "Ophir, about which one reads in the third book of Kings." After remarking on the island's excessive fertility, the admiral sent men to investigate Cipangu [Japan], the mountainous and rocky backbone of the island where the natives indicated there would be a great quantity of gold as well as woods full of spices. Sailing west and passing the islands of Cuba and Jamaica, he believed "he had reached close to the Golden Chersonese, the beginning of our east beyond Persia."<sup>10</sup>

The most dramatic moment of geographical clarity in Peter Martyr's accounts came in his description of Columbus's landing on Cuba:

8 For examples of the development of specific points of view about early modern European exploration, see, for example, Horodowich, *The Venetian Discovery of America*, and Ricardo Padrón, "(Un)Inventing America: The Transpacific Indies in Oviedo and Gómara," *Colonial Latin American Review* 25 (2016): 16-34. On the flexibility and centrality of world views in the representation of geography, see Zur Shalev, *Sacred Words and Worlds: Geography, Religion, and Scholarship, 1550-1700*, Scientific and Learned Cultures and Their Institutions (Leiden, 2011).

9 "Ex arboribus, veluti apud seres, uellera colliguntur," *Selections from Peter Martyr*, ed. Geoffrey Eatough, *Repertorium Columbianum* 5 (Turnhout, 1998), 134 (Decade 1.1.11).

10 "Ophiram, de qua legitur regum tertio," "Seque non longe ab aurea chersonesso, nostri orientis ultra persidem initio," *Ibid*, 146 (Decade 1.3.1) and 149-150 (Decade 1.3.10).

He [Columbus] called the beginning [of the island] Alpha Omega, because he thinks that there lies the boundary of our orient, since the sun sets there, and of our occident, since it rises there. For he insists that the beginning of "India beyond the Ganges" is to the West [of here], and in fact comes to its ultimate limit [here]. Nor indeed is this utterly absurd, since the cosmographers have left the boundaries of the Gangean India undefined, and many are of the opinion that the shores of India are not far from the coasts of Spain.<sup>11</sup>

For Peter Martyr, Cuba was the place where East and West met. The placement of the Alpha Omega line, a widening contact zone that contemporaries most often referred to as the New World, would shift in the coming decades, but the idea that the Columbian voyages clarified the farthest extent of Asia, what Ptolemy called India beyond the Ganges, was the first conceptual foundation for the idea of Amerasia.<sup>12</sup> India had long been a plural and unstable discursive category for European audiences, who had endlessly reinvented this flexible and multi-partite zone of the world.<sup>13</sup> From the moment Columbus returned from his first voyage, Europeans understood the lands he had explored to be an extension of Asia.

Columbus was unwavering in his belief that, in the Latin Americanist Edmundo O'Gorman's words, "he had reached Asia, he was in Asia, and it was from Asia that he returned. No one, nothing, to the day of his death, ever made him relinquish this cherished conviction."<sup>14</sup> The admiral travelled with a copy of Marco Polo's *Travels* (to which he contributed some 366 annotations), and

11 "Uocauitque eius initium alpha, o, eo quod ibi finem esse nostri orientis cum in ea sol occidat, occidentis autem cum oriatur, arbitretur. Instat enim esse ab occidente principium indiae ultra gangem, ab oriente uero terminum ipsius ultimum. Neque enim absolum penitus est, cum gangetidis indiae terminos indiscretos cosmographi reliquerint, nec desint qui ab hispanis oris non longe indica littora discedere sentient," *Ibid.*, 149 (Decade 1.3.8).

12 Decades later, Ferdinand Columbus explained that his father had completed the Ptolemaic picture Ptolemy had left unfinished. His father had called them the Indies not "because they had been seen and discovered by others [i.e. Europeans], but because they were the eastern part of India beyond the Ganges, to which no cosmographer set limits or boundaries with another land or province to the east, save with the ocean." Ferdinand Columbus, *Historie del S. D. Fernando Colombo* 6 (1571/1992, 14r.), cited and discussed by Nicolás Wey Gómez, *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), 166-67.

13 See Marianne O'Doherty, *The Indies and the Medieval West: Thought, Report, Imagination* (Turnhout, 2013), 2-7.

14 Edmundo O'Gorman, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry Into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of its History* (Bloomington, IN, 1961), 78.

he was reported also to own *The Book of John Mandeville* and *The Letter of Prester John*.<sup>15</sup> As the literary scholar Michael Householder has demonstrated, accounts of journeys to the East remained authoritative sources of geographical information well into the sixteenth century “even after the publication of eyewitness accounts of the extraordinary but real kingdoms of Mexico and Peru,” and they clearly aroused and determined Columbus’s understanding that he had reached Asia.<sup>16</sup>

An approach that begins by recognizing the extent and logic of the Amerasian phenomenon will be able to make sense also of voices audible from the period that appreciated the newness of the discovered lands. Recognition and celebration of newness did not contradict the idea that the newly discovered lands were an extension of Asia, or to be seen in relation to Asia. A variety of period writers—Peter Martyr, John Cabot, Amerigo Vespucci—at first appear as naysayers by understanding America as a new and separate world. Prying open their accounts a bit further, however, reveals them to be quite as involved in the Amerasian worldview as Columbus. Peter Martyr, perhaps most famously, appears to have been among the first to see America as a “New World.” In a letter to Cardinal Ascanio Sforza on November 1, 1493, he speaks of “*Colonus ille Novi Orbis repertor*” or “Columbus the discoverer of that New World,” an expression that has, more than any other, led to the modern understanding that Columbus discovered America.<sup>17</sup> However, the title was not incompatible with reference to Asia. *New* maintained that these lands were until then unknown, but by saying that this was a new world rather than part of a known hemisphere (*novus orbis* rather than *orbis terrarum*), he avoided having to judge whether Columbus had landed in Asia or not. Under the single title *De orbe novo*, Peter Martyr gathered reports on the new discoveries from both Asia and America. The idea of the New World, writes Joan-Pau Rubiés, “included most of Asia, no less than America, given that much of the East had been equally ‘newly found’ by European navigators.... This Renaissance perspective on the discoveries is often overlooked by modern historians all too often concerned with one area of expansion alone.”<sup>18</sup> The concept of the New

15 See Valerie Flint, *The Imaginative Landscape of Christopher Columbus* (Princeton, 1992) 18-19; and Michael Householder, *Inventing Americans in the Age of Discovery: Narratives of Encounter* (Farnham, 2011), 21-22.

16 Householder, *Inventing Americans*, 22.

17 *Fonti italiane per la storia della scoperta del nuovo mondo*, ed. Guglielmo Berchet, 2 vols. (Rome, 1892), 2: 42.

18 Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Travel Writing and Humanistic Culture: A Blunted Impact?” *Journal of Early Modern History* 10 (2006): 131-68, at 137. See also n. 3.

World was compatible with the idea that the new lands were either an extension of Asia or to be understood as an addition beyond an extended Asia.

Amerigo Vespucci and Martin Waldseemüller, celebrated by modern historians for having recognized the newness of America, also described Amerasia. In a 1502 letter given the title *Mundus novus* in period publications, Vespucci (the person to whom the letter was universally attributed whether or not he authored it) described his time spent on the coast of present-day Brazil, proclaiming famously in the first lines that “these [lands] we may rightly call a new world, because our ancestors had no knowledge of them, and it will be a matter wholly new to all those who hear about them.”<sup>19</sup> The letter was widely enough circulated that when Waldseemüller published his world map in 1507, he delineated an independent (if narrow) landmass to the West, separate from Asia, calling it America after the Florentine navigator, Amerigo Vespucci. It would seem that within a few years what has appeared to historians as Columbus’s confusion had been overcome, and the idea of the New World displaced the notion that Columbus had reached Asia. However, in the so-called *Mundus novus* letter, published in 1502 and in many editions and compilations thereafter under Vespucci’s name, we read, “certainly, if anywhere in the world there exists an Earthly Paradise, I think it is not far from these regions.”<sup>20</sup> This view was, in fact, not far from that of Columbus, who during his third voyage in 1498 had stood at the mouth of the Orinoco River in present-day Venezuela and reasoned that such a mighty river implied a great height inland, certainly the earthly paradise at the easternmost part of the earth.<sup>21</sup> That Vespucci thought of himself as close to Asia is clear from his account of his first voyage, where we find him searching the Amazon delta for the Asian port of Cattigara: the southeasternmost point of the Asian mainland on maps derived from the ancient cosmographer Ptolemy.<sup>22</sup> A little over a decade later, Thomas More

19 “E se diligentemente saranno considerate, parrà veramente che facciano un altro mondo, sì che non senza cagione l’abbiamo chiamato *mondo nuovo*, perché gli antichi tutti non n’ebbero cognizione alcuna e le cose che sono state nuovamente da noi ritrovate trapassano la loro opinione [sic],” *Il Mondo Nuovo di Amerigo Vespucci*, ed. Mario Pozzi (Alexandria, 1993), 103.

20 “E se nel mondo è alcun paradiso terrestre, senza dubbio dee [sic] esser non molto lontano da questi luoghi,” *Il Mondo Nuovo*, ed. Pozzi, 121. To be clear, Vespucci also determined the location of the Earthly Paradise based on Dante’s *Purgatorio* (1: 22-23); he used the stars visible in the New World to affirm the correctness of Dante’s terrestrial model. See Alessandro Scafi, *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth* (Chicago, 2006).

21 Christopher Columbus, *The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, ed. and trans. J. M. Cohen (New York, 1969), 220-21, 224.

22 Louis-André Vigneras, *The Discovery of South America and the Andalusian Voyages* (Chicago, 1976), 49.

in his *Utopia* of 1516 proposed that one of Vespucci's men traveling westward from Brazil eventually reached the island of Utopia, where the inhabitants speak a language not far from Persian. In the minds of real and imaginary voyagers, including those we typically consider to have proclaimed the Discovery of America, the New World remained connected to Asia.

Many sources indicate that the question of how far eastward India and Asia extended remained an open problem in early modern cosmography, leaving ample and flexible mental room for the newly discovered lands to exist in relation to the Indian or Asian landmass. For example, in his *De insulis meridiani atque indici maris nuper inventis* (*On the Islands of the southern or Indian sea, recently discovered*, ca. 1494), Nicolò Scillacio—a Sicilian humanist interested in geography and cosmography—believed that Columbus had sailed to Ethiopia, Arabia, and across the Indian Ocean, a claim that helps explain why the earliest images related to Columbus's discoveries show the newly discovered peoples engaged in commercial relations with turban-wearing inhabitants of better-known parts of the Asian world (Fig. 1).<sup>23</sup> When Vicente Yáñez Pinzón landed in Brazil in 1500, he thought he was “beyond the city of Cathay and the Indian shore beyond the Ganges.”<sup>24</sup> Writing to Domenico Malipiero in 1501, the Venetian ambassador to Lisbon, Angelo Trevisan, thought that Jamaica was Java,<sup>25</sup> and a great variety of cosmographers and mapmakers thought that Hispaniola (today, the island of Haiti and the Dominican Republic) was Japan.<sup>26</sup>

Many if not most cartographers either unified Asia and America as one continent or employed a wide variety of techniques and formats to express the unclear relationship between the two, by including broken or unclear coastlines, having images of continents fade out rather than be defined by a coast, and by cutting off landmasses with the edges of the map. The earliest maps of the New World, including the Cantino Planisphere (1502), the Caverio Map (1505), and the Contarini-Roselli map (1506), as well as many and others, left the meeting of the East and West undecided by having the coasts of the American and Asian continents extend beyond the right and left edges of the map. The vast

23 Nicolò Scillacio, *Sulle isole meridionali e del mare indico nuovamente trovate*, ed. Maria Grazia Scelfo Micci (Rome, 1990), 56. See also Antonello Gerbi, *Nature in the New World: From Christopher Columbus to Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1985), 27–28.

24 “Ultra urbem cataii et littus indicum ultra gangen percurrerant,” *Selections from Peter Martyr*, ed. Eatough, 189 (Decade 1.9.9).

25 “[Columbus] zonse a una insula chiamata da li paesani Iamaica, ma, come lui dice, da li cosmografi Ianna maior,” *Fonti italiane*, ed. Berchet, 1: 65.

26 The Contarini-Roselli map (1506) places “Zippangu” right next to Cuba, while the Ruysch map (1507) claimed that Japan was to be identified with Hispaniola, as did the Vopel/Vavassore map (1558).



FIGURE 1  
Christopher Columbus, *De insulis nuper  
in mari indico repertis*. Basel, 1494,  
frontispiece.

COURTESY OF THE JOHN CARTER  
BROWN LIBRARY AT BROWN  
UNIVERSITY.

majority of sixteenth-century world maps and maps of the Americas, however, confidently presented one unified and contiguous Amerasian continent that incorporated the new discoveries into Asian landmasses.<sup>27</sup> Amerasia found iconic expression in Oronce Finé's *Recens et integra orbis descriptio* (Paris, 1531); where China and Mexico merge, the Asian port of Cattigara is on the coast of Peru, and the Caribbean island of Hispaniola is labeled Japan (Fig. 2). While some cartographers experimented with separating the continents, their maps were distinctly in the minority.<sup>28</sup> Much like the early modern overlaps between Asia and America, Ethiopia, sometimes metonymically standing in for all of Africa, had since antiquity often been confused or associated with

27 See Edward Luther Stevenson, *Terrestrial and Celestial Globes Volume 1: Their History and Construction Including a Consideration of Their Value as Aids in the Study of Geography and Astronomy* (New Haven, 1921), 94-145. On the visual components and graphics of maps that orient and condition a viewer's gaze, including borders, grids, frames, and decorative figures, see Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches in Cartography throughout History* (Chicago, 2006).

28 The maps of Stobnicza (1512), Solinus (1538), Münster (1540), Antonio Salamanca (1550), and Tramezzino (1554), for instance, separated America and Asia. For a more complete list, see Eviatar Zerubavel, *Terra Cognita: The Mental Discovery of America* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2005), 41.

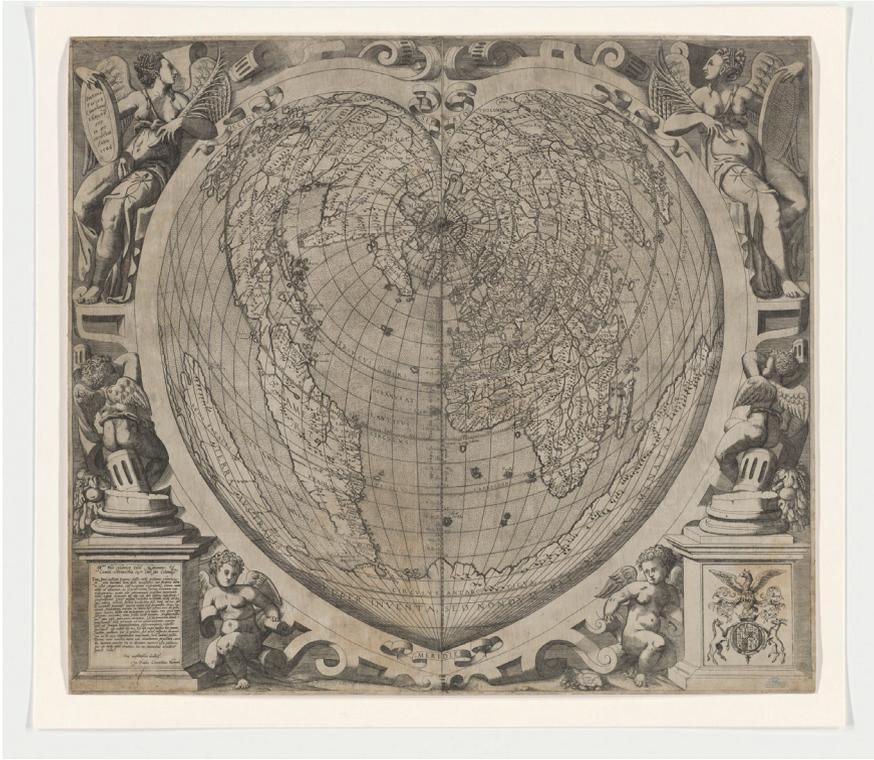


FIGURE 2 Oronce Finé, *Recens et integra orbis descriptio*, reprinted by Giovanni Cimerlino, Venice, 1566.  
COURTESY OF HOUGHTON LIBRARY, 51-2482, HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

India.<sup>29</sup> As we shall see, Europeans employed various formats to express the many relationships between these landmasses as well.

### Tools, Terms, and Models

In trying to grasp these geographical and cultural configurations, our language and study tools continually betray us. We speak of “Brazilian Tupi headdresses” worn by Sumatrans or of Columbus thinking himself close to paradise when in “present-day Venezuela,” and thus set up the problem of Amerasia as one of mistake-making. When the testimonies are presented in this way, we seem to

29 Pierre Schneider, *L'Éthiopie et l'Inde. Interférences et confusions aux extrémités du monde antique (viii siècle avant J.-C. -VI siècle de notre ère)* (Rome, 2004).

watch the sources fall short of the truth as they describe one thing from here as something from over there. Likewise, to plot Columbus's or other explorers' voyages on modern maps, so that we see travel lines landing in the Caribbean and Brazil with Asia nowhere in sight, is to reinforce an unhelpful historical telescoping according to which Columbus brought into being the world we now inhabit. To try to bring Amerasia into view, therefore, is to encounter resistance built into the modern methods and tools we might use to study it. The modern organization of historical study by fields is also structurally predisposed to misrecognize these Amerasian minglings as confusions or mistakes, often quaint or humorous, or just intermittent embarrassing glitches soon to be dispelled. Confusion implies that one thing has been mistaken for another, but how do we describe a view of the world before the separation that would make it possible to confuse two or more things? We propose that the confusion was not theirs, but between our models and tools and theirs.<sup>30</sup>

Among these tools are words and terms, such as "new world," or "Indians," or "discovery," which are common to both period documents and modern scholarship but are used differently in each.<sup>31</sup> When modern English speakers refer to the Sioux Indians in one moment and Indians of the subcontinent in another, they are in fact using two different words that are no more than homonyms. That clear semantic divorcing, where the one word "Indian" was prised apart into two words of the same spelling, was a surprisingly late development. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was one word, "Indian," and it connoted an imagined extension—geographic, climatic, or cultural, or all three—connecting Asia and America and sometimes Africa. The word could be geographically qualified, as when period sources speak of East Indies and West Indies, and sometimes this involved a clear understanding of a great

---

30 "It was therefore reasonable enough that there should have been continuing uncertainty throughout the sixteenth-century as to whether or not America formed part of Asia," John Huxtable Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492-1650* (Cambridge, 1970), 40. "Polo's description of Japan matched the Spanish description of Hispaniola.... [and] Cuba fell to even greater confusion," Thomas Suarez, *Early Mapping of the Pacific: The Epic Story of Seafarers, Adventurers, and Cartographers who Mapped the World's Greatest Ocean* (Singapore, 2004), 29.

31 Terms, such as "Indians," "terra firma," "discovery," "island," and "continent," easily adapted to modern usage, deserve careful contextualization in period sources. See Manlio Cortelazzo, "Nuovo Mondo e Indiani nel Cinquecento e poi," in *Il letterato tra miti e realtà del Nuovo Mondo: Venezia, il mondo iberico e l'Italia*, ed. Angela Caracciolo Aricò (Rome, 1994), 541-46; Wilcomb E. Washburn, "The Meaning of Discovery in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *The American Historical Review* 68 (1962): 1-21; and Martin W. Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

distance that separated them. Yet an imagined commonality connected the Indies, and it was above all an affinity imposed by latitude.

Nicolás Wey Gómez's *Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies* (2008) showed that thinking about latitude rather than longitude directly motivated Columbus's observations. Columbus had set out to discover the equatorial "torrid zone," thought by several ancient authorities to be uninhabitable, or inhabited only by marvelous creatures, and to prove, among other things, that they were temperate and habitable. The discovery that the tropics were in fact fertile and inhabited made possible descriptions of the Caribbean and its people that corresponded in many ways to descriptions of India, thought to occupy the same latitude. As Peter Martyr said, reporting Columbus's discoveries in 1493, "the parrots brought from there and many other things show that these islands taste of the soil of India, either because of their proximity or because of their natural properties."<sup>32</sup> Amerasian thinking could involve an imagined propinquity ("because of their proximity") or a climatic association ("because of their natural properties"). This may help explain why the vault mosaic of the chapel of Saint Helena in the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, commissioned around 1510 by the Cardinal Bernardin Carvajal, a Spanish prelate well informed about the Iberian discoveries and a correspondent of Peter Martyr, shows an American macaw and new world maize in the vicinity of a representation of the four rivers of the earthly paradise, traditionally placed in the easternmost part of the earth.<sup>33</sup> The fact that many of the newly discovered lands from India to New Spain occupied the same climatic zone determined by latitude reinforced the association connecting them, as can be seen well after Columbus in the writings of the Spanish naturalist Fernández de Oviedo.<sup>34</sup> Commonality by latitude produced an association robust enough to persist even as the mileage between the two Indies, including a growing knowledge of the Pacific, expanded greatly over the following decades. This latitudinal or Macrobian system was a basic tool for organizing the world throughout, even as four-continent models of the world came into being.

Unlike the cluster India-Indies-Indians, which has significantly challenged efforts to correlate period textual references to specific parts of the world, the

32 "Psitacci ... inde asportati atque alia multa, uel propinquitate, uel natura, solum indicum has insulas sapere indicant," *Selections from Peter Martyr*, ed. Eatough, 133 (Decade 1.1.11).

33 The New World elements in the Helena chapel were observed by Cynthia Anne Payne, "In the Fullness of Time: The Vault Mosaic in the Cappella Sant'Elena, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Georgia, 2003), 134-35, who understood them in connection with the Spanish patronage of the chapel.

34 See Padrón, "(Un)Inventing the Americas" and "The Indies of the West."

period terms *mundus novus* and *novus orbis* have been taken as a clear acknowledgment of the distinctness of America from previously known lands. Yet, as we saw above, the term was used in the period to refer to newly discovered lands in Asia as well as America. The famed theologian Egidio da Viterbo gave a sermon in the Sistine Chapel in 1507 where he celebrated the new discoveries of the Portuguese in Asia and the new era they opened up for a globally triumphant Church, never once mentioning America. He calls those conquests in Asia new world discoveries, speaking of a *novum terrarum orbem inventum*.<sup>35</sup> New World referred to all the newly discovered lands at the limits of the known world, whether American or Asian. Peter Martyr, as we saw above, collected travel reports from both Asia and America under the title *De orbe novo*. The Venetian doge Leonardo Donà (1536-1612) catalogued the “Asian” books in his sizable collection under the title “New World.”<sup>36</sup>

Often, the term “new world” came packaged with a predominantly island-based model that fostered extensible geographic formations.<sup>37</sup> Sebastian Münster’s 1550 edition of his *Cosmographia universalis* devoted a map to the “New Islands” discovered since Columbus. The map clearly shows a water separation between America and Asia, yet in the book to which the map belongs, America is discussed briefly in a short section at the end of the part of the book devoted to Asia—an addendum to the Asian extension.<sup>38</sup> The map visualizes this addendum status, presenting the newly discovered lands as part of an Asian archipelago (Fig. 3). Japan is shown closer to America than to China, an inscription explaining that it is one among 7,448 islands in this region. The largest of these, what the map calls “that Atlantic island they call Brazil or

35 John O’Malley, “Fulfillment of the Christian Golden Age under Pope Julius II: Text of a Discourse of Giles of Viterbo, 1507,” *Traditio* 25 (1969): 265–338, here 281: “lussisti coram te, sacro sanctoque Senatu astante, me uerba habere de ingenti beneficia quod a Deo optimo maximo grex tuus, te pastore, susceperat, quod, te praeside, Lusitanus rex fines sacratissimi imperii tui ad Indos usque produxisset, quod in nouum terrarum orbem inuentum auream attulisset aetatem.” Translation in Francis Xavier Martin, *Friar, Reformer and Renaissance Scholar: Life and Works of Giles of Viterbo, 1469-1532* (Villanova, PA, 1992), 225: “You further ordered that in the presence of Your Holiness and the College of Cardinals I should preach about the immense blessing received from our almighty and loving God by the flock of which you are shepherd, in that the King of Portugal had, under your auspices enlarged the bounds of your most sacred empire even to India, so ushering in a golden age in that newly-discovered land.”

36 Venice, Biblioteca Correr, Mss. Donà delle Rose, filza 447, n. 11, *Leggendo diversi autori alcune cose notabili*, c. 10-14.

37 We take inspiration here from Mark Shell, *Islandology: Geography, Rhetoric, Politics* (Stanford, 2014).

38 Surekha Davies, “America and Amerindians in Sebastian Münster’s *Cosmographiae universalis libri VI* (1550)” *Renaissance Studies* 25 (2011): 351-73.



FIGURE 3 Sebastian Münster, *Cosmographia Universalis*, Basel, 1550.  
COURTESY OF THE JOHN CARTER BROWN LIBRARY AT BROWN UNIVERSITY.

America (*insula atlantica quam uocant Brasiln et Americam*)” is just that, the biggest of the islands off the coast of Asia. Cattigara, Ptolemy’s last outpost in Asia, is now in Peru. The title at the top of the 1572 German edition of the map, proclaims: “The new islands are laid out in this way beyond Spain towards the East in the land of India (*Die neüwn Inseln so hinder Hispanien gegen Orient bey dem Land Indie liegen*).” The New World, even if separated by water, is an extension of Asia.

To suspend the modern myth of continents is not merely to open up relations between America and Asia; it is to bring into view a configuration that involves all parts of the world in a non-modern configuration.<sup>39</sup> Africa, for example, enters into the Amerasian formation in numerous ways. From the

39 See Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of the Continents*.

very beginning, all European seaborne traffic to India moved along the African coast, pulling Africa into the relationship between India. The administrative affairs of Portuguese trade with Africa were managed by the *Casa da Guiné*, which was renamed *Casa da Índia e da Guiné* (often shortened to *Casa da Índia*) after the circumnavigation of Africa by Vasco da Gama in 1497 established a sea route to India. Ships returning to Lisbon were filled with items from a variety of ports in the Portuguese-controlled world, yet the goods unloaded there and sent on for sale throughout Europe were registered as having arrived from the *Estado da Índia*, a general identifier that very likely colored their provenance from then onward.<sup>40</sup>

Apart from the clerical paper trail, there were cartographic and cosmographic reasons for associating Africa both with India and South America. On medieval *mappaemundi*, the Indian Ocean is minimized and Ethiopia and India are pressed one against the other. Europeans famously located Prester John alternately in both Ethiopia and India, and when in August of 1441 missions of the Patriarch of Alexandria came to Florence from the Ethiopian Convent of Jerusalem, these people were considered “Indians from Greater India sent by Prester John.”<sup>41</sup> When the humanist Francisco de Támara composed *El libro de las costumbres de todas las gentes del mundo, y de las indias* (Antwerp, 1556)—his Castilian translation of Johannes Boemus’ *Omnium gentium mores, leges et ritus* (Augsburg, 1520), which had only considered Africa, Asia, and Europe—Támara grouped the Americas with Africa. We see the same association in two drawings by the German artist Hans Burgkmair shortly after 1521, which show African people modeling American vestments and weapons.<sup>42</sup> Alvise da Ca’da Mosto placed the terrestrial paradise (as we saw, according to both Columbus and Vespucci, certain to be close to the lands they had explored) at the source of the Senegal river, and John of Mandeville recorded that the Nile flowed out of Earthly Paradise and through the deserts of India before running underground and coming up near Ethiopia, again connecting Africa to Asia.<sup>43</sup> Africa,

40 On Portuguese regulatory houses, see Patrick O’Flanagan, *Port Cities of Atlantic Iberia c. 1500-1900* (Ashgate, 2008), 133-42; and Susannah Ferreira, *The Crown, the Court and the Casa da Índia: Political centralization in Portugal, 1479-1521* (Leiden, 2015), 66-8. We wish to thank Ingrid Greenfield, who is preparing a study on this subject, for clarifying these matters and providing references.

41 “Indiani dell’India maggiore mandate dal Prete Janni,” Leonardo Olschki, *Storia letteraria delle scoperte geografiche* (Florence, 1937), 206, n. 75.

42 See Feest, “People of Calicut,” with further literature.

43 “Questo fiume ... è un ramo del fiume Gion che vien dal paradiso terrestre;” see Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, ed. Marica Milanese, 6 vols. (Turin, 1978), 1: 495; “This river [the Nile] as I said before flows out of Paradise and runs through the deserts of India, and then it runs down into the ground and thus flows underground through a large

metonymically represented by Ethiopia, was a kind of hinge that could be associated with both Asia and America, an Ethiopian lability that goes back as far as Homer, who in the opening words of the *Odyssey* spoke of the Ethiopians who inhabited both the westernmost and the easternmost parts of the world.<sup>44</sup> Africa was a persistent and even necessary part of the Amerasian idea.

### Amerasian Expansion

The idea of Amerasia actually grew over time as it assimilated new geographical knowledge, contravening a progressivist narrative that would chart a steady clarification of the geographical picture in modern terms. Increasing differentiation of America and Asia did not, in fact, set in after Waldseemüller published his 1507 map of the world with a discrete landmass named America. Waldseemüller in fact emended his findings in later maps, introducing an increasingly nuanced vision of the Amerasian extension. His 1516 *Carta Marina* in particular omits the word America, shows no signs of the Pacific or the western coasts of these lands, and indicates that North America is joined with Asia. A legend in a northern part of the newly discovered lands reads “the land of Cuba, part of Asia,” updating his view in conformity with the increasingly dominant Amerasian idea.<sup>45</sup> Here, Waldseemüller abandons Vespucci’s claim to the South American continent and instead adopts a Columbian vision of the New World as an extended Asia.

Episodes of the association of Asia and America are found regularly throughout the record, but as they crop up piecemeal the full charge of their impact has not been felt. When encountering such cases one by one—for instance, when Columbus thought he was near Cathay, or when Jacques Cartier or Giovanni da

---

region and it comes up again under a mountain called Alloche, which is between India and Ethiopia, some five months travel from the Ethiopian border. Then it flows around Ethiopia and Mauretania and all the way through Egypt to the city of Alexandria, and there it enters the sea at the edge of Egypt,” Sir John Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, ed. and trans. Anthony Bale (Oxford, 2012), 24-5.

44 “Aithiopians, most distant of men, who live divided, some at the setting of Hyperion, some at his rising,” Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York, 1991), 27 (1: 23-24).

45 See Chet Van Duzer, “Legends on Martin Waldseemüller’s *Carta Marina* of 1516,” Library of Congress Webcast, March 15, 2012, [https://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature\\_wdesc.php?rec=5539](https://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=5539) (accessed April 19, 2018). A similarly non-progressive pattern can be discerned in the globes of Johannes Schöner, whose 1515 and 1520 globes show a separation between America and Asia but whose 1523 and 1533 printed globes show America as part of Asia.

Verrazano searched the eastern seaboard of North America for a strait leading to China, or Waldseemüller produced his 1516 *Carta Marina*—they appear as curiosities, or remnants of the confusion of early modern cosmographers and explorers. There is no need to take every Amerasian expression literally, given the propensity for poetic and metaphorical thought found in the sources, yet a wide range of evidence from different arenas of cultural production brings into focus a larger worldview that sustained the Amerasian idea. When the Amerasian references are assembled more systematically, they articulate a lucid, if developing, view of the world that has been obscured by modern ways of thinking about Europe, the New World, Africa, and Asia. We are asking, what was it like to inhabit that world as a traveler, a merchant, a missionary, a reader, spectator, or audience member?

Even after Ferdinand Magellan's 1521-22 circumnavigation of the globe, the idea that Asia extended into the Americas continued to make sense of the newly discovered lands. Italian missionaries in New Spain in the 1530s, for instance, regularly referred to Mexico in their letters as India and Asia. In 1532, a pamphlet was published in Bologna presenting letters describing missionary work in Mexico, letters that are presented as having come "from the extreme ends of the world, from the Indies in Greater Asia."<sup>46</sup> Mexico was not in the "Indies" in some vague sense; it was in the Indies in *Magna Asia*. In 1539 the friar Marcos de Niza returned to Mexico from his expedition to the territory along the upper Rio Grande, and those who heard about his journeys reported his sightings of camels, elephants, and people wearing silk.<sup>47</sup> Recording Francisco Vásquez de Coronado's subsequent expedition in 1540, the chronicler Pedro Castañeda remarked: "Hereafter it may be possible to understand in what direction Florida lies and in what direction Greater India; and this land of New Spain is part of the mainland with Peru, and with Greater India or China as well, there not being any strait between to separate them."<sup>48</sup> For Castañeda, Asia, Florida, and Peru all occupied the same landmass. An anonymous account of Coronado's journey claimed that the buffalo of the plains

46 Giustiniano da Rubiera, *Passio gloriosi martyris beati patris Andreae de Spoleto* (Bologna, 1532), cited in Massimo Donattini, "Bolognese Franciscan Missionaries in the New World," in *Italy and the New World, 1492-1750*, ed. Elizabeth Horodowich and Lia Markey (New York, 2017), 63-85, at 69-70.

47 Henry R. Wagner, *Spanish Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America in the Sixteenth Century* (San Francisco, 1929), 8; and Arthur Grove Day, *Coronado's Quest: The Discovery of the Southwestern States* (Berkeley, 1940), 64, 334.

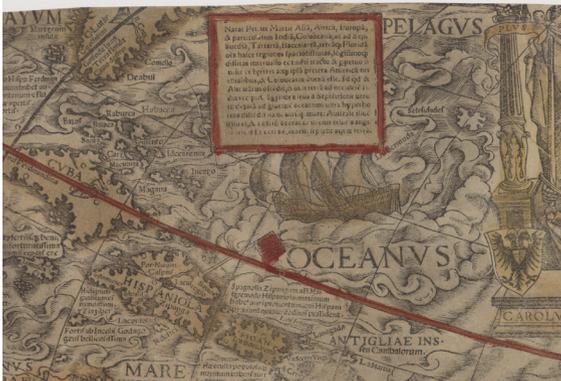
48 Pedro Castañeda, "The Journey of Coronado," in *The Journey of Coronado, 1540-1542, From the City of Mexico to the Grand Canon of the Colorado and the Buffalo Plains of Texas, Kansas, and Nebraska*, ed. George Parker Winship (New York, 1904), 83.

Indians were the same cows that Marco Polo had seen in China and the same humped oxen that the Venetian merchant and traveler Niccolò de Conti had seen in Ethiopia, as described by the Florentine humanist Poggio Bracciolini.<sup>49</sup> By many accounts, the first explorers of the region north and west of the Mexican capital expected to find Asia over the next mountain range or beyond the next desert canyon. Such expectations rebounded onto conceptions of the land traversed until then, implying that one already found oneself on a landmass that was continuous with Asia.

While the juxtaposition of a variety of sources is crucial in bringing Amerasia into focus and tracing its development, occasionally individual sources on their own reveal Amerasia in a brilliant flash. For instance, in 1558 the Venetian mapmaker Giovanni Andrea Vavassore reprinted a now-lost map by the German cartographer Caspar Vopel that represented Asia and America as the same continent. On Vavassore's map, Mexico and China are one and the same, where Chinese and Mexican toponyms mingle. The map depicts *India Orientalis*, *Asia Magna*, and *Hispania Nova* vertically on the Amerasian continent (Fig. 4). We find Temixtitlan, "discovered by Cortes in 1521" just south-east of *Mangi*, the Chinese Manzi, the derogatory term used by the Mongols and Marco Polo alike to describe the barbarians of Southern China. Nearby, just to the north, we can see *Quemquinafu* just below *Asia Magna*, referring to Quanzhou, the large port in Southern China from which Marco Polo departed to return to the West (though here, in its Amerasian location, not found on a coast). Below *Asia Magna* we see *Chatay* or Cathay, the kingdom of China, and *Cambalu*, referring to Kahnbalik, the Mongol capital and today, modern Beijing. Above *Asia Magna* is *Bangala* or Bengal, as well as *Tangut*, the ethnicity or kingdom of Xixia in northwestern China, *Tholoma*, and *Lop*, the Uyghur word for lake: all just to the north and east of *Messigo*. Moving further to the east, *Asia Orientalis* is due north of *Terra Florida* (Fig. 5), and the island of Hispaniola is labeled as both *Hispaniola* and *Zipangu*.

Vopel conceived, and Vavassore continued to print, this vision of Amerasia, despite the voyage of Magellan thirty-eight years earlier; indeed, Vavassore's map portrays the circumnavigating Magellan, hailed as a "second Neptune," triumphantly taking off from the Amerasian coast (see Fig. 4). O'Gorman hailed the publication of the Spanish historian and naturalist Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias* (Toledo, 1526), as a founding document in the invention of America, since this was the earliest European text in which Columbus appears as the "discoverer" of America, obscuring

49 Castañeda, "Journey of Coronado," 196.



FIGURES 4-5  
 Caspar Vopel, detail of *Nova et integra universalisque orbis totius ... descriptio*, reprinted by Giovanni Vavassore, Venice, 1558.  
 COURTESY OF HOUGHTON LIBRARY, 51-2577, HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

his original purpose of sailing to Asia.<sup>50</sup> The Vopel/Vavassore map, produced decades after Magellan, and in turn copied in various forms during the later sixteenth century, shows that Oviedo's text and Magellan's voyage were not, in fact, the historical turning points they have been claimed to be. Amerasia persisted in the minds of learned Europeans throughout the sixteenth century and beyond.

Visions of Amerasia proliferated even after it became common, in maps of the later sixteenth century, to separate the Asian and American landmasses. The Venetian cartographer Giacomo Gastaldi first inserted the Strait of Anian between America and Asia in his world map *Cosmographia universalis* (c. 1561), which shows the Asian toponyms of *Tolman*, *Agama*, and *Pagul* on the American side of the strait, as well as Mongols on camels making their way onto the continent (Fig. 6).<sup>51</sup> When he had been sent to travel west by the Great Khan, Marco Polo visited Tolman on his return voyage after passing through Tibet, reporting that it was near India and rich in gold.<sup>52</sup> Polo scholar Paul Pelliot associated Agama with "Andaman" or the Malay name of the Andaman Islands, and placed Toloman in the northeast part of Yunnan province.<sup>53</sup> Pegu (*Pagul*) was the capital of Burma. Numerous European cartographers continued to display these Asian toponyms in America, well into the seventeenth century.<sup>54</sup>

Mercator's 1569 world map, conventionally seen to usher in a new era of cartographic accuracy, also shows a water separation between the Asian and American landmasses, though not a wide one. Yet, here too Asia crosses the separation by water. On the Asian side of the map, the Golden Chersonese—our Malay Peninsula, traditionally the farthest extension of Asia, far to the East of the subcontinent of India—is labelled "India *intra* Gangem," raising the question, where is the rest of India? For that we need to go to the other side of the map, in the West, where we see the inscription "India" placed over Mexico or *Hispania Nova* (Fig. 7). The labels "Mexico" and "New Spain" cohabitate here with the idea of a vast Indian extension. Conversely, the Venetian cartographer Giovanni Francesco Camocio's wall map of the Americas (c. 1570) shows

50 O'Gorman, *The Invention of America*, 13.

51 On the question of the Anian strait, see the essential article of Marica Milanese, "Arsarot o Anian? Identità o separazione tra Asia e il Nuovo Mondo nella cartografia del Cinquecento (1500-70)," in *Il Nuovo Mondo nella coscienza italiana e tedesca del Cinquecento*, ed. Adriano Prosperi and Wolfgang Reinhard (Bologna, 1992), 19-77.

52 See Ramusio, *Navigazioni e viaggi*, 3: 218.

53 Paul Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1959), 1:39-40, 43; 2: 857-58.

54 See Horodowich, *The Venetian Discovery of America*, 126-33.

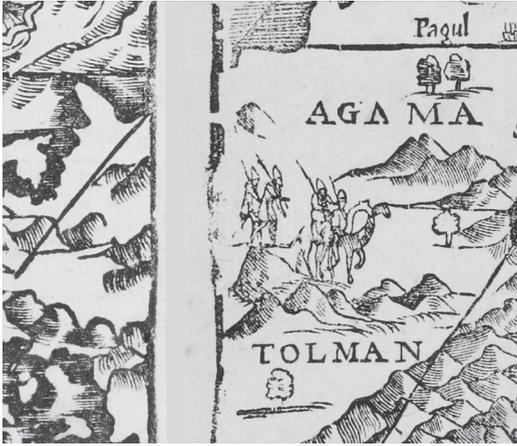


FIGURE 6  
Giacomo Gastaldi, detail of  
*Cosmographia universalis*, Venice,  
c. 1561. With permission from the  
British Library Board, Maps c.18.n.1.

*Tuchiano*, one of the pueblos visited by Francisco Vázquez de Coronado during his journey into New Mexico between 1540-42, clearly in Asia.<sup>55</sup>

The overlapping of Asia and America on maps was reflected in a commercial and social reality where Asian and American goods, people, and *naturalia* soon intermingled. Magellan's crossing of the Pacific, so far from establishing a mental separation of America and Asia, confirmed the expectation of a continuity between America and Asia and opened up imagined possibilities of contact that were then realized by merchants, military men, and potentates in the decades to come. After having conquered Tenochtitlan in 1521, Hernán Cortés planned an expedition to the Spice Islands of Borneo by delegating a fleet to his cousin, Alvaro de Saavedra. He gave Saavedra Mexican printed cottons to exchange for live clove trees, hoping to bring about a southeast Asian botanical transformation in Mexico. Though this initial effort failed, in 1523 Cortés attempted to bring China to America by importing mulberry saplings and silkworms to Mexico, and by the 1530s the production of silk became well established around Oaxaca.<sup>56</sup> Rather than dissolving with advancing geographical knowledge, the idea of Amerasia took new shape as explorations expanded and commercial networks grew. The Amerasian sphere became ever more real after 1565, when the viceroyalty of New Spain in Mexico City established Manila as the seat of the East Indies trade route to transport Asian goods to Acapulco in New Spain, and from there to Europe. *Chino* slaves began to arrive

55 Biblioteca Nazionale Correr, Venice, Correr cartella 32/70, Bertelli-Camocio, "Carta del Nuovo Mondo in 9 Pezzi."

56 Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, "On Ignored Global 'Scientific Revolutions,'" *Journal of Early Modern History* 21 (2017): 420-32, at 428-29.

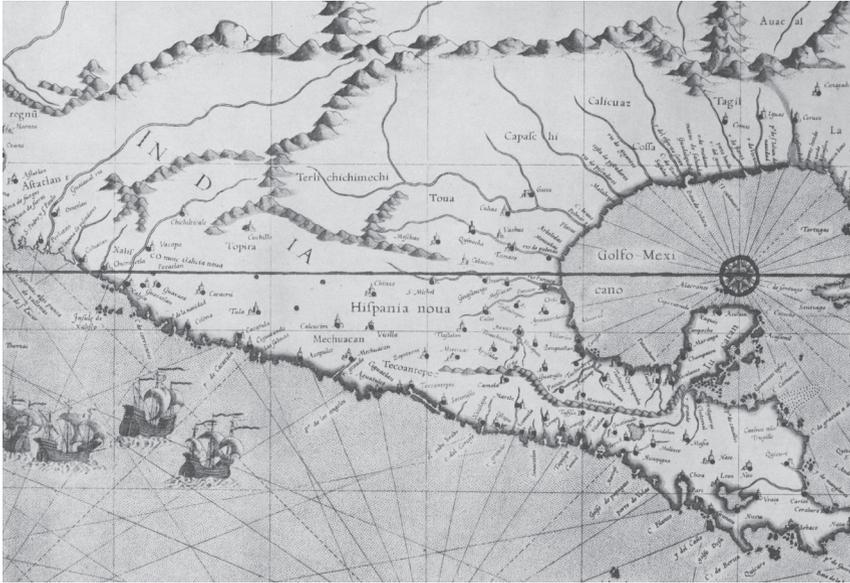


FIGURE 7 Gerardus Mercator, *Nova et aucta orbis terrae descriptio ...*, Amsterdam, 1569. COURTESY OF THE NEWBERRY LIBRARY.

in New Spain.<sup>57</sup> Increased traffic between America and Asia produced newly associated cultural productions, not only because Asian items now came back to Europe bundled together with American ones, but because local artists in Mexico soon enough produced imitations of Asian techniques and objects, such as porcelain, painted screens, and textiles, generating an Amerasian fusion in the increasingly hybrid world of New Spain.<sup>58</sup> These fusions and bundlings were not neatly distinguished by the prevailing taxonomies, as we shall see.<sup>59</sup> The Iberian unification of the crowns of Portugal and Spain and their respective territories in America and Asia thus gave a second wind to the European imaginary of Amerasia.

- 
- 57 See Tatiana Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians* (New York, 2014). At the same time across the Atlantic, slaves from the Americas in Spain learned to adopt the increasingly globalizing term *indio* as a strategy to prove that they were free vassals. See Nancy van Deusen, *Global Indios: The Indigenous Struggle for Justice in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Durham, NC, 2015).
- 58 See *At The Crossroads: The Arts of Spanish America and Early Global Trade, 1492-1850*, ed. Donna Pierce and Ronald Otsuka (Denver, 2012).
- 59 See Dennis Carr, Gauvin A. Bailey, Timothy Brook, et al., *Made in the Americas: The New World Discovers Asia* (Boston, 2015).

### Amerasians Imagined

Like the landmasses and the natural and cultural productions, the peoples of America and Asia were also associated in the European imagination. Thomas More's *Utopia* of 1516 delivered a report from the other side of the world, putting up an antipodean mirror to Europe's mores and institutions. The embedded narrator, one Raphael Hythlodæus (Greek for "expert in nonsense"), explains that he was a mariner left behind from Vespucci's final voyage, in the land corresponding to Brazil that Vespucci called *Mundus Novus*. He then traveled westward from there, eventually landing on the island of Utopia, where they speak a language not far from Persian and worship Mithras. Combined with the Asian elements, More's *Utopia* also projects American features, such as when the priests of the island are described wearing garments not of gold but of featherwork. More's Amerasian Utopians correspond in some ways to the woodcuts by Jörg Breu that accompanied the almost exactly contemporaneous 1515 publication of Ludovico Varthema's account of his (real) travels in India and beyond, where the inhabitants of Sumatra are shown wearing feather headdresses and carrying clubs of the sort used to describe the inhabitants of Brazil in images of the previous decade (Fig. 8).<sup>60</sup> Six years before Magellan's voyage around the world, More imagined connecting Vespucci and Varthema's real itineraries, creating in *Utopia* the Amerasian island par excellence, an inverted mirror to Europe's governmental structures from the other side of the world.<sup>61</sup>

The idea that the farthest reaches of the world meet in a joining of America and Asia is made evident in the final three woodcuts made by Hans Burgkmair for a vast procession of 139 woodcuts representing the people of the world come to pay homage to Maximilian I. Far from being generic depictions of exotic foreigners, the last three woodcuts in the series represent the tail end

60 See Feest, "People of Calicut," 299: "Calicut was then thought to be a place which could be reached by sailing either to the east or to the west."

61 As a mirror, it could be projected (back) into the New World. For the missionary bishop Vasco de Quiroga, writing from Mexico twenty years later in 1535, Thomas More had done nothing other than prophesy the existence of the communities he was working with in Michoacán, who did not know greed and lived contented: "They are pure and prudent and most simple; they look at us in amazement when they see our restlessness and anxiety." More somehow knew this without ever having seen the place, indeed years before the conquest of Mexico by Cortés. Vasco de Quiroga, *Información en Derecho*, 189 and 208: "Without having seen it, he puts it there, paints it, and describes it in such manner as makes me admire it repeatedly because it seems to me as if through revelation of the Holy Spirit for the order that would be convenient and necessary for this New Spain and New World."

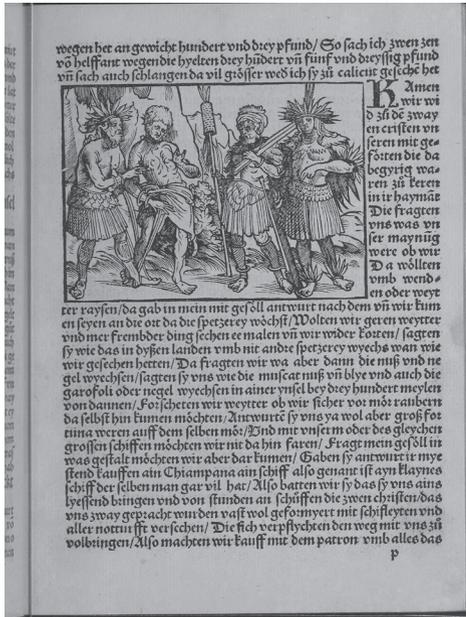


FIGURE 8  
 Jörg Breu, woodcut illustration to  
 Ludovico Varthema, *Die ritterlich uñ lob-  
 wirdig Rayss*, Augsburg, 1515. Illustration  
 of Sumatrans.

COURTESY OF THE JOHN CARTER  
 BROWN LIBRARY AT BROWN  
 UNIVERSITY.

of a clearly organized and labeled procession of the peoples of the world. Concluding the procession, these three woodcuts bring into view the people from the most remote lands, the lands of India—the “people of Calicut” as they are described by Maximilian himself in his instructions for the series (Fig. 9).<sup>62</sup> The first of the three woodcuts (Fig. 9a) shows an elephant ridden by an Indian from Calicut, who wears a turban, and directly behind the elephant are five Indian warriors wearing loincloths, perhaps meant to represent Indian dhotis. The second woodcut (Fig. 9b) shows more male warriors, led by a long-haired Brahmanic figure holding a lance. The figures following him, however, look more West Indian than East Indian. They wear feather headdresses and by now familiar feather skirts, and wield clubs of a sort observed by travelers to Brazil. They are followed by the final scene of the entire 139 series (Fig. 9c), which represents the people of Calicut more generally: shaggy-haired men and women

62 The text of the imagined procession, which Maximilian dictated to his secretary, Marx Treitzsaurwein, exists as manuscript in the Österreichisches Nationalbibliothek (Kod. 2835). A transcription was published by Franz Schestag, “Kaiser Maximilian I. Triumph,” *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlung des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 1 (1883): 154–81. On the three woodcuts that make up the *People of Calicut*, see also Feest, “The People of Calicut,” as in note 4, with further literature. We would like to thank Shira Brisman for sharing her views on this cycle, and for her encouragement to use the print from the Victoria and Albert Museum, which she believes may be an artist’s proof, for our figure 9a.

either naked or barely dressed or wearing animal skin. Some of them wear feather headdresses, and one of them hoists ears of maize, a product called *frumento d'India* in early accounts of Cortés' conquest of Mexico. More than one parrot appears in the scene—American or Indian or both. Rather than call this a confusion, as if one thing has been mistaken for another, the very structure of Burgkmair's procession of the peoples from the farthest reaches of the world offers an alternative and better model, one of extension. Burgkmair's three prints of the people of Calicut figure a lateral extension across a tropical zone connecting the Indians of America and Asia.

Such images, reinforcing prevailing conceptions of a commonality among the inhabitants of America and Asia, then fed back into the experience of European travelers in the New World as well as observers in Europe encountering human specimens from the New World, producing a powerful bias to see Asians in the people of America and Americans in the people of Asia. Several sixteenth-century sources compared the American Indians to Tartars.<sup>63</sup> Indigenous peoples brought back by Martin Frobisher from the northern regions of America in the 1570s were labeled "man of Cathay" and "woman of Cathay" in drawn portraits made of them.<sup>64</sup> In 1573, royal ordinances sent to the Spanish conquistador Juan de Oñate in preparation for his voyage to what is today New Mexico requested that he undertake "a survey of New Mexico's coastline and harbors," expressing the Spanish belief that the territory Oñate was to explore lay on the Pacific and not far from China.<sup>65</sup> In 1604, during his travels, he searched for the Golden Fleece—according to the myth of Jason and the Argonauts located in eastern Colchis, "at the furthest limits of sea and earth"—near the Gulf of California.<sup>66</sup> Between 1575 and 1600, many missionaries in New Spain believed they were baptizing the Indians of Asia.<sup>67</sup> In 1607, the Spanish chronicler Gregorio Garcia explained that the Great Khan of China and Montezuma were one and the same, as were Cambaluc (modern Beijing),

63 See Gerbi, *Nature in the New World*, 274-5; and Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of the Northwest Coast*, 2 vols. (San Francisco, 1884), 1: 60.

64 See William C. Sturtevant and David Beers Quinn, "This New Prey: Eskimos in Europe in 1567, 1576, and 1577," in *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, ed. Christian F. Feest (Aachen, 1987), 61-140.

65 Marc Simmons, *New Mexico: An Interpretive History* (Albuquerque, 1988), 37, 42.

66 Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, 11, 417.

67 Friar Julián Garcés and his contemporaries "thought that the lands of America were a part of Asia." Cited in Luis Weckmann-Muñoz, "The Alexandrine Bulls of 1493: Pseudo-Asiatic Documents," in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli, 2 vols. (Berkeley, 1976) 1: 207 n. 35.



c

b

FIGURES 9A-C Hans Burgkmair the Elder, woodcut of *People of Calicut*, from *The Triumphal Procession of Emperor Maximilian (Triumph Des Kaisers Maximilian I)*, Augsburg, designed 1516-18.

9A FROM THE FIRST PRINTED EDITION 1526, © VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON; 9B-C FROM THE SECOND EDITION 1777, © ALBERTINA, WIEN.

where Polo had lived, and Tenochtitlan, conquered by Hernán Cortés.<sup>68</sup> Even after Samuel Champlain had unsuccessfully voyaged around the turn of the seventeenth century far up the St. Lawrence River in search of a transcontinental route to China, the French cartographer Jean Guérard, on his *Universal Hydrographical Chart* (1634), noted in the blank space beside Hudson Bay that “it is believed there is a passage from there to Japan.”<sup>69</sup> According to the reports of Jesuit missionaries compiled by Barthélemy Vimont, the French explorer Jean Nicolet, an emissary of Champlain’s, was sent in about 1632 to treat and

68 See Frei Gregorio Garcia, *Origen de los indios del Nuevo Mundo e Indias Occidentales* (Madrid, 1729), 8. Johannes Schöner had also stated the Polo had gone to Mexico City, making the Americas the remotest regions Polo had explored and conflating Mexico City with Quinsay or Hangzhou; see Johannes Schöner, *Opusculum geographicum* (Nuremberg, 1533), pt. 1, chp. 1; pt. 2, chp. 20. See also Ricardo Padrón, “The Indies of the West’ or, The Tale of How an Imaginary Geography Circumnavigated the Globe,” in *Western Visions of the Far East in a Transpacific Age, 1522-1657*, ed. Christina H. Lee (Farnham, 2012), 19-42, at 29.

69 “L’on croit qu’il y a passage de la au Japan,” Jean Guérard, 1634 world map, *Carte universelle hydrographique*, cited in Timothy Brook, *Vermeer’s Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (New York, 2008), 48.



a

make peace with “the nation called people of the sea” (*la nation appellée des Gens de mer*). After his initial gifts were well received, he was conducted into the presence of this “people of the sea” wearing a Chinese silk robe embroidered with flowers and birds (*revestu d’une grande robe de damas de la Chine, toute parsemée de fleurs, & d’oiseaux de diverses couleurs*). The robe may well have been obtained from Jesuits with experience of courtly dress in China. He had brought it back around the world in the other direction for the purpose of this first entry, perhaps thinking it appropriate attire for meeting the peoples of the Northwest Passage to Asia.<sup>70</sup>

Jesuit imagery strongly sustained the idea of a commonality between American and Asian peoples. Many images of Saint Francis Xavier converting inhabitants of Japan or India or the islands of Southeast Asia show them wearing striking features of American dress, despite the fact that Francis Xavier never set foot in America. An engraving of 1690 by Philip Kilian illustrating the life of Saint Francis Xavier shows the saint offering an image of the Virgin

70 Barthélemy Vimont, *Relation de ce qui s’est passé en la Nouvelle France, en l’année 1642 & 1643* (Paris, 1644), 9-10. See also C. W. Butterfield, *History of the Discovery of the Northwest by John Nicolet in 1634* (Port Washington, NY, [1881] 1969), 58-9, 102; Gaëtan Gervais, *Champlain: The Birth of French America* (Quebec City, 2004), 189; and Brook, *Vermeer’s Hat*, 49-51. While American scholars tend to say he crossed Lake Michigan into Winnebago territory near present-day Green Bay, Canadian scholars tend to believe he stayed north, reaching present-day Sault Ste-Marie and treating with the Algonquins based near Lake Nipigon.

to the king of Bungo (in present day Oita province of Japan's southern Kyushu island), the samurai Otomo Sorin, encountered by Francis Xavier in 1551. The warriors in Otomo Sorin's retinue are shown wearing feather headdresses and skirts like the ones that can be seen in depictions of Amerindians produced over the previous century and a half.<sup>71</sup> Such images are part of a Jesuit pattern. On the altar dedicated to Saint Francis Xavier at the Jesuit mother church of the Gesù in Rome, Carlo Maratta's painting of 1682 shows the saint dying on the island of Shangchuan off the coast of southern China; a local shown nearby, his hands in prayer, wears a feather headdress starkly set out against the sky, a detail preserved in an engraved copy of the painting made decades later that broadcast its composition far and wide (Fig. 10). A painting made in Mexico in 1721 shows Saint Francis Xavier baptizing an Indian chief whose companions wear feather headdresses, suggesting to one commentator a somewhat puzzling scenario where we see the Saint "baptizing a Mexican cacique, who appears to wear a mantle of Asian silk, and figures in the background wear traditional headgear meant to recall imperial Aztec regalia."<sup>72</sup> That the scene is set in Mexico is, however, unlikely, as it was well known that Saint Francis Xavier never reached America. In fact, the painting is based on an engraving published in 1690 in a versified life of Saint Francis Xavier (the same publication mentioned above), where the scene clearly illustrates the Saint's activities in the subcontinent of India.<sup>73</sup> The engraving shows the same figures that we see in the Mexican painting: the chief wearing a silk mantle, one figure in a turban, the other figures in feather headdresses, with an Asian parasol topping the scene. Rather than inventing an American episode in the biography of Saint Francis Xavier and introducing Asian elements—silks, turban—into it, the painting copies an engraving that depicts Asian Indians with American features. The significant difference between engraving and painting is the point of view: this East Indian episode is now being projected not from Europe but from Mexico, across the Pacific from India. From an American vantage, a commonality is being imagined between the Indians over there and those from here, a commonality marked by a range of difference: the Indians in Asia are somewhat like us in appearance, but they wear silks and occasionally turbans.

To take a final Jesuit example, on the ceiling of the Jesuit church of Sant' Ignazio in Rome, painted around 1690 by Andrea Pozzo, we see allegories of

71 The print, by Philip Kilian, illustrates the University of Vienna thesis of Gabor Hevenesi, *Vita S. Francisci Xaverii e Societate Jesu, Indiarum et Iaponiae Apostoli...* (Vienna, 1690), p. G7. Such headdresses appear on the heads of natives in other engraved illustrations from this thesis, illustrating episodes of Francis Xavier's life in other parts of Asia.

72 Gauvin Alexander Bailey, "Religious Orders and the Arts of Asia," in *Made in the Americas*, 102.

73 This engraving by Philip Kilian is in Gabor Hevenesi, *Vita S. Francisci Xaverii*, D7.



FIGURE 10  
 Jacobus Frey the Elder, *The Death of St. Francis Xavier*, engraving of 1733 after painting by Carlo Maratta in the Gesù in Rome, 1678.

COURTESY OF THE WELLCOME COLLECTION.

the four parts of the world occupying the lower zone while saved souls rise above them towards the vault of heaven. Above the figure of Asia, who rides a camel, several saved inhabitants of Asia rise into the clouds where they are received by the missionary of Asia Saint Francis Xavier. More than one of them wears feather skirts of the sort often used in depictions of Americans. Across the vault, above the figure of America, the rising figures look much like their Asian counterparts, with close-cropped hair and only somewhat darker skin than their Asian counterparts, suggesting a basic commonality across a range of difference. The figure of America herself wears a feather headdress, connecting her to the feather headdress-wearing Asians across the vault. Moreover, she rides a striped tiger, an emblematic Asian animal not native to America. Features of America and Asia appear to be commutable in this world theater of Christian salvation.<sup>74</sup>

The fact that from the later sixteenth century America was identified and allegorized as a fourth continent does not, therefore, imply an end to the

74 We would like to thank Evonne Levy for sharing her observations and thoughts on Pozzo's ceiling with us.

Amerasian imaginary. The frontispiece of Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg's *Civitates orbis terrarum* (Cologne, 1612-18) appears to depict the allegory of America with a camel (though it is perhaps a llama), and the frontispiece of Jean Jacques Boissard's *Habitus variarum orbis gentium* (Cologne, 1581) similarly shows the allegory of America with an (African) ostrich rather than parrot feathers. A drawing attributed to Marten de Vos in the University of Michigan Museum shows the allegorical figure of America seated in the foreground and a lion and rhinoceros in the background.<sup>75</sup> The rhino is based on Dürer's famous woodcut, whose inscription clearly explains that the animal had come from India. A related but not identical allegory of America found on a lead plaquette of about 1580 also shows a rhino in the background. It is possible that the rhino here is standing in for the American armadillo; the point remains that the armadillo was not clearly differentiated from the rhino, a melding typical of the larger Amerasian pattern.<sup>76</sup>

A full understanding of the shape and position of the Americas, and the North American continent in particular, did not become clear until the voyages of Vitus Bering in 1741 and James Cook in 1778. Yet even after those voyages the idea of an ancient connection to the Old World persisted. As late as 1825, James Weddell, in his *Voyage Towards the South Pole*, theorized that several of the words of the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego resembled Hebrew. The book was owned and admired by Richard Fitzroy (captain of the H.M.S. Beagle, which transported a young Charles Darwin to South America in the 1830s), who in turn believed a centuries-old tradition that held that American Indians were descendants of Noah's son Ham through the line of Abraham.<sup>77</sup>

75 See Christopher Heuer, "Difference, Repetition, and Utopia: European Print's New Worlds" in *Crossing Cultures: Proceedings of the 31st International Congress of the History of Art, Melbourne, 13-18 January 2008* (Melbourne, 2009), 244-250, at 248, fig. 3.

76 These examples are discussed by Peter Mason, *The Lives of Images* (London, 2003), 85-86. Our interpretation differs from that of Mason, who reads this rhino and other displaced animals, such as American turkeys that show up in mythological scenes, as floating images of foreignness, no longer connected to place.

77 James Weddell, *A Voyage towards the South Pole, performed in the years 1822-24* (London, 1825), 173-74; and Robert Fitzroy, *Narrative of the surveying voyages of His Majesty's Ships Adventure and Beagle between the years 1826 and 1836, describing their examination of the southern shores of South America, and the Beagle's circumnavigation of the globe. Proceedings of the second expedition, 1831-36, under the command of Captain Robert Fitz-Roy, R. N.* (London, 1839), 644-46. For more on the Noachic genealogy of the American Indians, see the discussion in the conclusion of the present article.

### Amerasian Collections and Compilations

The organization of collections of artifacts and *naturalia* confirmed and sustained the general conception of an extension connecting America and Asia. Inventories of the Habsburg family regularly show that American objects (virtually never called American but rather “Indian”) mingled with Asian ones.<sup>78</sup> Sometimes it is simply impossible to tell from the inventories whether the provenance is American or Asian, a result not only of terminology that did not mark such distinctions, but of the fact that America and Asia were not clearly separated provenances.<sup>79</sup> The Spanish Habsburg collections at the Escorial, the Alcázar, and the Royal Convent of the Descalzas Reales placed American and Asian objects together, often labeling both as “indiano” or “de las Indias.” The inventories of the Medici family regularly identify Mesoamerican objects as “indiano” or “dell’India,” and the 1596 inventory of Archduke Ferdinand II shows that “Turkish” and “Indian” objects regularly mixed in the same collection.<sup>80</sup> Well into the seventeenth century, Aztec and Mixtec manuscripts were classed as Oriental manuscripts in Western collections, or as books from India or China (sometimes referred to as “India Superior”). A single example is the Mixtec Cospi Codex now in Bologna, which was considered a book from China as late as 1667.<sup>81</sup> The idea of a cultural-linguistic commonality that traverses

78 See Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón, *Inventarios reales: Muebles bienes que pertenecieron a Felipe II* (Madrid, 1956-59); Fernando Checa Cremades, *Los Libros de Entregas de Felipe II a El Escorial* (Madrid, 2013); and *idem*, *Los Inventarios de Carlos V y la Familia Imperial* (Madrid, 2014). Important observations on questions of provenance are offered in the comprehensive study of Kate Elizabeth Holohan, “Collecting the New World at the Spanish Habsburg Court, 1519-1700,” (Ph.D. Diss., New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 2015).

79 See Holohan, “Collecting the New World,” 126-35, 171-98.

80 See Jessica Keating and Lia Markey, “‘Indian’ Objects in Medici and Austrian-Habsburg Inventories,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 23 (2011): 283-300; Carina L. Johnson, *Cultural Hierarchy in Sixteenth-Century Europe: The Ottomans and Mexicans* (New York, 2011), 231-62; and Lia Markey, *Imagining the Americas in Medici Florence* (University Park, PA, 2016). See also Elizabeth Hill Boone, “Seeking Indianness: Christoph Weiditz, the Aztecs, and feathered Amerindians,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 26 (2017): 39-61.

81 The Bologna codex or codex Cospi was labelled *Libro della China* on the cover inscription dating to December 26, 1665, still visible today. It is called a “libro venuto dalla China con varij geroglifici” in the *Breve descrizione del Museo ... Ferdinando Cospi* (Bologna, 1667), 38. For more on the reception of this and related codices, see Laura Laurencich-Minelli, “From the New World to Bologna, 1533. A gift for Pope Clement VII and Bolognese Collections of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 24 (2012): 145-58; and Davide Domenici and Laurencich-Minelli, “Domingo de Betanzos’ Gifts to Pope Clement VII in 1532-1533: Tracking the Early History of Some Mexican Objects and Codices in Italy,” *Estudios de Cultural Náhuatl* 47 (2014): 169-209.

the Pacific, connecting New Worlds East and West, was clearly articulated by Athanasius Kircher, who noted that there were three cultures still in existence that used hieroglyphs like those the Egyptians had used in Antiquity: the Brahmanic culture of India, the Chinese, and the Mexican.<sup>82</sup> The newly discovered lands both to the West and to the East, in the remotest parts of the earth, were associated by Kircher as living relics of a shared antiquity.<sup>83</sup>

Such amalgams have posed a challenge to scholarship organized by modern field studies, the result of a very recent institutional history. If study begins with objects and texts classed as Chinese or Indian or American according to modern field designations, and then traces the reception of only one or the other class of object in European collections and publications, it misses the wider constellation of cultural expressions that also made up the identity of those cultures for early modern Europeans. To circumscribe the data set from

---

Another Mesoamerican manuscript, now known as the Vienna Codex, was given to Pope Clement VII sometime in the 1520s and was described sometime between 1537 and 1557 by Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter, formerly secretary of Pope Clement VII, as being from "Southern India." Then, in 1598, it was described as a book with "all sorts of Indian figures, not unlike hieroglyphic writing." See Lauran Toonians, "Some Light in the Dark Century of Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I," *Codices manuscripti* 9 (1983): 26-9, and *idem*, "Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I, its History Completed," *Codices manuscripti* 10 (1984): 87-97. Later, in 1677 or 1678, it entered the collection of Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I. Although it was known to have come from New Spain, in the Habsburg Imperial Library it formed part of a section labeled "Oriental Manuscripts." See Daniela Bleichmar, "Seeing the World in a Room: Looking at Exotica in Early Modern Collections," in *Collecting Across Cultures: Material Exchanges in the Early Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, 2011), 15-30, at 19-20.

82 Athanasius Kircher, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (Rome, 1652-54), vol. 1, tome III, *Theatrum Hieroglyphicum*, caput II, 10. In his *Prodromus Coptus* (Rome, 1636), 121, Kircher contended that "the Indians and other Asians received their wisdom from the Egyptians, as demonstrated by the common worship of heavenly bodies and animals in ancient Egypt, India, China, Japan, Tartary, Cathay, and even America." For this translation and further commentary, see Daniel Stolzenberg, *Egyptian Oedipus: Athanasius Kircher and the Secrets of Antiquity* (Chicago, 2013), 95. The background to Kircher's comments is the 1615 addendum by Lorenzo Pignoria to Cartari's encyclopedia of images of the ancient gods, where Pignoria adds comments on the gods of Asia and America: *Discorso intorno le deità dell' Indie Orientali & Occidentali con le loro figure tratte da gl' originali che si conservano nelle gallerie de' Principi & ne' musei delle persone private*, Appendix to Vincenzo Cartari, *Imagini delli Dei de gl'Antichi* (Padua, 1615).

83 Alessandra Russo, "De Tlacuilolli: Renaissance Artistic Theory in the Wake of the Global Turn," in *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, eds. Jill H. Casid and Aruna D'Souza (New Haven, 2014), 20-39, has studied several instances of the claim for a shared "ancient" knowledge connecting new world artisans to those of the rest of the world in both antiquity and modernity, the theme of a forthcoming book.

the start by using the modern field boundaries is to give only a partial view of these earlier configurations and conceptions of the world.<sup>84</sup>

To break free of modern field designations is not, however, to propose that “Indian” is a catch-all term for anything generically “foreign,” or a signifier for the “exotic,” in the sense of anything remote from European culture. As we saw above, there were reasons to associate Asia, Africa, and the Americas under the terms India, Indies, and Indian. These axes of association are affirmed again and again in the documents—in cartographic materials, in treatises of natural history, in inventories, and in ethnographic accounts. Moreover, the category of the “exotic” itself has a history; it was not available for use at all times. Almost unknown in the sixteenth century, the word “exotic” comes into more frequent use in the seventeenth century as a technical and scientific term to designate non-native species. Only at the very end of the seventeenth century and more commonly in the eighteenth century was it employed in the modern sense.<sup>85</sup>

The apparent mixing of provenances of foreign items in European collections and representations has suggested to many scholars that a culture of European exoticism arose with the New World discoveries. For Peter Mason, feather headdresses and other such items are not to be taken as signifiers of America but as indicators of an exotic taste for foreignness that was not particularly concerned with provenance.<sup>86</sup> We share his skepticism about assigning a strict American provenance to such features as feathers and maize, or for that matter a strict Asian provenance to tigers and elephants, but we differ from his conclusion that such reassignments bespeak an indifference to provenance. There was no strict American provenance because the place America was not in focus in the modern sense; it was strongly and persistently associated with Asia, and sometimes through Asia with Africa. Rather than dating a European taste for exoticism from the beginning of the Age of Encounters, therefore, we propose a “pre-exoticist” model in which provenance was configured according to consistent early modern geographic and cosmographic premises that organized multiple levels of cultural practice—from maps and globes, to

84 On the rise of area studies and Asian studies after World War Two, for instance, see Bruce Cumings, “Boundary Displacement: Area Studies and International Studies during and after the Cold War,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 29 (1997): 6-26.

85 Benjamin Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism: Geography, Globalism, and Europe's Early Modern World* (Philadelphia, 2015), takes as its subject the existence and articulation of the new category rather than the process by which it came into being, though the fact that it was the result of a historical process is clearly acknowledged, for example on pages 325-6.

86 Peter Mason's *Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic* (Baltimore, 1998) acknowledges (3) that the word exotic was not used in the modern sense before the seventeenth century, yet affirms the birth of the “exotic genre” ca. 1500 in the wake of the first New World discoveries.

representations of New World flora and fauna, to the narrative structure of travel accounts, to the organization and inventorying of European collections. These premises sustained the Amerasian view. If one begins with determinations of place along modern geographical lines—where America is America and Asia is Asia—then it will indeed appear as if artifacts, attributes, and markers are being moved willy-nilly from one place and culture to another, and thus that we are in a culture of exoticism and indifference to provenance. Perhaps a more in-depth study will reveal that modern notions of exoticism, coming later, were gradually layered on top of representations of Amerasia, in the end eclipsing the Amerasian idea altogether. If and when this “exoticizing” process happened, it did so unevenly; the Amerasian axis of association continued to have organizing power for Europeans into the eighteenth century.

Like collections of objects, compilations of travel literature, extremely popular in the sixteenth century, were powerful forms of assembly that sustained the life of the Amerasian imaginary. Such compilations regularly combined texts from America with accounts of discoveries in India and East and Southeast Asia. Simon Grynaeus and Johann Huttich's *Novus orbis* (Paris, 1532), whose full title was *New World of Regions and Islands Unknown to the Ancients*, became the standard collection of travel literature in Protestant Northern Europe. The authors considered the “new world” to include any and all lands sufficiently “unknown” outside of Latin Christendom. Michael Herr produced a German translation of Grynaeus and Huttich's work that published all of these accounts from around the world under the title *Die neue Welt* (1534). Travelogues such as these did not tend to group continents or parts of the world into east and west, or north or south for that matter. In his compendium of travel literature *Navigazioni e viaggi* (1550-59), the Venetian cosmographer Giovanni Battista Ramusio organized his knowledge of the globe according to routes of trade and to the degree to which Venetian merchants and travelers had infiltrated other parts of the world.<sup>87</sup>

Textual structures confirmed the tendency to bring far-apart places into proximity. According to a logic that could be termed elliptical continuity, readers and viewers moved from one place to another by passing from one sentence or page to the next. This is true not only of compilations, where accounts from different parts of the world jostle in neighborly fashion; even in single-authored accounts, such as navigational logs or *derroteros* (a Spanish term for navigational itineraries, also used for the texts recounting the voyages, or for texts structured as if recounting a voyage), the reader is made to hop from coast to coast and part to part, just as the viewer does in map cycles

---

87 Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni e viaggi* (Venice, 1550-59).

that offer different regions of the world in successive panels or book pages. For example, an entirely typical manuscript *derrotero* in the Huntington Library, written in 1576, takes the reader around the world, and towards the end reaches the limit of Asia, which starts to mingle with the territories lately discovered to the west of Europe.<sup>88</sup> Not far from the Indonesian port of Malacca is a province with cannibals named Caribes. In Cipangu, or Japan, there are also cannibals/Caribes. Then the reader reaches “Gatigara,” the limit of Ptolemaic Asia, where there are unicorns, and the author proposes this is where Paradise is. The sequence ends in the province of Catayo, Cathay, last habitation of the East, which is believed to be “una con la Florida y terranova que son al occidente”—one with Florida and terranova (Newfoundland) which are in the west—and then proceeds to the newly discovered lands. On the same page, from one sentence to the next, we pass from Orient to Occident. After Asia comes the West, as it did according to the logic of Peter Martyr’s Alpha-Omega. Decades after Magellan, narrative forms such as this offer no registration of the ocean that might separate America and Asia, and also no denial of its existence. The logic of elliptical continuity, at work in the display and inventorying of collections, in multi-table atlases, and in texts of different kinds, articulated the Amerasian idea.

### Conclusion

To visualize Amerasia is to affirm the importance of point of view. How, we ask, are places and peoples configured within a geographical and anthropological imaginary? Beyond exploring trade routes, the movement of luxury goods and objects, and the transmission of technical knowledge—recent research that has been fundamental in rethinking the definition and meaning of early modernity—we are attempting to understand how new information was mobilized into specific symbolic economies at different times. These processes, localized as they were, did speak to one another, primarily through the medium of print, in the end producing a “European” culture.

To make Amerasia visible and bring it into some focus is to begin to ask, how did it function in the minds of early modern Europeans, and what did it yield? Amerasian objects, maps, images, and texts all tell their own stories as individual case studies, each tied to the singular circumstances and conditions surrounding their production and consumption. Nevertheless, we can offer some provisional conclusions about how these representations worked,

---

88 Huntington Library, Pasadena, MS HM 1788.

as well as what they teach us about how geography was conceived, in both the early modern and contemporary worlds.

On a basic level, Amerasia brings into relevance the multiple and shifting spatial structures by which worlds are made and ordered. In the sixteenth century, there were numerous metageographies at work, some having to do with continents or “parts of the world,” but others organized by states, by trade routes, or by latitude. In this way, Amerasia offers a potent reminder of ways in which we should be skeptical of modern constructions of geography. Metageographical concepts are highly effective, both then and now. The point is not to do away with them but to be clear about which are ours and which theirs. In the sixteenth century, concepts such as *India extra Gangem*, climatic zones, or the New World itself, had special power. All of them are foreign to modern geographical thinking.

Amerasia shows us how early modern people comfortably held what might for us today seem conflicting ideas. We have tended to think that Columbus thought he was in Asia, but clearly, this simplifies the case. Columbus thought that he had arrived in a new place, *and* that he had arrived in Asia. As we have seen, on numerous maps, Hispaniola was at the same time Hispaniola and Cipangu; Mercator comfortably calls what is today Mexico both India and New Spain. In these instances, cosmographers do not replace an old name with a new one; they let both names stand side by side. We can often explain this as part of the practice of Christian renaming; for instance, when on his first voyage, Columbus recorded that “the big island, which these people from San Salvador ... have named Samaeto ... I gave the name Isabela.”<sup>89</sup> However, early modern rhetorical strategies also suggest a desire to describe things fractally, in more than one way, or in two ways at the same time. For instance, as Peter Martyr notes, the admiral “sent thirty men in different directions to explore the region of Cipangu [Japan], otherwise Cibao.”<sup>90</sup> Here, Columbus does not rename a place, but rather, associates an Asian location and an unknown or indigenous one, revealing how early modern thinking was more flexible and simultaneous than ours today. Angelo Trevisan did not rename Java as Jamaica; as his language clearly states, Jamaica *was* Java, both a new and an old place.<sup>91</sup> We might liken this simultaneity to a Rubin vase, with which we usually see the face but have the capacity to “flip” and see a vase. Early modern Europeans

89 *A Synoptic Edition of the Log of Columbus's First Voyage*, ed. Francesca Lardicci, *Repertorium Columbianum* 6 (Turnhout, 1999), 55.

90 “Interea dum ista agrerentur, triginta viros, qui cipangi, alias cibai, regionem explorarent,” *Selections from Peter Martyr*, ed. Eatough, 147.

91 See n. 25.

saw both Japan and Hispaniola, as if they could make them shift back and forth while holding the same book or map in their hands.

The idea of Amerasia prompts us to recast “anomalies” as applications of forms of knowledge. Rather than say, “Camocio placed the American toponym of *Tuchiano* in Asia,” a syntax that implies that Camocio had a choice, we are encouraged to say, “Camocio shows us that *Tuchiano* is in Asia,” a language that demonstrates instead that this is simply where this location *was* for the cartographer. Rather than describe the Pacific Ocean in the Amerasian world as “dramatically shrunken,” we are encouraged to allow that it was not an ocean but a sea, or the waters of an archipelago. In these ways, rediscovering Amerasia demands a persistent recalibration of our perceptions, senses, and language.

The melding of America and Asia served political purposes, for example supporting Habsburg claims to the Pacific and the Spice islands by bringing all the Indies, East and West, under the jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Castile. Tendencies to convey the narrowness of the Pacific and the proximity of America to Asia, in maps like Vopel's and written accounts of New Worlds such as those of Oviedo or Francisco López de Gómara, were part of the cartographic ideology of Spanish imperialism.<sup>92</sup> Yet, to be effective ideology has to work with usable conventions, so rather than put Amerasia down to Habsburg propaganda, it is more fitting to ask how axes of Amerasian logic were effectively exploited by political strategy. Along similar lines, when Venetian cartographers and cosmographers deployed images of Amerasia, they often did so as a means of emphasizing their historic connection to Marco Polo, Asia, and its wealth, allowing them to frame the Americas as Venetian and claim their place in the exploration of the New World.<sup>93</sup> English cosmographers and explorers like Richard Hakluyt or Martin Frobisher, intrigued by the Northwest passage, may have embraced Amerasia as a means of suggesting that their merchants were close to finding a direct route to China.

In conceptions of global space dating back to the Greeks and Romans, Europe, Africa and Asia had long been envisioned as forming a single, interconnected world island, the *orbis terrarum* or *oikoumene*. Amerasia made the Americans part of the same order as other humans, suggesting that their homeland must be an extension of the known, human world rather than an *orbis alterius*, or alter/other world. However, in contrast to the notion of the *oikoumene*, this amplification of the known world went hand in hand with a newly global aquatic world view. As the very first post-Columbian images make clear (see Fig. 1 and discussion above), to imagine the New World was to

92 See Padrón, “(Un)Inventing the Americas,” and “The Indies of the West.”

93 See Horodowich, *The Venetian Discovery of America*.

imagine an expanded human realm connected by waterways and sea travel. Early modern navigation not only made the discoveries possible; it introduced a deep conceptual shift away from the traditional Ptolemaic land-mass model of human habitation and migration. Beyond providing a basis for a new and future globalism, the new aquatic model significantly altered the picture of the past, which was now envisioned in the seafaring terms made famous by the achievements of modern navigation. As an Amerasian geographical constellation came into view, so did an imagined Amerasian antiquity marked by commerce and migrations across sea as well as land.

In its aquatic adaptation of the traditional world view, Amerasia allowed developments of theories of the universal origins of humanity, and in this way was often linked to sixteenth-century missionary objectives. The friars Diego Durán and Bernardino de Sahagún, for instance, believed the American Indians to have descended from the lost tribes of the ancient Jews, the families of Noah's descendants. Benito Arias Montano, an influential Spanish theologian and orientalist, insisted that one could easily find New Spain in the Bible by tying the origins of New World settlement to the family of Shem; the English courtier Sir Walter Raleigh did the same in his *The History of the World* (London, 1614). Montano went so far as to map the migrations of Noah's sons to North and South America in his *Polyglot Bible* (Antwerp, 1572), identifying Peru as the site of the biblical Ophir. Amerasia, in sum, clearly supported such a worldview. Making Amerasia visible permits us to better understand one of the primary cognitive tools that allowed Europeans to grasp and assimilate the copious amount of news about global geography that came into their possession during the period between the Columbian voyages and those of Vitus Bering.

Amerasia introduces important complications to genealogies of modernity. The Italian literary scholar Giuseppe Mazzotta claimed that "If Columbus is the 'new man,' the first modern man, a new Adam naming this New World, Spain is for Columbus the land where modernity begins. And it begins by retrieving the culture of Rome."<sup>94</sup> For Mazzotta and others, modernity as first manifested by the likes of Columbus, Vespucci, and Da Gama emerged out of the intellectual models of the Florentine Quattrocento, and ultimately from the ancient world. There is no doubt that Europeans understood the New World through the lens

---

94 Giuseppe Mazzotta, "The Emergence of Modernity and the New World," in *New Worlds and the Italian Renaissance: Contributions to the History of European Intellectual Culture*, ed. Andrea Moudarres and Christiana Purdy Moudarres (Leiden and Boston, 2012), 15. "The discovery of America ... was clearly a triumphantly modern achievement," Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World* (New Haven, 1993), 92.

of classical antiquity.<sup>95</sup> However, when we bring Amerasia into view, it also suggests something rather different: that if Columbus represents modernity, if he represents a “new man,” he does so in relation to Asia as much as to Rome.

Amerasia was a temporal reflection. The new discoveries actually informed the past, and thus allowed the past to shape the present in new ways. As Thomas More’s narrator says when describing the island of *Utopia*, “There were cities there before there were people here [in Europe].”<sup>96</sup> The dominance of the idea of Asia in the Western understanding of the “New World” required among other things a highly dynamic integration of the old and the new, since Asia was known through ancient sources and always thought to be of the greatest antiquity. Amerasia is thus characterized by the paradoxical quality of being both old and new, older and newer than Europe.

Amerasia came to function as an antipodal structure to Europe during a crucial period when Europe was itself coming into its self-definition as a cultural entity. To bring an alternative early modern configuration into view requires assimilating a different understanding of the world and of Europe’s place in it, one that we are perhaps in a position to grasp now that these relations are undergoing fundamental redefinition in our time. To ask the traditional question, “What was the impact of the New World on European consciousness?” is to presume to know what the New World was—that it was America then because it is America now—and it also presumes that the cultural entity “Europe” was securely in place. In her book *Europe’s Indians*, Vanita Seth asks, how could there be a European colonial consciousness, and thus an organizing discourse of self and other, if the very idea of Europe was in formation during the early modern period?<sup>97</sup> We ask, further, what does it mean that Europe was coming into self-definition during the very period that it inhabited an Amerasian worldview? Was the Amerasian formation in fact symbiotic with the European one? Amerasia was considered both older and newer than Europe, framing it temporally, but as a cultural and conceptual formation, it arose with Europe. Like Europe, Amerasia was being radically reshaped by repeated performances of encounter, its future continually being redrawn.

---

95 John H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New* (Cambridge, 1970); and Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, 1992).

96 Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Clarence H. Miller (New Haven, 2001), 49.

97 Vanita Seth, *Europe’s Indians: Producing Racial Difference, 1500-1900* (Durham, 2010).