

A select chronology of people, events, and maps in

— THE — FOURTH PART OF THE WORLD

- **4th century B.C.:** **Aristotle** explains the makeup of the spherical cosmos in **On the Heavens**

- **1st century B.C.:** **Cicero** describes the Earth's five climate zones in **The Dream of Scipio**

- **1st century B.C.:** **Virgil** predicts in the Aeneid that Rome will rule a great southern land across the Ocean

“And there in very truth is he whom you have often heard prophesied, Augustus Caesar, son of the Deified, and founder of golden centuries once more in Latium, in those same lands where once Saturn reigned; he shall extend our dominion beyond the Garamantians and the Indians in a region which lies outside the path of the constellations, outside the track of the year and the sun, where Atlas the Heaven-Bearer holds on his shoulder the turning sphere, inset with blazing stars.

—The Aeneid¹

- **1st century A.D.:** **Strabo**, **Pomponius Mela**, and **Pliny the Elder** write influential geographical works

- **2nd century:** **Claudius Ptolemy** compiles the Geography



Claudius Ptolemy, from the Waldseemüller map of 1507.²

- **4th century:** **Constantine the Great** makes Christianity the official religion of Rome

- **5th century:** **St. Augustine** dismisses the possibility of human habitation on the other side of the globe

“But in regard to the story of the Antipodes. That is, that there are men on the other side of the earth, where the sun rises when it sets for us, who plant their footprints opposite ours, there is no logical ground for believing this ... Even if the world is held to be global or rounded in shape, or if some process of reasoning should prove this to be the case, it would still not necessarily follow that the land on the opposite side is not covered by masses of water. Furthermore, even if the land there be exposed, we must not jump to the conclusion that it has human inhabitants. For there is absolutely no falsehood in the Scripture, which gains credence for its account of past events by the fact that its prophecies are fulfilled. And the idea is too absurd to mention that some men might have sailed from our part of the Earth to the other and have arrived there by crossing the boundless tracts of ocean, so that the human race might be established there also by descent from the one first man.”

—St. Augustine³

- **5th century:** **Macrobius** includes a map of the world's climate zones in his Commentary on the Dream of Scipio

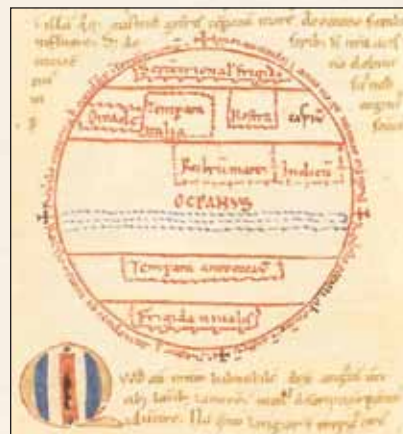


Figure of the earth from Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, ca. 1150.⁴

- **6th century:** **Cassiodorus** refers his readers to Ptolemy's Geography, the last Latin reference to the text for more than 800 years

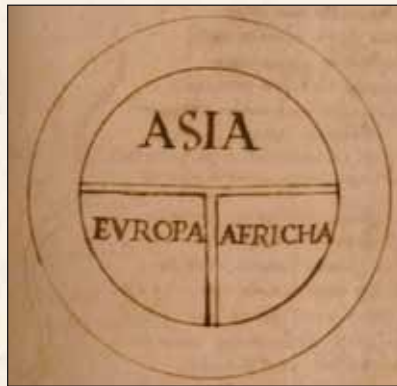
“Read through geographical writings so that you know the location of each place you read of in holy books ... If you are fired with interest for this noble subject, you have the book of Ptolemy, who described every place so clearly that you might almost think that he was an inhabitant of all regions. Thus, although you are in one place (as monks ought to be) you may traverse mentally what others in their travels have collected with a great deal of effort.”

—Cassiodorus⁵

- **7th century:** **Isidore of Seville** describes the known world in his Etymologies and includes a T-O map

“[The earth] is divided into three parts, one of which is called Asia, the second Europe, the third Africa.”

—Isidore of Seville⁶



T-O map, from a 15th-century manuscript of Gregorio Dati's *La sfera* (before 1435).⁷

- **8th century:** **Arab scholars** begin translating and studying classical treatises of the ancient Greeks
- **12th century:** Latin translations of works by **Al-Battani** and **Ibn al-Saffar** include mentions of Ptolemy's Geography
- **13th century:** **Sacrobosco** writes *The Sphere*, and **Matthew Paris** and **Roger Bacon** make their maps
- **13th century:** **The Mongols** invade Europe, and **John of Plano Carpini** and **William of Rubruck** trek into Central Asia in search of the Great Khan
- **Middle to late 13th century:** Production of the **Psalter map** and other elaborate Christian **mappaemundi**



The Psalter Map (1265)⁸

- **Late 13th century:** **Marco Polo** spends years in the Far East and writes *The Description of the World*
- **Circa 1275:** Production of the **Carte Pisane**, the earliest surviving European marine chart
- **1291:** **The Vivaldi brothers** sail off into the Atlantic in search of a sea passage to India
- **Circa 1300:** **Maximos Planudes** rediscovers Ptolemy's Geography in Byzantium



World map from one of the earliest surviving copies of Ptolemy's Geography (circa 1300), generally attributed to Maximos Planudes.⁹

- **1321:** **Petrus Vesconte** combines features of a mappaemundi and a marine charts on a new kind of **hybrid world map**
- **Early 14th century:** **Sir John Mandeville** describes the full circuit of the Earth

- **Early 14th century: Lanzarotto Malocello** discovers two of the Canary Islands
- **1368: Expulsion of the Mongols** from China
- **Mid-14th century: Petrarch and Boccaccio** pioneer the study of classical geography
- **1375: The Catalan Atlas** portrays the **Far East** as described by Marco Polo
- **1397: Manuel Chrysoloras** carries Ptolemy's Geography to Florence
- **Circa 1406–1409: Jacopo Angeli** completes the first Latin translation of the Geography
- **1413: The Viladestes chart** shows the extent of the West African coast known to Europeans
- **1414–1418 : Poggio Bracciolini** and other humanists at the **Council of Constance** exchange rediscovered classical texts and discuss ancient and modern geographical ideas
- **1415: Prince Henry** and the Portuguese take Ceuta and begin to explore North Africa's Atlantic coast
- **Circa 1415–1420:** The Italian merchant **Niccolò Conti** begins twenty-five years of eastern travel
- **1424: Claudius Clavus** makes the first Ptolemaic map of lands not included in the Geography
- **1434: Gil Eanes**, a Portuguese squire, rounds Cape Bojador, on the West Africa coast
- **1439–1443: Italian humanists** meet with Greek, African, and Asian delegates at the Council of Florence and press them for geographical information
- **1453: Constantinople** falls to the Turks
- **1453–1454: Johannes Gutenberg**, inventor of the European printing press, produces the Gutenberg Bible
- **Circa 1459: Fra Mauro**, relying on Islamic sources, makes a mappaemundum for the Portuguese that shows a sea route around southern Africa to the Far East



The Fra Mauro world map (circa 1459). South is at the top, in the Islamic style, focusing attention on southern Africa, the Indian Ocean, and the Far East.¹⁰

- **Mid- to late-14th century: The Portuguese** develop the **caravel** and the **mariner's astrolabe**, and pioneer new techniques of **celestial navigation**
- **1474: Paolo Toscanelli** proposes to the Portuguese that the quickest route to the Far East is to sail west across the Atlantic
- **1477: First printed edition of Ptolemy's Geography**
- **1476–1485: Christopher Columbus** arrives in Lisbon and sails with the Portuguese up and down the Atlantic seaboard, to Iceland, Ireland, and West Africa
- **1487: Bartolomeu Dias** sails the length of Africa's west coast and reaches the Cape of Good Hope
- **Circa 1489–1490: Henricus Martellus** produces Ptolemaic world maps, including this one, that show Portugal's recent African discoveries and the Far East as described by Marco Polo



The wall map of Henricus Martellus (circa 1489-90).¹¹

- **1492: Spain expels the Moors** from the Iberian Peninsula

- **1492–1506:** Sailing for Spain, **Columbus** makes four voyages of discovery across the Atlantic, explores the Caribbean and parts of South America, and dies believing he has reached the vicinity of Japan, China, and the Earthly Paradise

- **1494:** Spain and Portugal divide the Atlantic and the New World between themselves in the **Treaty of Tordesillas**

- **1497–1500:** **John Cabot**, the **Corte-Real brothers**, and **Pedro Álvarez Cabral** sail across the Atlantic and explore separate mainland portions of the New World

- **1499–1502:** **Amerigo Vespucci** makes at least two voyages to the New World and sends letters to Florence describing a coastline that extends thousands of miles into the southern hemisphere



Amerigo Vespucci, from the Waldseemüller map. ¹²

- Production of the earliest surviving **New World marine charts**, among them the **La Cosa chart** (1500), the **Cantino chart** (1502), and the **Caverio chart** (1504–1505).



The chart of Juan de la Cosa (1500). ¹³



The Cantino chart (1502), showing the New World on the left. ¹⁴

- Florentine printers publish Vespucci's **Mundus Novus** letter (1503) and his Letter to Soderini (1504)

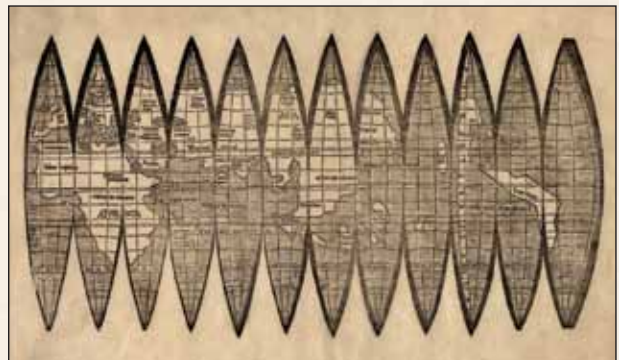
- **1505:** **Matthias Ringmann** publishes the **Mundus Novus** letter in Strassburg, under the title *Concerning the Southern Shore*

- **Circa 1505–1506:** In Saint-Dié, Lorraine, **Ringmann** and **Martin Waldseemüller** form the **Gymnasium Vosagense** and begin work on a modern edition of Ptolemy's Geography

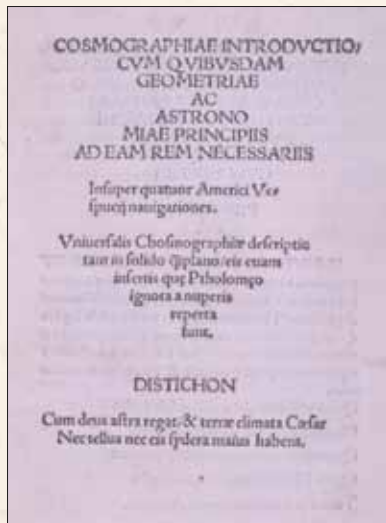
- **1507:** **Ringmann** and **Waldseemüller**, in possession of New World marine charts and letters by Vespucci, coin the name America in Vespucci's honor and print a giant wall map, a tiny globe, and the *Introduction to Cosmography*.



The Waldseemüller map of 1507. ¹⁵



The Waldseemüller globe gores (1507) ¹⁶



Title page, Introduction to Cosmography (1507).¹⁷

- **Circa 1507: Nicholas Copernicus** sees the New World on the Waldseemüller map and uses it as geographical evidence to support his theory that the Earth revolves around the sun.

Sources:

1. The Aeneid. Translated by W. F. Jackson Knight. Penguin Classics 151. Revised ed. Baltimore: Penguin, 1958. Page 171.
2. Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress.
3. Augustine, Saint, Bishop of Hippo. The City of God Against the Pagans. Vol. 5 (Books 16–18, chs. 1–35). Translated by Eva Matthews Sanford and William McAllen Green. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957–1972. Pages 49–51.
4. Wikimedia Commons. Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, ms. NKS 218 4°, fol. 38v.
5. Cassiodorus. "Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning" and "On the Soul." Translated by James W. Halporn. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003. Pages 157–158.
6. Isidore of Seville. The "Etymologies" of Isidore of Seville. Translated by Stephen A. Barney, J. A. Beach, Oliver Berghof, and W. J. Lewis. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Page 285.
7. Boston Public Library/Rare Books.
8. Wikimedia Commons. The British Library (Add. MS 28681 fol 9).
9. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome (Urb. Gr. 82, ff. 60v–61r).
10. Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice.
11. Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
12. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.
13. Museo Naval, Madrid, via Wikimedia Commons.
14. Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, Modena Italy.
15. Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress.
16. The James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota.
17. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress.