

CANTINO PLANISPHERE



This was the second chart to show the New World. Inscriptions on the coast of Brazil indicate that the Portuguese knew that it was a new continent said to have been discovered by Cabral in 1500 (actually discovered by Vincente Pinzon in 1499). Inscriptions near the islands north of there are labeled *the Antilles of the King of Castille* attributing their discovery to the Spanish. This was the first use on a chart of the term Antilles. The point of land northwest of Isabella (Cuba) is probably Florida even though it was not officially discovered until 11 years later in 1513 by Ponce de Leon. No one knows the source of information about that peninsula. Perhaps it was discovered by an anonymous Portuguese or Spanish explorer, or slave trader. For Portugal to acknowledge that would have been a violation of the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494.

The Line of Tordesillas is shown cutting through Brazil at the south and Terra Nova (Newfoundland) in the north. Consequently the Portuguese claimed Brazil and the land at the north. Notations on the African and Asian coasts show valuable trade information and a coastline of southern Asia indicates that it was separate from South America. This is not the case at the northern areas of Asia and the North American mainland.

Alberto Cantino was secretly sent to Lisbon to get the latest information about Portuguese explorations by the Duke of Ferrara, Ercole d'Este. Cantino paid a Portuguese mapmaker 12 golden ducats to draw the chart on three pieces of vellum which were glued on a large piece of cloth. It measures 4 x 8 feet. The mapmaker had access to the secret information in the Armazem da Guinee Indias (Repository of Guinea and the Indies) where nautical charts were kept. The map represented the latest, closely guarded information. Cantino sent the chart from Genoa to the Duke of Ferrara, as stated in a letter by him to the Duke, dated November 19, 1502. The chart stayed in the library of the Duke for 90 years, then it was moved to another palace in Modena, where it stayed until 1859. During riots in that year, it apparently was removed from the palace and hung in a butcher shop as a screen, until recovered in 1868 by Giuseppe Bonne, director of the Biblioteca Estense in Modena, Italy. It is still in the Biblioteca and is in good condition.

Written by Daniel Mitsui, www.danielmitsui.com