

The oldest known illustration of South American Indians

In: Journal de la Société des Américanistes. Tome 16, 1924. pp. 111-118.

Citer ce document / Cite this document :

Schuller Rudolph. The oldest known illustration of South American Indians. In: Journal de la Société des Américanistes. Tome 16, 1924. pp. 111-118.

doi : 10.3406/jsa.1924.3761

http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/jsa_0037-9174_1924_num_16_1_3761

THE OLDEST KNOWN ILLUSTRATION OF SOUTH AMERICAN INDIANS,

By Prof. RUDOLPH SCHULLER.

One of the rarest, and, up to the present day, very little known print concerning South American Indians is an old wood engraving, eight and one-half by thirteen and one-half inches, in the library of the British Museum, at London. This picture represents some of the manners and costumes of the natives of the eastern coast of Brazil, as first found by the Portuguese explorers at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The text in German beneath the picture occupies four lines and is as follows :

« This picture represents to us the people and island which have been
« discovered by the Christian King of Portugal or by his subjects. The
« people are thus naked, handsome, brown, their heads, necks, arms,
« private parts (and the) feet of men and women are a little covered with
« feathers. The men also have many precious stones in their faces and
« breasts. Nor does any one possess any thing, but all things are in
« common. And the men have as wives those who please them, being
« they mothers, sisters, or friends, wherein they make no distinction.
« They also fight with each other and eat each other, even the slain and
« hang the same flesh in the smoke. They become a hundred and fifty
« years old. And have no government » ¹.

The first bibliographical description of this very rare xylographic leaf, accompanied by a facsimile of the same, as far as I know, was published by Henry Stevens in the « American Bibliographer », Part I, London, 1854, page 8.

The leaf is without date ; but Stevens believed it was probably printed at Augsburg or Nürnberg in Bavaria, Germany, between 1497 and 1504.

More or less the same statement we find in Sabin's « Bibliography », vol. I, No. 4, 034, and Vol. V, No. 20, 257.

Stevens' bibliographical notice appears again in his « Historical

1. The translation is almost literally, in order to preserve the « coloris » of the German text of the original.

Nuggets », or « *Bibliotheca Americana* », vol. I, No. 77, page 20, where the leaf is quoted as being printed in 1500.

In exactly the same way it is mentioned by Henry Harrisse in his excellent work « *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima* », except that this foremost authority concerning early printed Americana includes the leaf among the prints of 1497, yet without giving any reason whatever to justify this early date.

Finally Justin Winsor in the « *Narrative and Critical History of America* », vol. II, page 19, where is inserted also a reduced facsimile of the illustration, limits himself to what already had been published by the former bibliographers on the origin and the date of the print.



Fac-simile of the oldest known wood engraving of South American Indians.
(British Museum, London).

The leaf, or broad-leaf, is believed to be unique. The only copy, so far as now known, was bought at the Puttick¹ and Simpson auction sale in London by the British Museum for 3 £ 13s 6d in 1854 (Stevens gives 12 £ 12s).

In the manuscript notes which I found in Harrisse's own copy of the « *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima* » in the Library of Congress, at

1. « Botteck » in the manuscript notes of the copy of Harrisse's « *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima* », which I consulted in 1915-16, in the Congressional Library at Washington, D. C., is surely a mistake.

Washington, however, is mentioned a second copy of the famous print as belonging to the Royal Public Library in Munich, Bavaria. Unfortunately, I was not able to verify the assertion of that anonymous collator, owing to the present abnormal conditions of affairs. Be that as it may, the print, as already stated, bears no date and no name of the author or the artist. In regard to the date 1497 and 1500, suggested by Stevens and Harrisse, respectively, I wish to point out that no student well acquainted with the history of early voyages to America, especially to South America, can accept either, for this reason. In the first place, the German text beneath the woodcut states explicitly :

*« This picture represents to us the people and island which
have been discovered by the
Christian King of Portugal, or by his subjects..... »*

Thus, the point in question is that of an early expedition to South America, undertaken by the Portuguese. And there are no positive records of any expedition ever sent to South America by the Crown of Lusitania before the years 1500-1501.

Now, it is necessary to examine to which one of the early Portuguese exploring expeditions the anonymous author refers. The first voyage took place in the spring of 1500. Pedro Alvarez Cabral sailed from Lisbon direct for the East Indies, March 9, 1500, with thirteen vessels, and discovered, by a mere accident indeed, on April 22 following, the coast of Brazil, somewhere in the vicinity of the present Porto Seguro, in the State of Bahia, where he remained until May 2, 1500. He then pursued his voyage to Calicut, after sending to Portugal Gaspar de Lemos, to bring the news of the discovery of the land, at that time believed to be an island, which he named « Terra da Sancta Cruz », the Holy Cross Land. He returned to Lisbon July 29, 1502¹.

Gaspar de Lemos was at the same time bearer of a letter written at Porto Seguro on May 1, 1500, by Pero Vaaz da Caminha, one of the secretaries of Cabral's fleet, and addressed to the King of Portugal, in which he gives a detailed account of Cabral's ten days' sojourn on the Brazilian coast and a remarkable description of the Native Indians found in Porto Seguro.

There is no doubt that Caminha's information was known at the

¹ *Relazione di Leonardo da Ca' Masser alla serenissima republica di Venezia sopra el commercio dei Portoghesi nell' India dopo la scoperta del Capo di Buona Speranza* »; in « Archivio Storico Italiano ». Tomo II. Appendice. Firenze, 1845, pp. 51 y 15. Harrisse apparently did not know this account written by Ca' Masser; cf. *The Discovery of North America*. London, 1892.

Société des Américanistes de Paris.

Court of Lisbon so far back as the autumn of 1500. But this highly official document hardly could have reached the German printers, as it remained unknown and unpublished until the beginning of the nineteenth century¹.

It was, therefore, impossible that this German broad-leaf could have been printed *before* 1500. But still, even admitting relation between Caminha's letter and the German print, the extreme *TERMINUS A QUO* for the latter, in this case, would be, at least, the last quarter of 1500, or the beginning of 1501.

Though, a careful comparison of both texts must convince even the layman that there can be found not the slightest evidence of any kind of relationship between them, they being, as it can be easily shown, the work of two entirely different authors.

The question as to how many expeditions were equipped by the Crown of Portugal at the beginning of the sixteenth century, to prosecute Cabral's discovery and to explore the Brazilian shores, remains still open. Most of the writings on the subject are mere conjectures, without any historic foundation².

The fact, proved by documentary evidence, historical as well as cartographical³, is that an official Portuguese expedition put out from Lis-

1. « *Corografia Brazilica* ». By Father Manoel Ayres de Casal. Rio de Janeiro, Na Impressão Regia, 1817; 2nd. edit. Rio de Janeiro, 1833. See also « *Alguns Documentos da Torre do Tombo* ». Lisboa, 1892. — « *Vultos e Descobrimientos* ». Pará, 1900.

2. See my « *A nova gazeta da Terra do Brazil (Copia der Newen Zeytung auss Presillyg Landt)* »; in « *Annaes da Bibliotheca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro* ». Vol. XXXIII, 1914.

3. See my paper on the famous Cantino Map « *O Mappa Portuguez mais antigo do Brasil* »; in « *O Imparcial* ». Rio de Janeiro, May 27, 1914.

Cf. likewise Kunstmann II. The entire map, as well as the wonderful planisphere of the Estense Library, at Modena, Italy, were reproduced in size of the original in Dr. Stevenson's « *Maps Illustrating Early Discovery and Exploration in America* ». New Brunswick, N. J., 1906, Nos. I and II. The Kunstmann II, an Italian chart, is probably Vespucci's own work.

Based upon the Cantino map is also the so-called Canerio and the « Kings map », the latter published by late Dr. Hamy of Paris.

Surely Vespucci's « Second Voyage ». Dr. J. J. Valentini's attempt to prove that Vespucci had undertaken a voyage of exploration to America *before* 1499, can be considered as a failure. See Valentini's « *In the Track of Columbus* ». This paper seems to have appeared in the « *Journal of the American Geographical Society* ». There, Valentini tried to connect that highly problematic voyage of the Florentine merchant with the land (probably mainland of North America-FLORIDA?) which on the Cantino map appears west to the Island of Cuba (La Fernandina).

bon, May 10, 1501 (or May 16), according to other texts ¹, « to discover new land » ; and that those explorers returned to the Texo, September 7 (or 17), 1502. And the only known account, which comes to us of this all-important early voyage, is the letter of Amerigo Vespucci, on his so-called « Third Voyage » ², in which is noted the discovery of Cape of São Augustinho (August 28, 1501), the rivers São Miguel (September 29), São Francisco (October 4), the Bahia de Todos os Sanctos (November First) and the Cabo de Sancta María ³ (de la Candelaria, February 2nd, 1502) in the mouth of the Rio de la Plata ⁴.

We possess numerous editions ⁵ of this letter printed in Latin, Italian, German and Dutch ⁶, between 1505-1508.

1. Up to the present day, nothing we know as to the discoverer of that section of the shores of North America. It is a highly important and very complicated question even not explained in a satisfactory way by the foremost authority of early American Cartography; cf. Harrisse « The Discovery of North America ».

The same may be said as to the mysterious early Portuguese exploration expedition mentioned in the « Esmeraldo » of John Pacheco. There can be no doubt that it was an official expedition, which left the harbour of Lisbon shortly after Columbus successful trip across the fearful ocean. We do not need to explain here Portugal's designs.

2. Positively we know only Vespucci's voyage along the northern coast of South America in 1499-1500, with the famous Spanish Conqueror Alonso de Hojeda. Vespucci was then a simple merchant of Seville. The original document referring to this fact, I have published in « *O Mappa Portuguez mais antigo do Brasil* ». And the only known document concerning this early exploring expedition on the northern shores of South America, till the « Cabo de la Vela », more or less, is a Vespucci letter, too. Though, the itinerary as given by the Florentine does not agree with that furnished by the anonymous author of a yet unknown manuscript-account on the same voyage, a very important Spanish document, which I had the chance to discover in a Spanish private archive.

3. Based upon the geographical results of this voyage is the second, later part of the Cantino Map. See my article on this subject.

4. Wieser, Stevenson, Derby and others give « Sancta Marta », a date which cannot be conciliated with Vespucci's itinerary. That mistake surely is due to an erroneous palaeographic interpretation. The old Portuguese and Spanish mariners used to give to almost every new-found locality the name of the saint on whose feast day it was discovered. And the day of Sancta Martha is the 27th of July, a date chronologically impossible, as Vespucci at that time was sailing homeward and had already passed the Sierra Leona on the coast of Africa.

As to the first discovery of the mouth of the River Plate, see my already quoted article on the « *Neue Zeytung auss Presilly Landt* » ; and cf. also the Cantino map.

5. Harrisse, « *Vetustissima* » ; and the « *Additions* » of the same author. Fumagalli (Uzielli) : « *Vita di Amerigo Vespucci scritta da Angelo Maria Bandini con le postille inedite dell'autore illustrata e commentata da Gustavo Uzielli. Bibliografia delle opere concernenti Paolo Toscanelli ed Amerigo Vespucci per Giuseppe Fumagalli.* » In Firenze Auspice in Comune April MDCCCXC (1898), in-folio.

6. The unique known copy printed at Antwerp, 1506-1508 (1510?), is in the posses-

The best known is that included in the collection of travels and discoveries « Paesi nuouamente trouati. Et nouo mondo da Alberigo Vesputio Florentino intitulado » (Newly Discovered Lands, etc.), published by Fracanzano da Montalboddo in Vicenza, Italy, 1507. In this letter, which was written probably early in 1503, and which is addressed to Lorenzo Pietro de' Medici of Florence, referring to the native Indians Vespucci met somewhere on the Brazilian coast, we are told that those Indians

« None have patrimony among them, but every thing is common. They have neither King (chief) nor government; and each one is his own master. They take as many wives as they please. In the intercourse of the sexes they have no regard to kindred, intermarrying the son with the mother, the brother with the sister (and so on), in these things they live ungoverned by reason. . . . »

« Their cheeks, their jaws, their noses, lips and ears have not one little hole only, but many large ones in them; so that I have often seen one with seven holes in the face ».

« it will hardly be believed, that one man had seven stones in his face, each one more than a half a span in size. . . . »

« I saw in the houses of a certain Indian village, in which I remained twenty-seven days, where human flesh, having been salted (?), was suspended from the beams of the dwellings, as we use to do with bacon and pork. . . . »

Then he observes » they live a hundred and fifty years ».

In the letter of Vespucci as published by Count Baldelli¹, and reproduced by Varnhagen², there we read :

« ... they have no laws, and no religious belief, but live according to the dictates of nature... they have no private property, but every thing is common; they have no king, they do not obey any body, being each one his own master. . . . »

« The men are in the habit of piercing their lips and cheeks and in these holes they introduce then bones and stones; and do not believe (that they are) little ones. . . . »

« ... the meat they eat, specially the usual, is human flesh. . . . »

« this is certain; for we found human flesh in their huts hung up to smoke. . . . »

sion of the rich americanistic library, surely unique *sui generis*, of Mr. John Carter Brown, in Providence, R. I., United States of North America. Only twenty-five facsimile copies were printed, 1874, for private distribution.

1. Conte Baldelli Boni, « *Il Milione di Marco Polo* ». Firenze, Pagani, 1827. Vol. I.

2. « *Amérigo Vespucci* ». *Son caractère, ses écrits (même les moins authentiques)*, etc., par Francisco Adolpho de Varnhagen. Lima, 1863.

And in another place, he says : « they fight each other and they kill each other..... they are a people wich lives many years..... (132 years!!!).

Here is one thing particulary worthy of mention, Lionardo Giovanni da Empoli, of a Tuscan marchant and banker family ¹, in a letter written at Lisbon, September 16, 1504, and addressed to his father in Italy, giving him account of the voyage to the East Indies, he had then accomplished with the great Portuguese conquerer Alfonso da Albuquerque, among other things, refers : « we arrived at the Holy Cross Land, time ago discovered by Amerigo Vespucci..... ». And speaking of the Indians of Brazil, named by him also « The True Cross-Land » ², he says « ... the people there (in Brazil) is well formed, they go naked..... they adorn themselves with parrots' feathers..... and their lips full of fish-bones..... they have no faith, but live as epicureans..... they eat usually their war prisoners, human flesh, which they dry in the smoke as we do hog's flesh ».

As it would involve a long dissertation about the authority of those passages in Giovanni da Empoli's letter, I pass over, whether it is his own observation, or whether it is merely an extract from a Vespucci letter. If so, it is most remarkable in a letter written at the close of 1504; and, surely, deserves the attention of all students of Vespucci literature ³.

Finally, the words : « the people and island which have been discovered by the Christian King of Portugal..... » do not occur in any of the numerous Latin and Italian editions of the Vespucci letter, but only in the title of those printed in Germany, as for instance, in the Nürnberg and in the Leipzig edition of 1505; and in the Strassburg edition of 1506, whose title commences, as follows :

« Von den newen Insulen und Landern kürzlich durch den christenlichen Künig von Portugal wol erfunden sind » (Concerning the now islands and countries which have lately been discovered by the Christian King of Portugal). And beneath the « Colophon » of the Strassburg

1. *Chopia de una lectera mandata da Giovanni da Empoli a Lionardo suo padre del viaggio fe' « a Malacha »*, published by Giuglielmo Berchet in « *Narrazioni Sincrone-Raccolta Colombiana-Fonti Italiane* ». Parte III, vol. II. Roma, MDCCCXCII, No. LXXXII, pp. 180,181. See also « *Viaggio fatto nell' India per Giovanni da Empoli fattore su la nave del seren. re di Portogallo, per conto di Marchionni de Lisbona* (with some variation); in Ramvsio « *Navigat. et Viaggi* ». Tomo I, Venezia, 1554.

2. Name employed also by Mestre João Physico and by the anonymous Portuguese author of the Cantino planisphere.

3. On this subject, see also Humboldt « *Examen Critique* », vol. V, p. 139.

edition ¹, there we find even a woodcut of the King of Portugal receiving Vespucci ².

Whatever I may have omitted, I think, after such conclusive proofs, there can be no further doubt as to the origin of the description of the Indians presented in this illustration. And, as the German translations of the Vespucci-letter were all made from a copy which some booksellers beyond the Rhine must have obtained from Paris as early as May, 1505, it is logic that this broad-leaf must have been printed *after* that date; perhaps in the same office and at the same time as the famous « New Gazette from the Brazil-Land ³, another German broad-leaf, which, as I have already shown in a pamphlet ⁴ presented to the Nineteenth International Congress of Americanists, in Washington, D. C., is also based upon Vespucci's narrative of his first voyage to Brazil by order of King Dom Manoel « o Grande » of Portugal.

The question as to whether the illustration is a derivate of some yet unknown original prototype, or whether it is a drawing based upon Vespucci's description and made by some German artist, I must, of course, leave unanswered. The Indians represented there, undoubtedly, belong to the Tupí of the eastern coast of Brazil. Vespucci never met there BOTO-CUDO-CRÊN-CRAN (Tapúya-Gês) ⁵, as has incorrectly been asserted again and again by some students.

México City, November, 1923.

1. See « *Vetustissima* », No. 40, No. 41, Leypzick, 1506; and « *Additions* », No. 20 and 21, *sine loco*, printed 1505.

2. Published in facsimile at Paris.

3. *Annaes da Bibliotheca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro*. Vol. XXXIII, Rio de Janeiro, 1914.

4. On Prof. Oberhammer's observations as to my thesis I shall revert on another place.

5. « *Die älteste ethnographische (!) Skizze über die Botokuden in deutscher Sprache* ». By Schulze (Franz Brichnitz); in « *Globus* ». LXXX. Braunschweig, 1900, pp. 242-243.

Absolute ignorance as to the material culture of both the Tupí-Guaraní and Boto-cudo-Crên-Crân. This is the only conclusion to be drawn from Schulze's article.
