



**THE 24TH OF APRIL, 2007
WILL BE THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FIRST USE OF THE WORD
“AMERICA”**

**AN EVENT ALSO CALLED
THE “BAPTISM OF AMERICA”**



***The Overseas American Academy
Invites you to Participate
In the Celebration of
This Unique Occasion***



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**LET'S CELEBRATE
THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE "BAPTISM OF AMERICA"**

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THE CELEBRATION CONCEPT

On the 24th of April 1507, the name "America" was used for the first time. It appeared on a map that was printed in St. Dié, in the Vosges Mountains of Lorraine (now part of France). America was the name used to identify one corner of the continent that is now "South America".

To celebrate the 500th Anniversary of this "baptism" of America, the Overseas American Academy proposes a series of events to be organized at St. Dié and other appropriate worldwide locations on the 24th of April, 2007.

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES THAT COULD TAKE PLACE

Among the many different activities that have been suggested so far:

- ❖ **A re-enactment of the "baptism" events at St. Dié** and other pageants, festivals and other entertainment events in North and South America and also including.
- ❖ **Seminars, conferences and other forms of discussions** in other appropriate locations on the evolution of the brand equity value of "America", addressing such questions as:
 - What the discovery and evolution of "America" has meant to the world.
 - What the world has contributed to "America".
 - What "America" means to the world today.
 - What the world likes about "America" and wants to support.
 - What the world dislikes about "America" and wants to see changed.
 - What the world expects from "America" in the future.
 - What role the world expects "America" to play in the future.
- ❖ **Your ideas and suggestions.**

AN INVITATION TO HELP ORGANIZE THESE EVENTS

If you would be interested in organizing a 500th Anniversary of the Baptism of America event, or participating in one of these events, please contact:

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THE STANDARD EXPLANATION OF HOW THE NAME “AMERICA” WAS CHOSEN

The current “official” version of how the name “America” was chosen is as follows.

Early in the sixteenth century, René II, Duke of Lorraine, was urged by Vautran Ludd, his secretary and chaplain, to create a new academic society for the arts and sciences. The Duke agreed, and thus became the official patron of the “Gymnase Vosgien” which he established at St. Dié, a small town in the Vosges Mountains, not far from Strasbourg and Basel. The town, also home to a famous Benedictine monastery, became known as the Athens of the Vosges.

Vautran Ludd was not only secretary to the duke but also the owner of a printing shop. This was significant because the duke, who was especially interested in geography, encouraged the Gymnase to not only collect foreign books and maps — including maps from Spain, Portugal, and Italy — but also to translate them and print them for the society and for its bookshop.

In addition to the Duke, and Vautrin Ludd, whose official title was Canon of St-Dié, the staff also included:

- Johannes Ludd, Vautrin's brother.
- Nicolas Ludd, his nephew.
- Jean Basin, de Saudoncourt, a Latin Scholar and Curé of Wisembach.
- Martin Waldseemüller, mapmaker and Clerk of the Diocese of Constance.
- Mathias Ringman, a poet and teacher of Latin.

From the “Baptism of America” point of view, Martin Waldseemüller was in many ways the key member of this group. He had previously studied cosmography with Gregor Reisch at Freiburg. Reisch was the compiler of the *Margarita Philosophica* (Pearl of Wisdom), first published in Basel in 1503. This book was an encyclopedia of knowledge, including commentaries on anatomy, astrology, astronomy, geometry, music, natural history, philosophy, and geography.

In a section on geography, Reisch produced a Ptolemaic map of the world showing the Indian Ocean enclosed by land. Reisch's observation on the alleged land connection between Africa and the East was: “Here is not land but sea, in which there are such islands not conceived of by Ptolemy”.

Reisch, therefore showed that he was aware of the voyage of Vasco da Gama and he thus refutes Ptolemaic geography, but only by words, not by making any changes on a map. This was a time when new information about geography kept coming to scholars on a regular basis. The challenge facing these scholars was how to incorporate this new information into the classical view of the earth that was still represented in the maps of Claudius Ptolemy, a Roman citizen who lived in Alexandria from 87 -150 AD.

Ludd, Waldseemüller, and Matthias Ringmann planned to publish a fine critical edition of Ptolemy's *Geographia*. They borrowed a Greek manuscript of the text from a monastery and began research on it. The idea was to print the book and its maps at St. Dié.

In 1505, however, the Duke received an abridged account of the expedition of the Florentine navigator Amerigo Vespucci, written in French, together with some Portuguese cartographic documents. The Duke entrusted these documents to the Gymnase, and Vautran Lud had them translated into Latin by Jean Basin. The scholars also decided to not only prepare a new book, but also lay down a map on which the New World described by Amerigo Vespucci would appear as a continent. (Note: Stefan Zweig, in his book “Amerigo” claims that Vespucci's letter to a friend in Florence had been forged to make it appear that he had also sent it directly to René II.)

The first task was to compare Ptolemy's maps with several other maps and with the writings of Amerigo Vespucci. This proved to be a very large undertaking, and took far longer than expected. Although the editing was in process by 1505, progress was very slow. The printing press was ready.

As Waldseemüller wrote: “Therefore, studying, to the best of my ability and with the aid of several persons, the books of Ptolemy from a Greek copy, and adding the relations of the four voyages of

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Amerigo Vespucci, I have prepared for the general use of scholars a map of the whole world — like an introduction, so to speak — both in the solid and projected on the plane”

The Latin translation of Vespucci’s letter was included in a 103-page book, “Cosmographiae Introductio,” which described the new geographical knowledge and was accompanied by a new map with the first appearance of the name “America”. The book and map first appeared in public in St-Dié on **24 April, 1507**. The book was dedicated to the Emperor Maximilian.

Noting that Vespucci had recently discovered “a fourth part” of the world, Waldseemüller delivered the book’s most sensational proposal. “Since Europa and Asia have received names of women,” he wrote, “I see no reason why we should not call this other part ‘Amerige,’ that is to say, the land of Americus, or America, after the sagacious discoverer Americus.”

The cartographer might have been influenced in conceiving this name by a young colleague, Matthias Ringmann, who was fond of words and geographical names and was a bit of a romantic.

The name America was affixed only to the southern continent, with the north left unnamed. On the full map, the two continents are separated by a strait, but on an inset map, they are joined at the Isthmus of Panama.

Historians have long debated why Vespucci was chosen rather than Columbus. Some say it was because Columbus had died a year earlier still insisting that he had reached the fringes of his goal of the Indies and Asia. Vespucci, however, had announced in his letter, which he entitled “Mondus Novus,” that he had found “what we may rightly call a New World.”

It was a time of rapid change and much historical competition and Columbus’s successors like Vespucci were eclipsing Columbus’s fame. Vespucci had written vivid descriptions of the scenery and customs of the new lands he had just visited, and that intrigued a wide audience, beyond just the scholars at the Gymnase.

Some have gone farther and suggested that the naming of America was not a mistake but rather a deliberate snub of Columbus. Peter Dickson, an independent scholar in Washington and former analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency says “It was not a stupid mistake. They thought it through.” He says that during his research for a book on Columbus, as yet unpublished, he found evidence indicating that the 1507 map promoted Portuguese interests and that Columbus was by then held in low regard in Lisbon, in part because he had sailed for Spain and might have been involved in intrigues against the Portuguese crown. Columbus, Mr. Dickson said, was “a person with a lot of political baggage from Lisbon’s perspective.”

Dr. John Hébert, Chief of the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress, said that some of Mr. Dickson’s research about Columbus’s life in Portugal was “very interesting.” But on the naming question, most scholars would probably agree with the explanation offered by Dr. Woodward of Wisconsin. “Somehow Vespucci had a better public relations department,” he said.

Columbus might have been slighted, but not completely ignored. On a section of the map showing the Caribbean, Waldseemüller wrote, “These islands were discovered by Columbus, an admiral of Genoa, at the command of the King of Spain.”

The book and the map were immediate successes. The press at St.-Dié turned out more than 1,000 copies, making it a best seller by the standards of the day. Other works were printed on Ludd’s presses. These included a manual on the use of Latin by Jean Basin (1507), a book of grammar by Mathias Ringmann (1509), and a funeral eulogy in honor of Duke René II of Lorraine upon his death in 1508 which was composed by Jean Aloys (1510).

When Mathias Ringmann died in 1511, at age 29, Waldseemüller gave up the project. Vautran Ludd sold his plates to Johann Schott, another former student of Gregor Reisch, who had been at Freiburg when Waldseemüller studied there. The splendid Waldseemüller / Ringmann edition of Ptolemy’s *Geographia* was finally printed in 1513 in Strasbourg) by Schott.

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In 1513, in other maps, Waldseemüller, by now much better informed, inserted the name of Columbus as the discoverer of America. After Waldseemüller's death in 1518, printers restored the name America. Then, in 1538, the great cartographer Gerardus Mercator published a map of the world that extended the name to both continents, to North America and South America.

Dr. Daniel J. Boorstin, a historian and former librarian of Congress, has offered two ways of looking at the naming of America, each rich in irony. In a lecture in 1987, he remarked that the Waldseemüller map and book were an early demonstration of the "irreversible powers of the press." In his book "The Discoverers" (1983), Dr. Boorstin accepted the naming outcome with equanimity. "It was appropriate," he wrote, "that the name America should be affixed on the New World in a manner casual and accidental, since the European encounter with this new world had been so unintentional."

A second edition of the "*Cosmographia Introductio*" was produced at St-Dié in August, 1507, a third at Strasburg in 1509, which continued to spread of the name of America throughout Europe.

The only known surviving copy of this first map bearing the name of America, often called "the baptismal certificate of the New World," is now owned by the Library of Congress. The map's most notable innovation is the one word that is written across the space for Brazil: America.

The Waldseemüller world map, a woodcut print on paper in 12 sections, 8 by 4 ½ feet altogether, is of great interest to many scholars because it is believed to be the first cartographic presentation of the Americas as a land mass totally separate from Asia. Even after 15 years of European explorations, mapmakers had continued to draw a world composed of only three major parts, Europe, Africa and Asia, with the newly discovered lands represented just as vague appendages of Asia.

Another very interesting innovation in Waldseemüller's map is that the coastline from Newfoundland to Argentina is limned with a seeming authority that probably exceeded the known facts. The northern continent is a narrow wisp of land, but the southern continent bears a hint of its true shape. Even more curious is another of the map's innovations, which is that a wide ocean stretches between the new lands and Asia, the first representation of the Pacific as a separate body of water. Most learned people at the time had not conceived of a world large enough for such a sizable ocean, and apparently no geographical discoveries had by then occurred to change minds. Balboa would not cast eyes on the Pacific, in Panama, until 1513, and it would be 1519 before Magellan set off on the voyage that first took Europeans across the Pacific.

"With this map, the world is beginning to look like something we can recognize," said Dr. John R. Hebert, chief of the library's geography and map division. Dr. Hebert said he doubted that those who drew this map possessed any secret knowledge leading them to separate the new continents from Asia and place a great ocean in between. "They probably made a scholarly surmise, really a leap of faith," he said.

AN ALTERNATE HYPOTHESIS ON THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME "AMERICA"

A different hypothesis about how the name "America" might have been derived is a much more imaginative and occult one.

It is based on the fact that several carefully guarded traditions had given rise to speculation about what might lie beyond the sea to the west of Europe, and what such a discovery might someday imply. These included traditions of peoples living in the Middle East from before the First Century and afterwards.

TRADITIONS OF THE MANDEANS: The Mandeans are a people who once lived in Judea and whose descendents still survive in modest numbers in southern Iraq and western Iran. According to reports of their beliefs, John the Baptist was the first leader of a sect called the Nasoreans, and Jesus was one of the initiates who allegedly then betrayed some of their most closely guarded secrets. The Mandeans to this day still conduct baptism in the river, have a series of special handshakes and other rituals that are similar to practices of modern Freemasonry. The Mandeans left Jerusalem shortly after the crucifixion of Jesus to avoid persecution during the purges of Saul (before he too converted and took the name Paul).

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Here is the possible link to our Baptism of America story. The Mandeans believed in a perfect land to the west, beyond the sea, with a beautifully clement climate and inhabited by the purest spirits, so perfect that mortal eyes cannot see them. They believed that this place is marked by a star called **Merika**, that sits above it in the sky.

Vespucci's vivid and endearing description of what he claimed he found when he explored the coast of South America *might* have been the trigger that brought the millennium old "Merika" story front and center during the discussions at St. Dié. Given the very controversial nature of the Mandaean beliefs it would not have been possible to acknowledge such a direct link, but a subtle play on Vespucci's given name (Amerigo into America) might have been the result of such an historical wink and nod. Given that the ancestors of René II had been among the leading participants in the First Crusade, they might well have come across this Mandaean belief and subtly used it hidden under the cloak of Vespucci's first name.

ISRAEL: Josephus, in his History of Jewish Wars, mentioned that among the Essenes there was a belief that souls of virtuous people would reside beyond the ocean to the west, in a region that has no oppression from rain, snow or intense heat, but is constantly cooled by a gentle breeze. This is similar to the Mandaean tradition although there was no specific name associated with such a location.

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLARS: Finally, some believe that both the knowledge of this star (Merika) and the land that it was meant to designate were also secret traditions of the Knights Templars, and that they too had tried sailing west in search of their own "**Merica**."¹

It is, of course, hard to know what to make of this alternative theory of the origin of the name "America". It is quite apparent, however, that in the early 16th Century it would have been very foolhardy on the part of anyone to bring forth such a justification for the attribution of this name to the newly acknowledged continent. There would have been a lot at stake, including possibly a one-way trip to the stake.

THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY PROJECT TEAM

Preliminary work on this project, and contributions and ideas, have been generously offered by the following people.

Overseas American Academy Scholars:

- Andy Sundberg, Overseas American consultant, economist and writer
- Eugene Schulman, Overseas American financier, historian and writer
- Matthew Stevenson, Overseas American banker, author, and editor of Harpers Magazine
- Dr. Michael Gordy, philosopher and writer
- Dr. Daniel Warner, writer, Institute of Advanced International Studies, University of Geneva
- Michael Hedges, Media consultant and former CBS radio executive

Albert Ronsin, French historian and honorary curator of the Library and Museum of St. Dié, France

OTHERS WHO HAVE EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN THE PROJECT

Hon. Steingrímur Hermannsson, former Prime Minister of Iceland

Dr. John Hébert, Chief of the Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress

Hon. Bill Alexander, former Member of Congress

Carl Fleischhauer, Project Coordinator, Office of Strategic Initiatives, the Library of Congress

Paula Johnson, Curator, Smithsonian National Museum of American History

Dr. Barbara Baudot, Professor of Political Science at St. Anselm's College, New Hampshire

Edward Sundberg, International Business Consultant



¹ The Second Messiah, Christopher Knight and Robert Lomas, Arrow Books, London, 1998

**THE NAME "AMERICA" FIRST APPEARED IN
THE UPPER RIGHTHAND CORNER OF WHAT IS NOW
"SOUTH AMERICA" IN THE ST. DIE MAP BELOW**



**THIS IS THE EXPLANATION IN LATIN
OF HOW THE NAME "AMERICA" WAS DERIVED**

Nūc ꝑo & hę partes sunt latius lustratę / & alia
quarta pars per Americū Vesputiū (vt in sequenti
bus audietur) inuenta est / quā non video cur quis
iure vetet ab Americo inuettore sagacis ingenij vi
Americo Amerigen quali Americi terrā / siue Americam
ca - dicendā: cū & Europa & Asia a mulieribus sua sor
rita sint nomina. Eius sitū & gentis mores ex his bi
nis Americi nauigationibus quę sequunt̄ liquide
intelligi datur.