

**Putting "America" on the Map: The Story of the Most Important Graphic Document in the History of the United States**

Seymour I. Schwartz.

Amherst, NY; Prometheus Books, 2007. 400 p, maps, illustrations, photographs, \$29.95. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-1-59102-513-9.

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Having led a somewhat sheltered academic life, I had never taken the time to ponder what might be the most important graphic document in the history of the United States. Along with other questions more suitable to a cartographer's edition of the parlor game Trivial Pursuit, this issue had never flashed on my personal radar screen; but, if it had, I might have generated a checklist of important maps, some data graphics, and perhaps even a few items from the history of art and graphic design. I doubt that a highly obscure map that may have been the first to identify the western hemisphere by the name "America" would have made the list. Seymour Schwartz makes a lengthy case for assigning this accolade to the Waldseemüller world map of 1507, and while I might now consider putting this item in the top ten, I nevertheless came away unconvinced of the veracity of his recent book's title.

In a series of chapters with somewhat contrived alliterative titles, Schwartz weaves a narrative with several story lines. These include tales of the discovery of the New World, how cartographic information from each new voyage of exploration gradually filtered into the scientific knowledge base of European mapmakers, how a group of educated clerics residing in a small village came to create a series of cartographic products during the first and second decades of the sixteenth century, into whose hands these maps, atlases and gores passed, how they were stored over the centuries, and how some of these items first came to be displayed and later owned by the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. Many of these narrative discourses may be interesting reading, but Schwartz has a penchant for taking side excursions into intellectual controversies rather than focusing on the main topic under discussion. Likewise, his text is repetitive and reads as if each chapter were written separately and without any consideration that readers might not wish to continually review information previously described in similar detail. With judicious editing, and more careful organization, the material in this book could have been presented in perhaps half the number of pages.

This is not to say that *Putting "America" on the Map* will hold no interest for cartographic historians. The story behind the location of the sole extant copy of the

Waldseemüller world map of 1507 contains features reminiscent of a novel of detective fiction, and the story of how the Library of Congress was eventually able to purchase the map for permanent display may be of interest to some readers. Schwartz also includes considerable detail on the methods of early sixteenth century map making and printing. But the most valuable aspect of the book, by far, is the series of 22 plates on high quality glossy paper. These plates reproduce in full and in enlargement portions of the 1507 map and other maps and globes in which Waldseemüller was involved, together with earlier maps that influenced Waldseemüller's cartographic thinking. The volume also includes notes and a bibliography.

Schwartz, a physician by vocation, and a collector of rare maps and atlases by avocation, has clearly produced a labor of love. However, in the final analysis his labor falls short of the level of scholarship and clarity of organization and language necessary to make *Putting "America" on the Map* an essential monograph on the history of cartography. While map libraries may wish to add this volume to their collections in the interest of completeness, most scholars of the history of science and cartography will find it sufficient to borrow a library copy rather than adding this book to their personal bookshelves.