

## **The Marble Globe of Gotha**

**By Dominique Görlitz**

***A globe that is part of the Ducal Collections at Friedenstein Palace in Gotha apparently holds a fascinating secret. Because the marble delineations show the image of a ship east to the South American Continent, which has all the features of an early Egyptian type of vessel. But no person living in Gotha in the end of the middle ages could possibly have held and recorded such knowledge on a globe at that time.***

***Furthermore, the globe shows geographical details about a world what contemporary cartographers could not have had. The studies of the author bring not only light into the geographical knowledge but also in the research of cultural interactions in the prehistoric time.***

We can only guess the year it was manufactured: 1533. The globe measuring a mere 11.9 cm in diameter shows the earth just a few decades after the rediscovery of America. Clearly visible are both continents of Antarctica and Australia, which were discovered by European seafarers 250 and 73 years later, respectively. Their outlines resemble those known today remarkably well. Thus, the Marble Globe of Gotha belongs to the category of mediaeval mystery maps, of which we only know a handful to exist in the world. Those mystery maps document that people of early historic times held an enormous geographical knowledge. The voyages of Christopher Columbus were not the beginning of naval exploration, but the continuation of much earlier journeys of discovery. But the knowledge thereof was lost in the course of history.



*Fig. 1: The Marble Globe of Gotha is displayed in the Ducal Collection at the castle Friedenstein in Gotha. The globe itself as well as its stand was done in a masterly manner by an unknown master. Its origin is dated in 1533.*

Three charts in particular have gained a reputation as prominent mysteries of cartography: The Waldseemueller map of 1507, the Peri-Reis map of 1513 and the Finaeus map of 1531. A comparison of these three creations is required to fully assess the significance of the Gotha globe. The map published by Waldseemueller and Ringmann showed the American twin continent and the entire Pacific Ocean. And did so even six years before the Pacific was first sighted by Bilbao in 1513 and before the first Pacific crossing by Magellan between 1519 and 1522, and even without a connection

between America and Asia. But where did Waldseemueller and Ringmann obtain their knowledge to conceive such a radically new view of the world? A plausible answer may lie in the Peri-Reis Map. It is not as precise, but it contains an imprint left by the Turkish draftsman in the western fragment of the map. As the orientalist Paul Kahle discovered during the translation of the text passages, this map was drawn with the help of other maps from ancient times. Peri Reis left 24 annotations in Turkish language, among those references to ancient sources that are lost today (1). This also serves as proof that the cartographic heritage of the antiquity was perpetuated most notably by Islamic scholars. On the other hand, the map of Frenchman Orontos Finaeus (1531) provides the most stunning representation of Antarctica. 250 years before its discovery it displays the continent with unexpected quality. But as if that weren't enough, a research committee led by history professor Charles P. Hapgood discovered in a joint project with the West Over Air Force Base, that the coastline of Antarctica was drawn in its ice-free condition at a time before it

was covered again by pack ice in the 6th millennium B.C. after a short interglacial warm period (2). The research report attests there is no plausible way to match their findings with the cartographical knowledge available in the 16th century A.D. Professor Gallez, expert for ancient cartography, draws his conclusion based on his research of the Finaeus Map: The exploration of a continent would require the existence of a highly developed society, equally in civil and military aspects, in pre-historic times. All that doesn't correspond very well with the knowledge we have today about human societies in the 6th millennium B.C. (3).

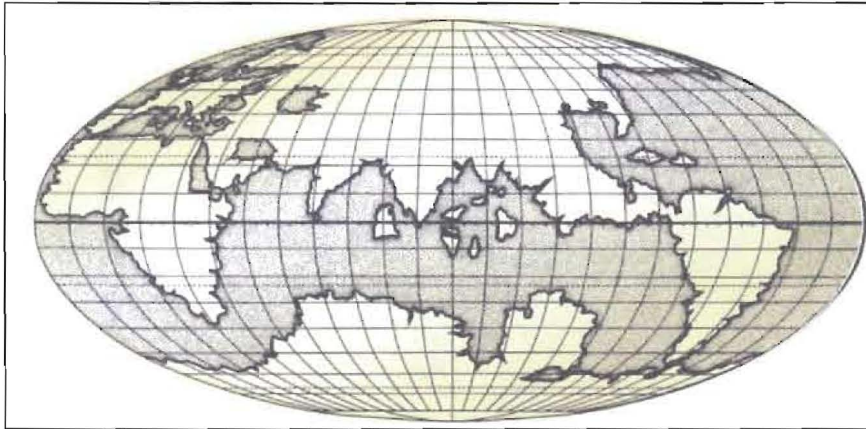


Fig. 2: The cartographer Werner Horn has transformed the globe into a plan and staunch presentation. This global image gives a better view about the shape and distribution of land-masses and ocean. It also shows its membership to a dragon tail map.

However a lot of experts do not follow Hapgood explanations: "Hapgood made a number of mistakes because the recent geologic data was not available to him when he wrote in the early 1970s. Specifically, the temperature studies show that the Antarctic coast was free of ice certainly between 2,000 BC and 1 AD (4,000 to 2,000 years ago). It may have been ice free up to 900 AD. This is based on warm climates during those periods and sufficient time for the ice to melt. More recent studies of the sea level in the Mediterranean Sea show the sea level to have been 3 feet higher 2000 years ago in Roman times than today" (4). A Comparison with new climax data of the sea level of the North Sea in the last 10,000 years (5) confirms these hypotheses that the cartography of the ice free coasts of Antarctica could have been also done in a later period.

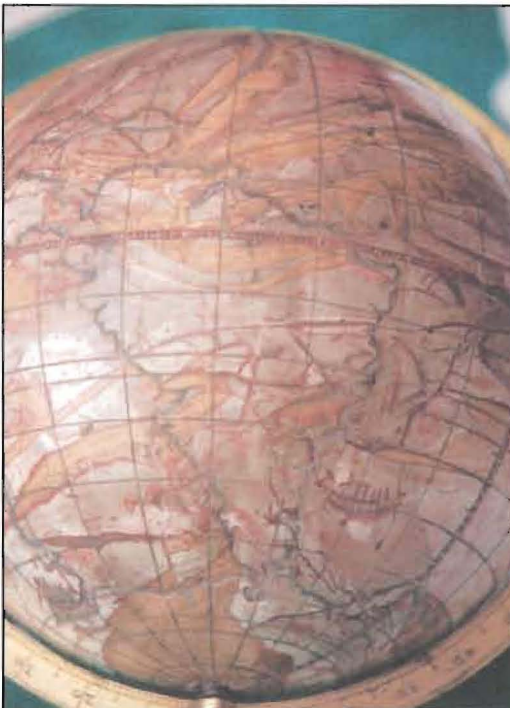


Fig. 3 (l.): The remarkable drawing of South America. The shape and accuracy is unsurpassed in the maps of the early sixteen century. Comparable to the Finaeus Map South America is linked beyond of the Strait of Magellan with the Antarctica.

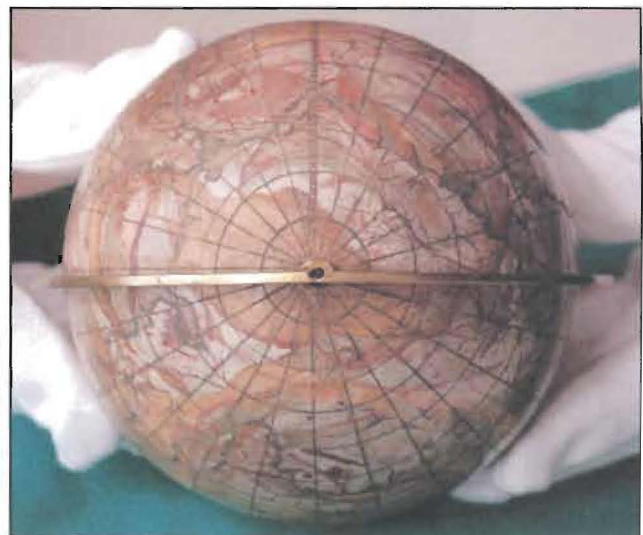


Fig. 4 (r.): The whole presentation of the Antarctica with its link with America in the upper left part and Australia in the lower left part.

We can assume that the artist who manufactured the Marble Globe of Gotha would have drawn many elements from the mystery maps described above. And in particular of those regions on which he could not obtain any new information. Nevertheless, the globe shows quite a number of dissimilarities. It contains certain novelties, but also incongruities with those mystery maps some 20 years older. The most remarkable is the realistic representation of South America. It is one of the earliest examples, and a most prominent feature is the exact reproduction of its western coast as well as the correct orientation of the Amazon flow. One needs to keep in mind that the first cartographic expedition along the South American west coast was carried out by Sir Francis Drake in 1566. That was 33 years after the Marble Globe was made.

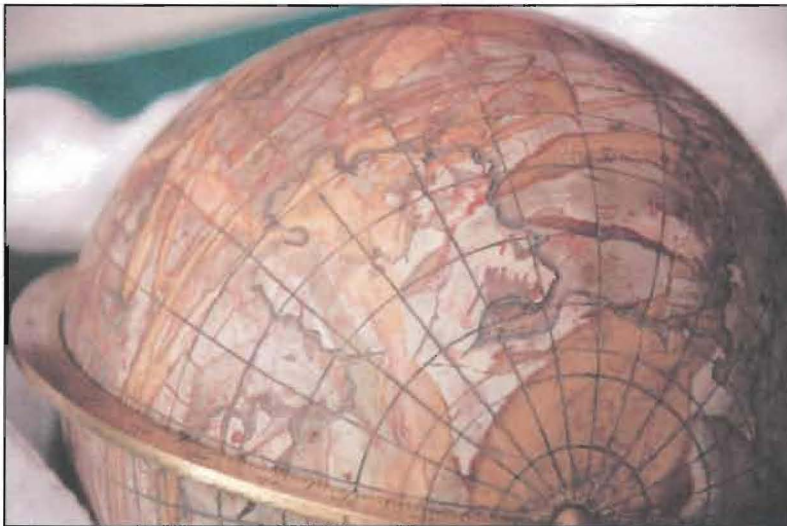


*Fig. 5: The possible image of Australia. Similar to South America this continent is linked with Antarctica under omitting of the Bass Strait and Tasmanian Sea. The land-mass is located far under the equator where the globe maker has presented South-east Asia and the tail of the dragon (compare fig.2).*

Another novelty lies in the first complete indication of Australia's coastlines, even if the fifth continent is erroneously connected to Antarctica by a land bridge. Still, it took another 73 years before Australia was sighted by Europeans in the person of Dutch voyager Willem Jansz, and only in 1770 it was first cartographed by James Cook. So where does the information on the globe originate? Could Chinese seafarers have been involved?

Obviously neither position nor size of both continents mentioned above match those of modern maps. Hapgood has found that cartographers confused the Antarctic Circle ( $66^{\circ}$  S) with the  $80^{\circ}$  line of latitude when they copied maps of early antiquity (6). Also certain geographical names, such as *Regio Brasilia*, were falsely assigned to Antarctica instead of South America. This proves that the globe manufacturer did not fully understand the information gained from new expeditions, and could not merge this information with the old exemplary maps. Additionally, even a layman will notice on the Gotha Globe that North America is connected to the Asian continent – a common feature on all the early dragon tail maps.

Another hint leads to Nuremberg, where the famous cartographer Johannes Schoener pursued his art. Many scientists consider him the mental father figure behind the Gotha Marble Globe. In Nuremberg, he produced an almost identical globe around 1533, albeit with a less exact representation of South America. But it was something else that fascinated me even more: The image of a ship is clearly visible on that globe, which I could have immediately used for the construction of my expedition ship – an early Egyptian vessel.

During the production of the ZDF (German Television) movie about our voyage with ABORA III, my partner Comelia Lorenz and I made a sensational discovery. East of the South American continent, a ship is emblazoned that carries all the features of an early type of Egyptian ships. First we could not believe our eyes. But as we immediately began to research, comparing drawings of early Egyptian ships and implementing computer-aided imaging, we could exclude all possibility of doubt. The structure of the image is no optical illusion or a natural phenomenon such as a potential discoloration in the marble. The shape of the hull is identical with early Egyptian wood vessels, showing a pointed bow and highly arched stem. The rather crude structures on deck are similar to even older pre-dynastic ship

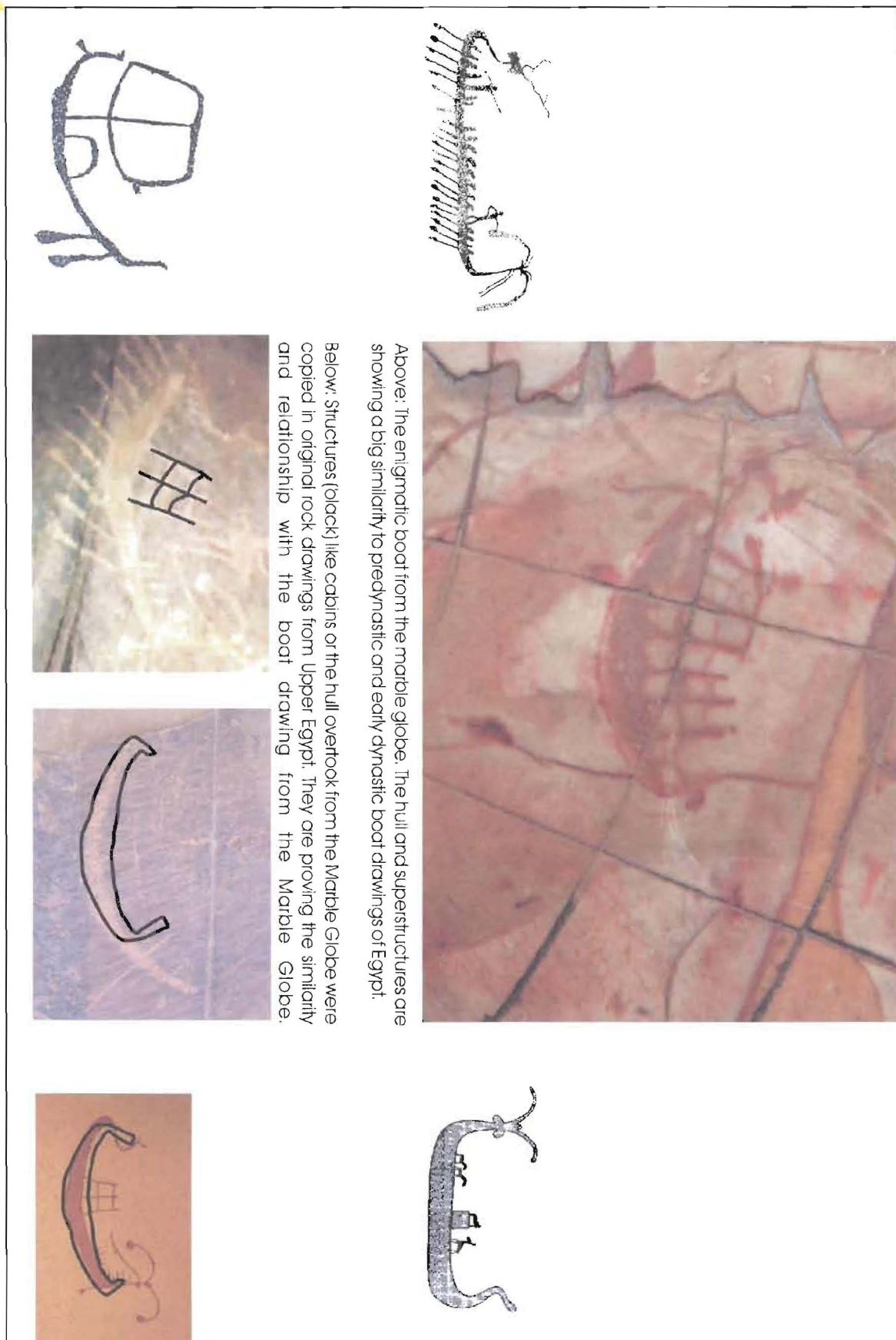


Fig. 6: Comparison of the boat drawing from the Marble Globe of Gotha with original predynastic as well as early dynastic rock drawings from Upper Egypt. These pictures are belonging to the Negade-II-Culture and the 1<sup>st</sup>- 2<sup>nd</sup> dynasty of Egypt (3,500 – 3,000 B.C.).

images dating from 3,500 B.C. (Negade-II & III-Culture). Those visual elements are special and can be found only in predynastic Egypt in this characteristic design (7). The execution of this picture required exact proficiency in Egyptian shipbuilding techniques of the early dynastic time: No cartographer of the late middle ages could possibly have immortalized this kind of knowledge regarding Egyptian shipbuilding and rigging on a globe.



*Fig. 7 & 8: Easterly of S-America under the 50<sup>th</sup> degree of latitude a unique boat drawing is located. In accordance to the map of Waldseemueller this is the only ship presentation and also its location is identical to Waldseemueller ones. However the features of the boat drawing give amazing indications of the real origin and age of the geographical knowledge*

Thus, our work turned into a real scientific detective story. The representation of Antarctica alone, and even more so the engraved future name of this continent, to be discovered only 250 years later, are valuable evidence that the contents of this globe cannot be judged by our historic knowledge of today. And that means the Egyptian-looking ship image could possibly be a secret message. No contemporary artefact or later effigy would ever show an Egyptian vessel again. The only clue in this puzzle is provided by the Turkish Admiral Peri Reis, who published his world map 20 years before the creation of the Gotha Marble Globe. As an Islamic scholar, Peri Reis was under no political or religious pressure as were his European colleagues. Is this why he could frankly reveal his knowledge about the origins of this geographical information? Therefore, could the boat drawing pay homage to ancient knowledge and predynastic navigation?



*Fig. 9 & 10: The author already conducted several trans-oceanic expeditions in order to investigate the maritime capabilities of Predynastic reed boats. With these expeditions he could demonstrate that prehistoric watercrafts were even able to tack against the predominant winds. On base of our*



*experiences made on lee board equipped reed boats it seems very reasonable that such boats could make back and forth voyages across the oceans. Theoretically long before the advanced civilizations these navigators had already the opportunity to collect geographical information and storage this knowledge in their first maps which are lost today. For this hypothesis we have only few evidence in kind of the constellation of zodiac as well as pre-Ice Age rock drawings (8, 9).*

Questions leading to more questions, and if properly thought out, the answer can only mean two things: Either the early cartographers had access, if only for a few decades, to the knowledge of ancient civilisations that was later lost, or the seafaring explorations of the Europeans started much earlier and went much further than we can read in our history books today.

We hardly know anything about the voyages of the Egyptians. With an international team, I currently conduct research on mysterious finds of tobacco in Egyptian graves, providing further clues to the existence of intercontinental trade missions in antiquity (10, 11). The image of an Egyptian ship on the Marble Globe of Gotha could be another evidence for this hypothesis. This means that further research on the globe and early cartographical works is necessary to uncover the secret messages contained in those mysterious images from the past.

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- Fig. 2 changed in accordance to Horn, W. (1976), Gotha
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- Fig. 6 Dominique Görlitz (2009) and in accordance to:  
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- Fig. 9 Dominique Görlitz (2007)
- Fig. 10 Hennes Grossmann (2007)

More information: [www.abora.eu](http://www.abora.eu)

**Foundation Palace Friedenstein  
is the owner of the Marble Globe of Gotha.**

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**Correspondence address:**

Dominique Görlitz

Harthweg 254  
09117 Chemnitz  
Germany

Tel: +49 371 72 54 780

e-mail: [dominique.goerlitz@t-online.de](mailto:dominique.goerlitz@t-online.de)  
website: [www.abora2.com](http://www.abora2.com)

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