Typus Orbis Universalis [from: Geographia Universalis vetus et nova...]

Cartographer: Sebastian Münster, Basle
Date: 1540.
Size: 10 1/2" x 13 1/2" [including title].
The world as viewed in the mind of educated, mid-16th century Europeans is perhaps best preserved in Münster’s classic map. The books where it appeared, his Geographia and Cosmographia, would have been found in any library of quality of the period. Though Münster lacked the sophistication of many of his contemporaries, his world map is adventurous in some important respects. Of cartographic significance is his use of Bordone’s oval projection, which would later be used in such world maps as those of Ortelius [1570] and Le Maire/Spilbergen [1618]. Further, Münster’s is the first world map to name the Pacific Ocean with the use of the term Mare Pacificum.

Following Verrazano’s pattern, the Pacific Ocean cuts deeply inland into North America from the north, leaving only a narrow istmus on the east coast at 40 degrees north latitude. Verrazano actually believed as he gazed over the Outer Banks off of North Carolina, that he was seeing the sea which would lead him to the China coast. Off the California coast, Japan, still derived solely from Marco Polo, appears arbitrarily shaped and misplaced to the southeast. Africa is quite accurate in basic out-line and, characteristic of the period, shows two lakes in the Mountains of the Moon as the Nile’s source. Greenland hovers above Canada, stretches over Europe, and connects to Asia, which in turn extends north of America and nearly meets Greenland again, on the west. This was the result of thinking that Iceland, Newfoundland, and some northern areas of Canada comprised a single land mass.
Münster’s woodcut map is handsomely decorated with windheads embedded in clouds. Since the direction of the wind was more vital to navigation during this period than in later ones, each direction was given a name and took on a personality of its own. This is the first edition of the map, with the east and west windheads contained within the perimeter of the oval map.