La Nuova Francia - Terra de Laborador

La Nuova Francia [The New France] by Giacomo Gastaldi /Giovanni Batista Ramusio, Venice, 1556. Map of New England and eastern Canada from Ramusio’s I Navigazioni et Viaggi. The chronicler Ramusio credits Giacomo Gastaldi with authorship of this map, and it is in any case clearly a modified extraction of the New England portion of Gastaldi’s Tierra Nueva of 1548 (see below). It is the first printed map focusing on the region of New England, and it established the name “New France” (La Nuova Francia) to denote the French possessions in the north.

This work adds some interior geography to the 1548 Tierra Nueva, and depicts the coast in more elaborate, if no more accurate, detail. The courses of the several rivers have been modified, and a westerly branch of the Hudson has been added. The landmass called Isola de Demoni on the 1548 work is now part of Labrador (extending off the map), but the name has been retained for the northernmost and largest island of Newfoundland. It has been suggested that the demons illustrating this Isola de Demoni are the Beothuk Indians, described by Pasqualigo half a century earlier as “shy” and “gentle,” now defending themselves against European aggression. Separating Isola de Demoni from Terra Nuova (i.e., Newfoundland) is the Golfo di Castelli, which was the Bay des Chasteaulx of Cartier, present-day Strait of Belle Isle. Ramusio resurrects the old Baccalaos [cod fish] for one of the other islands to the south. Bonne viste is Cape Bonavista, Cartier’s first sighting of land in Newfoundland. The illustration of birds nearby reflects Cartier’s Isle des Ouaisseaulx [Isle of Birds, now Funk Island]. C desperaza (i.e., de speranza) is North Pt. Miscov, and C. de’ras is Cape Rouge. A cross with a fleur-de-lis is planted on that island, symbolizing Cartier’s claiming of the region for France. The two major islands which separated the mainland and Terra Nova /Isola de Demoni on
the 1548 work have here been eliminated. In the Atlantic is a stylized representation of the Grand Banks, the mid-point of which is *Isola della rena* [Island of Sand]. As with the 1548 Gastaldi work, Cartier’s penetration of the St. Lawrence to Montreal is not shown.

_Angoulesme_, the strawberry-shaped bay in the lower part of the map, is Verrazano’s New York Bay, which the navigator described as:

> a very attractive site between two small prominent hills, in between which a very great river flowed to the sea [the Hudson], deep at its mouth, and from sea to the place where it merged any loaded ship could go on a rising tide, which we found to be eight feet. Having anchored off shore in a sheltered place we did not wish to venture farther without knowing the nature of the river mouth. We took the longboat from river to the land, which we found greatly inhabited. The people were about the same as we had met before, dressed with bird feathers of different colors, and came toward us happily, giving loud shouts of admiration, and showed us where we could take the boat safely.

The longboat ventured as far as Upper Bay, but then suddenly “there arose a contrary wind from the sea which forced us to return to the ship and, greatly to our regret, to leave that land.” Verrazano thus missed the opportunity to enter the Hudson (though Ramusio speculatively charts it).

East of New York is the flat, east-west oriented southern coast of Long Island (lacking Long Island Sound), which Verrazano skirted “always in sight of land.” The fin-shaped eastern shore of Long Island is discernable at *Flora*. Verrazano continued east to Newport Bay (Port Real), “a most beautiful harbor [where upon entering] we saw about twenty boats of people who gathered about the ship with various cries of astonishment.”

Finally, *Port du Refuge* is Narragansett Bay, in which “a fleet of any size could stay . . . in security without fear of tempest or other hazard of fortune.” After this point, Verrazano’s reconnaissance becomes cursory, and his influence on Ramusio ends.

Clipping the coasts of much of what is now Massachusetts and Maine, Cartier’s Cape Breton and Cape Breton Island are grafted onto the eastern bounds of Narragansett Bay. Due both to the omitted stretch of coast and to the effects of magnetic declination of the mariner’s compass at high latitudes, southern Newfoundland is shown slightly south of New York Bay.

Created by the Italian cartographer, Giacomo Gastaldi in 1565 and published by the Venetian editor Ramusio, this map reports Verrazzano’s voyage of 1524 (#347). *La Nuova Francia* [The New France] depicts the North Atlantic coastline spanning from New York to Labrador. It is the first time New England is displayed and the first time it is named New France. The French did not pursue further exploration for another 50 or so years and thus upon their return many things had evolved making the voyages of Verrazzano and Cartier an obsolete source of geographic information, yet a beautiful work of art.

This copy can be found in the *Terzo Volume Delle Navigazioni et Viaggi (raccolto gia da M. Gio. Battista Ramusio)* [Third Volume of the Navigation and Voyages]. An intellectual man with a passion for geography is what led Giovanni Battista Ramusio to begin his travel writings. Known for this passion he was privy to the insightful, first-hand knowledge attained by explorers upon their return to Italy, such as Verrazzano and Cartier. Ramusio used his fluency in multiple languages to compile and translate an array of reports into an Italian book comprising the intimate stories of explorers’ travels paired with images, such as Giacomo Gastaldi’s map from 1548, *La Nuova Francia*. 


The idea behind a book of this kind was unique and became very popular as can be seen through the multiple publications. This map is second state, which can be evidenced through the pagination and the addition of weeping willow trees. Due to a fire, the second manuscript was destroyed and thus the third volume was actually the second book printed in 1565.

Mainly based on the voyages of Verazzano and Cartier to the Hudson and St. Lawrence rivers, this map shows an extremely primitive and unexplored land. Most of the identified places on this map have subsequently been conferred new names. For example: modern day New York Harbor was titled Angoulesme, Newport Bay was Port Real, Narragansett Bay was Port du Refuge, Long Island (which was then thought by Verrazzano to be a peninsula) was Flora, and Block Island was formerly Brisa.

Since Europeans were yet to explore the Lake Champlain corridor between the Hudson and St. Lawrence rivers the mapping was based on previous chartings produced by Native Americans. The Native Americans had marked their maps with waterways upon which they canoed as well as rivers and thus the Europeans mistakenly portrayed the St. Lawrence River and the Hudson River as being connected.

The long curved line around the bottom and right side of the map represents the Grand Banks, and the decorative devices reflect the importance of fishing off the eastern coast.

When mapping new lands, cartographers were faced with the challenge of mapping terra incognita [unknown lands]. They would use this space to portray further information about the geography of the land; such as, the vegetation, the animals, the indigenous people, the seas, etc., as can be seen here. This map was essential to the ease of subsequent exploration, mapping, and settlement of the region.

Author: Giovanni Battista Ramusio
Source / Publication: Terzo Volume delle Navigationi e Viaggi. (edition 2)
Place of Publication: Florence
Date: 1565
Cartographer: Giacomo Gastaldi
Size: 11 7/8 x 16 1/4 inches/ 27 x 37.5 cm
Medium: Woodcut

Reference:
Suarez, T., Shedding the Veil, pp. 90-92, Plate 19.
For this edition a completely new wood-block was used, the changes most evident in the shape of the trees and the sea creatures at the bottom – Yale University Collection
Terra Nueva, 1548 by Gastaldi