

The Da Vinci Globe

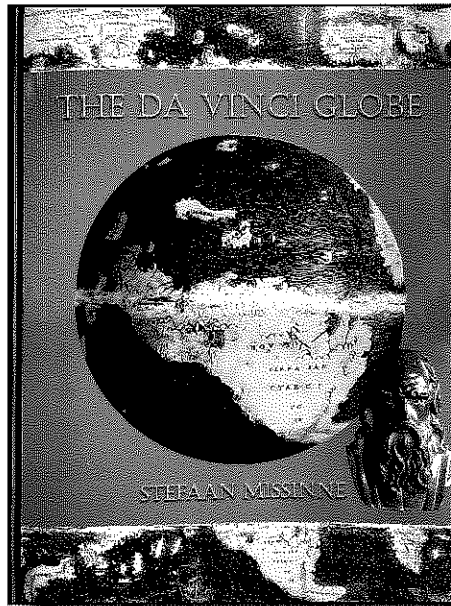
by Stefaan Missinne

- 282 p., 220 illustrations mostly in colour, 4 tables, 2 diagrams, 29 x 20.5 cm, soft cover
- Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2018
- ISBN: 978-1-5275-1134-7, GBP 71.00

The book presented here is about what could potentially become the most important and prestigious discovery of the 21st century, in the field of the history of cartography of course: a ca 11 cm diameter globe made of two halves of similar ostrich eggs glued together and engraved by da Vinci himself around 1504. The author of the book is at the same time the proud owner of this precious collector's item. Stefaan Missinne clearly has a nose for good business: a couple of years ago he bought an anonymous silver ciborium representing Hercules carrying a celestial globe on his shoulders which he was able to attribute to no less than James II of England ('The Solving of a Mystery: a Silver and Gold-gilt Celestial Globe Cup from a Catholic English Monarch in Exile!', *The Portolan*, Spring 2012, p. 52-56).

The book's title is quite obviously a reference to the mystery thriller novel by Dan Brown, a bestseller that was also adapted for the big screen but was at the same time very much criticised within the academic world. Time will tell if the Cambridge Scholars Publishing company made the right choice here.

The 'Da Vinci Globe' should be considered a report on the author's research into the globe and its making, more than a final scientific and academic publication. The latter is normally the result of some serious editing from the publishing company, which in this case in the absence of an editorial board clearly has failed to guide the author in the preparation of his publication. There is no full bibliography, nor index of names. Bibliographical references are found in the footnotes, though without



consistency and next to emails and personal conversations with colleagues and specialists quoted for proof (see the impressive catalogue of scholars mentioned in the Acknowledgements p. 264). The book's 15 chapters and 3 appendices are abundantly illustrated, but some images appear more than once. There are photographs of technical analyses, letters and personal encounters with well-known specialists such as Rudolf Schmidt and Carlo Pedretti, which are designed to give the necessary auctoritas to the author's arguments, but the reader could do with some more context in order to grasp their importance. The book's detailed structure should put some order in the relentless succession (and repetition) of arguments of every kind, from chemical analyses and spectroscopy, over quotations from da Vinci's personal manuscript notes to iconographic parallels from art history. On the whole I must admit

I had some difficulty following the author's reasoning, as he is continually jumping from one argument to another. Stefaan Missinne obviously has a lot to tell and to prove. Fortunately, appendix I (p. 265-270) gives an overview of all arguments addressed in the book. Complementary information can also be found in two earlier publications of the author which I recommend: (with G.J. Verhoeven), 'Unfolding Leonardo da Vinci's globe (AD 1504) to reveal its historical world map', *ISPRS Annals of Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences*, 4/2/W2 (2017), p. 303-310 and 'America's Birth Certificate: The Oldest Globular World Map: c. 1507', *Advances in Historical Studies*, 4 (2015), p. 239-307.

As it is impossible (and unnecessary) to enumerate all arguments addressed in the book, I will try to resume what I personally consider the main reasons for the author's double conviction :

1. that the globe is authentic and datable to the beginning of the 16th century
2. that its author must be Leonardo da Vinci.

The globe's authenticity is evidenced by the fact that its cartographical content and engraving is identical to the one of the Lenox globe, an early 16th century globe of copper alloy now in the New York Public Library, and similar to that of the Jagiellonian globe dated ca 1510 and now in the library of the Jagiellon University of Cracow. An in-depth comparative study of the three globes can be found on the following address: <http://www.myoldmaps.com/renaissance-maps-1490-1800/314-the-lenox-globe/314-lenox.pdf>.

The link with Leonardo da Vinci is based on a study of the thousands or so pages of personal notes by da Vinci written down in his manuscripts, of which the most important are in the Codex Atlanticus, Arundel and Leicester. It is indeed tantalising to think that da Vinci was at the origin of this ingenious idea to glue together halves of two ostrich eggs to make a terrestrial globe. He was after all, amongst so many other things, also interested in cartography. In addition, he has left us many designs of all kinds of mechanical and other inventions, most of which never came to fruition. More specifically, as is shown by the Codex Arundel, in the early years of the 16th c., in Florence, da Vinci was studying geometry, hydraulics, optics, etc.

Stefaan Missinne has avidly been searching in da Vinci's notes for references to ideas, even just words or drawings, which in some way could be linked to the material aspect of the ostrich globe. A list of his findings can be found in Appendix III (p. 272-279) of his book. The author also consulted specialists in the field, such as the above-mentioned da Vinci expert Pedretti, editor of a new facsimile of the Codex Arundel, who passed away about a year ago (Leonardo da Vinci, *Il Codice Arundel 263 nella British Library, Florence, 1998*). If on the whole it remains difficult to judge the validity of these links, as they are often taken out of their ms. context, I did like the suggestion that the two circles on fol. 104r of the Codex Arundel so far interpreted as representations of the moon are actually sketches of the earth (p. 184-195). Furthermore, sketches in the Codex Atlanticus clearly suggest that da Vinci was thinking about globe-making (p. 79 and 119 ff.). But what do the other drawings on these folios teach us? And what about the text on these folios? Do they confirm the author's thesis, or not? As regards fol. 104r, for example, the author is right when he says that the 'title' above one of the circles reads 'terra', but the 'title' above the second

circle (less centred than the first title and therefore perhaps not mentioned by the author) reads 'luna', and the whole folio does indeed talk about the relationship between earth, moon and sun. I would have liked to read the author's opinion on that matter.

In my view the author is too much at pains to prove the Da Vinci authorship and hence occasionally sins in what I would call 'suggestive interpretation'.

Some examples:

- the triangular form of the lettering of Terra Sanctae Crucis interpreted as a possible signature of da Vinci (more an example of 'horror vacui' and quite consistent with the composition of the other toponyms on the globe which are clearly engraved after the layout of mountains and rivers on the globe) (p. 77, 138, 147);

- the lettering itself as being the same as the one on the back of the da Vinci painting of Ginevra Benci (while it is actually quite common) (p. 80-82) - see Fig. 1;

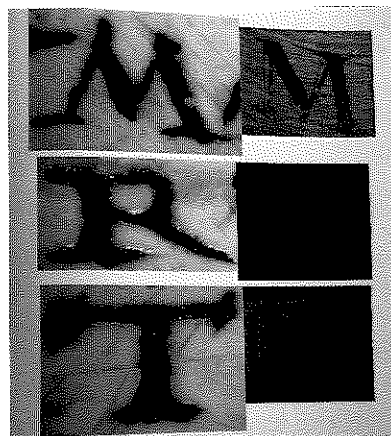


Fig. 1 - Calligraphic comparison between letters on the ostrich egg globe (left) and letters on the Banderole of the Ginevra Benci painting of Leonardo Da Vinci (right)

- the toponym 'Assia' in the middle of the Asian continent as indicating the trading post of Cascar on the Silk Road and at the same time a possible

'word game' with reference to the Via Cassia in Italy that runs near Vinci (rather than indicating the Asian continent whose name does not appear elsewhere on the globe) (p. 64, 146) - see Fig. 2;

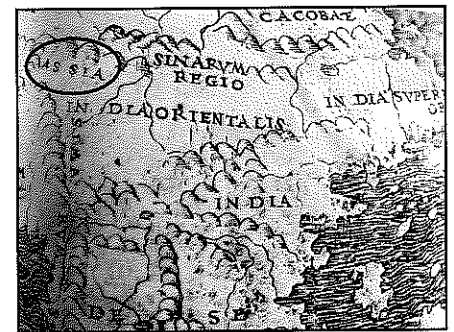


Fig. 2 - Toponym 'Assia' on the Asian continent

- the eye of one of the sea monsters engraved on the globe as illustrating da Vinci's knowledge of the eye's anatomy (p. 167-170) - see Fig. 3;

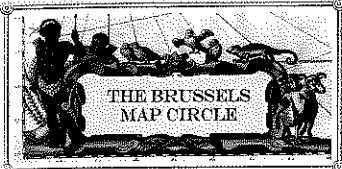


Fig. 3 - The sea-monster eye

- the similarity between the ships on the globe, as well as other graphic elements such as the waves, and those found in da Vinci's manuscript notes (p. 154ff.);

- the discussion of the hairstyle of one of the figures on the globe "compatible with the dating and provenance of the Ostrich Egg globe" (p. 139-141)

This does not necessarily invalidate the idea that da Vinci could have been involved in the making of the ostrich globe, and hence of the Lenox globe,



**THE BRUSSELS
MAP CIRCLE**

Newsletter No **48**


JANUARY 2014

www.bimcc.org

ISSN 1379-4306

MAPS IN HISTORY

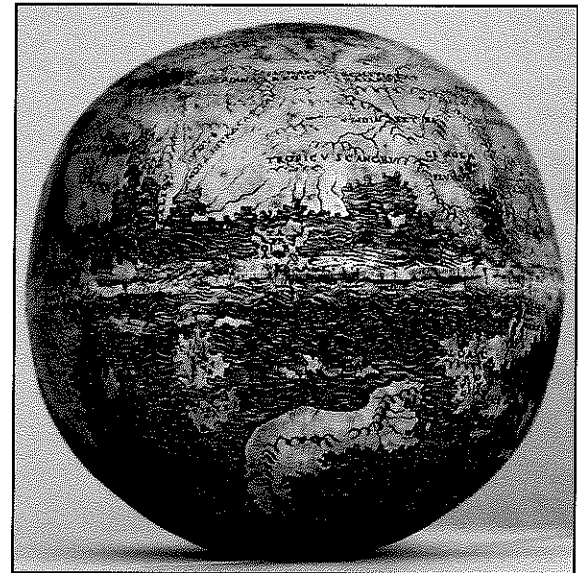
An intriguing globe...



Also in this issue:

- 1690, the battle of Newwpoort
- Report on the Mapping India Conference
- Report on the historical week-end in the French Hainaut
- ... and the usual departments

Picture of Stefaan Missine's globe on the cover of 'Maps in History' No 48 (Jan 2014), where we published a 3-page summary of Missine's 17-page article in 'The Portolan', with the additional indication that Missine had 'found new evidence' leading him to consider that his globe 'can be attributed to Leonardo da Vinci himself'.



The ostrich egg globe dating from 1504 showing Asia and the Indian ocean.

Note the large embryonic island in the southern hemisphere.

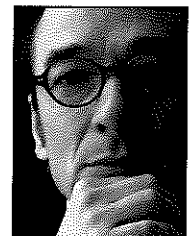
© Stefaan Missine 2013.

but in a way lessens the researcher's credibility and thus makes his hypothesis easier to attack, especially in academic circles.

More research should be done on the egg's provenance, its more recent history, and on da Vinci's interest in cartography and globe-making. I would therefore like to conclude by saying that the importance of the book's contribution to the history of cartography is unquestionable, but lies rather in the discovery of an early 16th century globe of an exceptional as

well as ingenious material than in the arguments put forward of da Vinci's authorship. As such, this is a first step towards a thorough study of the globe.

Wouter Bracke
wouter.bracke@kbr.be



Making Maps in History

This issue of Maps in History was coordinated and edited by Jean-Louis Rentoux. Paul De Candt did the lay-out on the basis of a design by David Racs.

Contents have been checked by the Editorial Committee comprising Wulf Bodenstien, Nicola Boothby, Wouter Bracke, Lisette Danckaert, Francis Herbert, Pierre Parmentier, Luis Robles and Soetkin Vervust.