

**RESEARCHES RESPECTING  
AMERICUS VESPUCIUS  
AND HIS VOYAGES**

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Researches respecting Americus Vesputius and his voyages by E. V. Childe

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**E. V. CHILDE**

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## RESEARCHES.

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### INTRODUCTION.

THE discovery of the New Continent, which we owe to the genius of Columbus, was a fact of the utmost importance, on account of the remarkable influence it exercised in developing the human intellect. It enabled Astronomy, Physics, Botany, and Mineralogy, to add greatly to their stores by means of new observations and numerous experiments; and to it the moral sciences themselves too have not been less indebted.<sup>1</sup> From the comparison also of new idioms, manners, customs and opinions, invaluable materials have been extracted for the history of man.<sup>2</sup>

Since that event more than three thousand works have been written upon the history and geography

<sup>1</sup> Ancillon, *Description of the Revolutions of the Political System of Europe*. Vol. i. p. 191, et seqq.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

of this vast portion of the globe, and upon the expeditions which took place between the years 1492 and 1540. Notwithstanding, however, this immense number of literary productions, and the minute investigations they contained respecting the leaders and dates of these early expeditions, this part of the history of the geography of the New Continent remained in great obscurity up to the commencement of the present century. Till then there was a multitude of problems concerning the history and geography of the New Continent, which the research of many learned men had failed to solve.

Certain authors had indeed sought to ascertain if the New World had been known to the ancients, while others occupied themselves with the same question either in the hope of tarnishing the fame of Columbus,<sup>1</sup> or with a view to investigate the causes and traditions which led him to the enterprise that immortalized his name; or, finally, for the purpose of proving that this part of the world was the famous Atlantis of Plato.

Thus, since the sixteenth century, a *savant* of immense erudition, the celebrated Las Casas is found discussing in his *History of the Indies* all the pas-

<sup>1</sup> Although the roundness of the earth, and the antipodes, are found in almost all the cosmographical treatises of the fourteenth century, it is well known that at the end of the fifteenth many persons were unwilling to admit them as facts, and sustained a contrary opinion for the purpose of opposing themselves to the voyage of Columbus. Libri, *History of the Sciences in Italy*. Vol. ii. p. 127.

sages, whether from ancient authors or from those of the Middle Age, which in his opinion exerted a powerful influence on the mind of Columbus.<sup>1</sup> Then Scherer, in 1777, made a collection of certain geographical fragments respecting the knowledge which the ancients possessed of the existence of a New Continent.<sup>2</sup> And later, that is, in 1783, Masdeu occupied himself also in bringing together the observations of ancient authors, such as Plato, Aristotle, Diodorus Siculus, Posidonius, Strabo, Seneca, Pliny, Saint Clement of Alexandria, Ælian, Apuleius and Origen, which bore upon the existence of a continent separated from ours by the great ocean.<sup>3</sup> Passages from these authors we have seen this learned Spaniard grouping in one mass, for the purpose of showing that their united testimony proves that from the time of Solon to that of Origen, and even for a much longer period, comprising nine centuries, the tradition of another continent than our own has prevailed among the nations of the old world. But, on the other hand, nothing which is met with in the works of Adam of Bremen,<sup>4</sup> Torfæus,

<sup>1</sup> General History of the Indies, 1559. An unedited MS. in the library of M. Ternaux. *Vide* chaps. 5 - 11.

<sup>2</sup> Scherer, Historical and Geographical Researches touching the New World.

<sup>3</sup> Masdeu, Critical History of Spain. Vol. iii, b. 6, p. 324, et seq. "Clement of Alexandria" is here substituted, by a mistake of the author, for Clement of Rome, to whom Masdeu refers.

<sup>4</sup> An author of the eleventh century, in whose work it is pretended that there are indications of America's having been visited in his time by the people of the north. But those who have put their faith in

Gottlob Fritsch, Daniel Victor, Erasmus Schmid, nor of Cassel or Bremen, tends satisfactorily to solve the question, whether the New Continent had ever been visited by Europeans.

We have, therefore, thought it perfectly useless to repeat what has been already said by others, or to criticize anew these passages, especially as one of the most illustrious *savans* of our day, (M. de Humboldt,) <sup>1</sup> has very lately entered into a discussion of the same.

Previously to the year 1825, the discussions which appeared concerning the New Continent were rather matters of mere erudition than historical treatises upon positive facts. But then was brought forth *one of the most important memorials of modern times*,<sup>2</sup> which shed a new light upon many points of the highest interest, and opened to the world documents, hitherto unedited, of great value, respecting the earliest stages of discovery of the New Continent. We here allude to the work of our very learned friend, M. de Navarrete,<sup>3</sup> which has brought to the acquaint-

this author forgot perhaps that he himself was completely ignorant of the geography of the Baltic; that he had doubts whether Russia had even been reached by this sea, and moreover reckoned Esthonia and Courland among the number of the isles. See his work *De Situ Danie*.

<sup>1</sup> Critical Examination of the History of the Geography of the New Continent. Vol. I. p. 15, et seq.

<sup>2</sup> See these expressions in the Critical Examination by M. de Humboldt. Vol. I. p. 15 of the Introduction.

<sup>3</sup> Collection of Voyages and Discoveries which the Spaniards made by sea since the end of the fifteenth century.



ance of *savans* an enormous quantity of documentary matter and new opinions, by means of which may be entirely re-written a large portion of the history of the New Continent, as it was known to us before this important publication. Following the production of M. de Navarrete, came the interesting *Life of Columbus*, by Mr. Washington Irving; and not long ago, M. de Humboldt published the result of his erudite labors.

In 1826, M. de Navarrete having consulted us regarding the voyages which Americus Vesputius pretended to have undertaken at the expense of Portugal, this question, so important to the geographical history of the New Continent, from that moment fixed our attention, and we consequently communicated to the learned Spaniard a memoir, in which we ventured to express our opinion on the subject, such as he was pleased to introduce into his own work.

To this memoir we afterwards added numerous notes and considerable new matter, all of which are contained in the present volume, although we acknowledge that it was not in such a form they were originally intended to appear, but in a work superior in method and of greater extent. The kind reception, however, they met with from many *savans*, and particularly from the Geographical Society of Paris, together with the repeated applications which were made to us at different times by one of the greatest

authorities in this branch of science, our learned friend and fellow-laborer the Baron de Walckenaër, decided us to collect the several detached pieces hitherto published in M. de Navarrete's work, and in the volumes of the Bulletin of the Geographical Society, and to make to them many additions, which, with the analytical table, are now for the first time given to the public.

We are quite aware, and feel bound to admit, that, according to the strict rules of historical criticism, the highest importance should be attached to those documents, and to the testimony of those authors alone, which belong to the first half of the sixteenth century. Neither were we at any time ignorant of the fact that this importance gradually diminishes in proportion to the distance at which we leave this epoch behind. But the impartial reader will doubtless acknowledge that, in a discussion of this sort, the opinions of critics and historians of a later date, when they bear upon the same subject, should be cited for examination. For in order thoroughly to appreciate the merits of a controversy, one ought to have before his eyes all that has ever been written on either side of it.

We have thought it necessary also to give all the bibliographical indications, and to point out the sources, whence is to be obtained a profound and accurate knowledge of the question. And if this method is not indispensably necessary to historical

criticism, it is at least of vast utility, in our opinion, for a correct appreciation of the truth. So that, without being over anxious about the criticism to which we may expose ourselves, we have taken upon us to detail whatever historians, geographers, and *savans*, in great numbers, have thought and spoken relative to Vespuccius and his voyages, in the conviction that those who read our book without partiality will feel obliged to us, for having spared them the trouble of new investigations in search of materials whereon to form an opinion for themselves. We fancied, besides, that, by confining ourselves to the testimony and documents beginning with the commencement of the sixteenth century, we might break the thread of the history of this controversy, which, we may venture to say, has endured since the time of Vespuccius to the present day.

It is not without regret that we have occupied ourselves with this question in a controversial manner, we who, in all our works successively published in the course of twenty years, have always most carefully avoided every sort of disputation. Nevertheless, our convictions upon the subject we proposed to treat were profound, and unfortunately, no argument to alter them has as yet presented itself. We had, moreover, the firm assurance that a controversial discussion of points, which have not been sufficiently elucidated, is always a gain to science. And, indeed, it is impossible to gainsay the importance and utility