

The Origin of the Name "America."

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Source: *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York*, Vol. 18 (1886), pp. 301-316

Published by: American Geographical Society

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/196796>

Accessed: 30-05-2018 00:37 UTC

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## THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME “AMERICA.”

BY

GEO. C. HURLBUT.

Amerigo Vespucci made two or, as some have maintained, four voyages to the New World. He wrote observations on latitude and longitude and accounts of his voyages, and drew or corrected charts. None of these works exist. Some letters of his to two friends are extant, and in these he gives notes of his voyages and of the strange people he had seen. Two of these letters were published during his life, but neither in these nor in any other known writing of his does he give his name to the land he visited and described.

The name “America” appears for the first time in the *Cosmographiæ Introductio* of Waldseemüller, or Waltzemüller (Hylacomylus), of St. Dié, in the Vosges. In this book, published in 1507, Waltzemüller says again and again that he gives the name *America* to the New World, because it was discovered by Americus Vesputius.

The first passage, on the verso of the third leaf, says :

“After which any one will more easily understand the description of the whole world given by Ptolemy, afterwards amplified by others, and lately more largely set forth by Americus Vesputius.”

The next, on the verso of the ninth leaf, reads :

“The Ceylonese, the Ethiopians, and the greatest part of the still unknown land, lately discovered by Americus Vesputius. Concerning this there are subjoined the accounts of his four voyages, translated from the Italian tongue into French and from French into Latin.”

On the third leaf occurs the passage :

" Towards the Antarctic Pole are situated the recently discovered farthest part of Africa, and Zanzibar, the islands of the Lesser Java and Seula, and the fourth part of the world, which may be called Amerige—that is, the land of Americus, or America, because it was discovered by Americus."

On the verso of the fifteenth leaf is the well-known statement :

" And now these parts (Europe, Africa, and Asia) have been more fully described, and another fourth part has been discovered by Americus Vesputius (as will be learned farther on), and I do not see how any one can with reason object to calling this Amerige—that is, the land of Americus, or America, after its discoverer Americus, a man of excellent parts ; since both Europe and Asia happened to get their names from women.

" The situation of this part and the manners of its people will be clearly understood from the account of the four voyages of Americus, which follows."

On the 19th leaf Waltzemüller explains why he had occasionally preferred in his *Cosmographia* the authority of the marine charts to that of Ptolemy :

" And we have so arranged matters that we have copied Ptolemy in the map, except for the new regions and some other places, while in the globe which accompanies the map we have relied upon the following description of Americus."

Four editions of the *Cosmographia* were brought out at St. Dié in the year 1507 ; two, one in Latin and one in German, appeared at Strasburg in 1509 ; and the last of all was published at Lyons in 1517 or 1518.

All but the last were published by Waltzemüller himself. It does not appear when he became aware of his error with regard to the discoverer of the New World ; but in the Second Part of the Ptolemy of 1513, printed at Strasburg by J. Schott, and very largely the work of Waltzemüller, is a line which assigns the discovery to the " former Admiral of the Most Serene King Ferdinand of Portugal."

Vespucci, who died in 1512, never bore the title of Admiral, and the King of Portugal was Emanuel the Great. The admiral alluded to could be no other than Columbus, and the legend on the New World in the map given in this Ptolemy, under the name "Tabula Terre nove," puts this question at rest.

"Hec terra cum adjacentibus insulis inventa est per Columbum januensem ex mandato regis Castelle."

"This land, with the adjacent islands, was discovered by the Genoese Columbus, in the service of the King of Castile."

Varnhagen has shown how generally the name of America, bestowed upon the New World by Waltzemüller, was accepted. In the *Globus Mundi*, brought out at Strasburg in 1509, in Latin and in German, the name is adopted naturally enough, since Waltzemüller undoubtedly aided in the production of this work; but it appears also in the *Luculentissima quædam terræ totius descriptio*, published by Johann Schöner at Nuremberg in 1515, "cum globis cosmographicis," and is there explained almost in the words of Waltzemüller:

"America sive Amerigen (sic) novus mundus: et quarta orbis pars, dicta ab ejus inventore Americo Vesputio viro sagacis ingenii: qui eam reperit Anno domini 1497."

"America, or-Amerige, the new world and fourth part of the globe, so called from its discoverer Americus Vesputius, a man of excellent parts, who found it in the year of our Lord 1497."

On Schöner's globe of the year 1515 the name *America* is given to South America only; while beyond the strait to the south of it is a great land which bears the name *Brasilie Regio*.

In the folio edition of Pomponius Mela, published at Vienna in 1518, is a letter addressed by Vadianus (Joachim

de Watt) to Rudolph Agricola. In this letter America is twice mentioned. The first passage reads :

"Americam a Vesputio repertam."

The second does not name Vesputius :

"Immensum Pelagus interesse inter extremum ab America occidens et oriens Ptolomei etc."

In 1520 Apianus brought out at Vienna a mapamundi, to accompany an edition of Solinus, and in this the New World is called America. In the same year Dr. Margallo published at Salamanca a *Phisices Compendium*, and described the divisions of the earth as follows :

"Prima est Asia secunda Africa et tertia Europa . . . addenda tamen veteribus incognita *America* a Vesputio inventa que occidentem versus etc."

"The first is Asia, the second Africa, and the third Europe . . . and to these must be added the part unknown to the ancients, America, discovered by Vesputius, which, towards the west, etc."

It was also in 1520 that Schöner inscribed the name in the globe, which he sent in 1523 to the Canon of Bamberg, Reymer von Streytpergk.

In Phrisius' map in the Ptolemy of 1522 the name appears in its place.

In the *Cosmographicus Liber* of Apianus, published at Landshut in 1524, the name America occurs several times, and the description of the New World begins with the words :

"America ; quæ nunc Quarta pars terræ, dicitur ab Americo Vespuccio eiusde' inne' tore (sic) nomen sortita est Et non immerito."

"America, which is now called the fourth part of the world, received its name from its discoverer, Americus Vespuccius, and not undeservedly."

Henr. Glareanus Loritus, professor of geography at Basle, published a treatise—*De Geographia liber unus*—in 1527, in which he gives the name as one generally known :

"Porro ad occidentem terra est quam Americā vocant, longitudine octoginta fermè graduum, duæ insulæ Spagnolla et Isabella : quæ quidem regiones, secundum littora, ab Hispanis lustratæ sunt, Columbo Genuensi et Americo Vesputio ejus navigationis ducibus."

"Then to the west is the land which they call America, nearly eighty degrees in length (and) the two islands Hispaniola and Isabella : and these regions, so far as regards the shores, have been explored by the Spaniards, sailing under the command of the Genoese Columbus and Americus Vesputius."

Glareanus' book was adopted as a text-book in the schools, and Varnhagen affirms that he has seen editions bearing the dates 1528, 1530, 1533, 1534, 1538, 1539, 1543, 1551, and others still later.

The *Cosmographicus Liber* of Apianus was reprinted no less than eleven times between 1524 and 1574, without counting the translations. Apianus brought out, also (at least, the work is ascribed to him), a compendium of the *Cosmographiæ Introductio*, under the same name, and repeating the assertion that Vesputius had discovered the New World, and that the name *America* was given to it for this reason.

Of this little book Varnhagen has personally examined four editions, one of Ingolstadt, two of Venice, and one of Paris ; and he notes in the catalogue of the public library of Padua two other editions which he has not seen, both of Venice.

Gemma Frisius, who annotated and added to the work of Apianus, published at Antwerp in 1530 a work on the principles of astronomy and cosmography, of which there were several later editions, besides a French translation, published in 1556. In all these the New World is called *America*.

Schöner's *Opusculum Geographicum* (Nuremberg, 1533) gives the name of America to the newly discovered regions of the west.

The various editions of Ptolemy contributed to fix the name in the public mind ; and among the epitomes and compilations of geographical works there is one, published at Venice in 1537, which has among its cuts an engraving of the two hemispheres, the western one with the inscription, *America*, while on the back of the frontispiece is an engraving in which the name is curiously misspelled, *Ametrica*.

Mercator's globe of 1541, reproduced in fac-simile in 1875 by the Belgian War Department, divides the land surface of the world into five parts—Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and the Land of Magellan, lately discovered. On this globe Europe, Asia, and Africa are copied from the maps of Ptolemy, while the names, especially those of the far Eastern countries, appear to be taken from Marco Polo.

The name of America is written on the whole Western Continent, *Ame-* on North America and *-rica* on South America. Below it are the words: *A multis hodie Nova India dicta*: "Called to-day by many, New India."

The Land of Magellan is made of great extent, and covers all the region around the South Pole, the geographers of the time reasoning that, without a vast southern continent to balance the mass of land in the northern hemisphere, the equilibrium of the world would be destroyed.

Sebastian Munster, whose *Cosmographia* was so long and so widely recognized as authoritative, adopted the name *America* in the *Novus Orbis* of Grynæus, which he brought out in 1532, and it appears in the numerous editions of his own book in Latin, French, English, Bohemian, and other tongues, from the first in 1544 to that of 1598.

In Honter's *Rudimenta Cosmographica*, the map of the New World bears the inscription: *America*.

A little work, published by Jacques Focard at Lyons in 1546, under the title: "Paraphrase de l'Astrolabe," after giving a description of the three parts of the world known to the ancients, adds that besides these there had been discovered no land which could be called a continent, "*excepté une appelée Amérique, de laquelle ne sommes encore bien assurés*"; and then proceeds to give a description of this, so far as known.

This record, which could be lengthened, shows that the name suggested by Waltzemüller in 1507 had become, in fifty years, the recognized name of the Western Continent, except in Spain, where the official designation of "The Indies" held its ground.

It was for a long time an effective commonplace to denounce Vespucci's usurpation of the glory which rightfully belonged to Columbus; but his innocence in the matter is now so clearly established that even the school-books are beginning to state the case with fairness.

When one door is shut, however, another is opened; and in history the last word is never spoken.

Waltzemüller's declaration as to the origin of the name *America* seems to be final; but it has been called in question, and the whole subject has been reopened in these later years.

Mr. Jules Marcou, a distinguished American geologist, published, in 1875, two articles—one in English in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the other in French in the *Bulletin* of the Paris Geographical Society, and made in these an ingenious argument in favor of the American origin of the name *America*. Briefly stated, his argument is to this effect:



There exists between Juigalpa and Libertad in the province of Chontales in Nicaragua, a highland region or chain of mountains, known by the name of Amerrique, Amerique, or Americ. This chain stretches on one side into the country of the Carca Indians, and, on the other, into that of the Rama tribe. The Mico, Artigua, and Carca rivers, which unite to form the Blewfields, and the Grande Matagalpa, the Rama, and the Indio, all flow from these mountains into the Atlantic; and, on the other side, the Comoapa, Mayales, Acoyapa, Ajocuapa, Oyale, and Terpenaguatapa flow from these same mountains of Amerrique into the Lake of Nicaragua.

Columbus, on his fourth and last voyage, reached, on the Mosquito Coast, the river to which he gave the name of Rio del Desastre. This, Mr. Marcou identifies with the Grande Matagalpa. Some days after, Columbus stopped for a time at a place named Cariay, in order to repair his ships and rest the crews. While there he inquired about gold, and learned that the metal abounded in several places which were named to him. The last of these was Veragua, twenty-five leagues farther up the coast. This place is on the great bay of Chiriquí in Costa Rica. Twenty-five leagues beyond Veragua was Carambaru, a little north of the river San Juan and the present Greytown. Cariay must have been more to the north, in the neighborhood of the mouth of the river Blewfields. This region is now inhabited by the Carca Indians, and Carambaru must have been near the Rama river in the country of the Ramas.

The Amerique chain of mountains runs through this region, and there are gold mines in it which are now worked. Columbus, in the letter which recounts this voyage, while

he says he was told of places rich in gold, contents himself with naming only the province of Ciamba; yet it seems to Mr. Marcou most probable that the Indians often spoke of Amerique, or Americ, and he holds it to be almost certain that they answered the continual question, as to the source from which the gold was derived, by saying that it came from Americ.

When the Spaniards returned to Europe they probably boasted of having discovered mines of gold, meaning, of course those reported as existing in the region of Amerique, and this strange name, repeated from mouth to mouth, travelled through the cities and towns and villages of Spain, and beyond the Pyrenees, until, at last, it reached Waltzemüller at St. Dié. He, not knowing the significance of the word, supposed it to be derived from the name of Albericus Vespucius, whose account of the New World was the only one with which Waltzemüller was as yet acquainted. "To support this derivation," says Mr. Marcou, "it was necessary to twist the name of Vespucius into the form *Americus*, and this Waltzemüller did not hesitate to do, though in calling the New World after the baptismal name of the supposed discoverer, he was violating the rule which makes this an exclusive privilege of crowned heads. If named after Vesputius, the New World ought to have been called Vesputia, and not America." The only explanation of this inconsistency is, in Mr. Marcou's opinion, the fact that Waltzemüller had heard the name Amerique before associating it with Vesputius.

In closing his argument, Mr. Marcou points out the advantages of his theory. These are: that it takes nothing from the glory of Columbus, because it shows that the

name of the continent is an indigenous name ; that it disposes forever of the accusations against Vesputius, the more decidedly that his name never was Americus, but Alberico, or Amerigo ; that the name America, while indigenous, admits of no confusion between the whole and a part, because it comes from a locality too insignificant to give rise to misconceptions ; and, finally, that it seems to be admirably chosen from a spot in the very centre of the continent, and to reach out thence to the north and to the south, to the West Indies and to the Pacific, from the heart of the longest line of mountains on the globe. It is well chosen, also, says Mr. Marcou in an addendum to his *finally*, because "it is very probable that it struck the ear of the great admiral Columbus on his fourth voyage, so that the illustrious discoverer of the New World was the first European who heard and pronounced the name *Amerique*, or *Americ*, although we do not possess the certainty and the material proof of this."

This theory, put forward almost simultaneously in America and in Europe, did not immediately attract attention. It is first noticed in the report of the International Congress of Americanists, held at Luxemburg in 1877. M. Schoetter read before this Congress a paper on Amerigo Vespucci, and in a note to this he makes the following comments on Mr. Marcou's theory :

"It is still to be explained how a local name, which is not to be met with in any account of the sixteenth century, could have found its way before the year 1507 to a little town buried in the Vosges mountains. Furthermore, the name of the Florentine navigator was first applied to the southern part of the continent, which was then believed to be an island situated to the south of the West Indies."

In *Ausland*, No. 21, for 1881, Mr. Marcou's objection to the form *Americus* for Vespucci's name is noticed,

with the brief remark : "It must not be overlooked that the orthography of proper names was dealt with in an arbitrary fashion in those days, and that there is no very great difference between Alberico and Amerigo, Albericus and Americus."

In 1883 a translation, somewhat condensed, of Mr. Marcou's French article appeared in the *Boletín* of the Geographical Society of Madrid, and a summary of its argument was brought out in the *Bulletin* of the Société de Géographie, of Toulouse, for December.

It was early in the same year that Mr. T. H. Lambert read before the American Geographical Society a paper under the title : "The Origin of the Name *America* from the National History of the Peruvians." This paper, written apparently without knowledge of Mr. Marcou's ingenious theory, leaves the impression of having been suggested by it.

The Argentine Geographical Institute republished, without comment, in the third number of its *Boletín* for 1884, the translation of Mr. Marcou's article made for the Madrid Geographical Society.

It is in the *Deutsche Rundschau für Geographie und Statistik*, for August, 1885, that the next notice of Mr. Marcou's theory is found, in a short article by Dr. K. Würzburger, who remarks that the appearance of Ortelius' great Atlas in 1570 definitely established *America* as the name by which the New World was to be known in Germany, but expresses no opinion concerning the new theory.

Prof. Guido Cora was the next writer to take up the subject, in an article on "The Precursors of Columbus in America," in the *Bollettino* of the Italian Geographical

Society for December, 1885. Prof. Cora contents himself with stating briefly the substance of Mr. Marcou's paper, and noticing Mr. Lambert's by the way; and he adds that the case is not to be hastily disposed of, and that it seems to call for more ample information. The matter was taken up at this point by Mr. Luigi Hugues,\* who has studied Mr. Marcou's theory with calmness and impartiality, and has come to the conclusion that all the evidence is against it. Mr. Marcou lays stress upon the termination *ic* or *ique* in American names, and cites, among others, with a certain emphasis, the name of *Jamaica*. Mr. Hugues reminds him that the true name of the island is, in the old Spanish orthography, *Xaymaca*, which differs in form and meaning from names in *ic*.

Mr. Hugues shows, by quotations from letters written to Vespucci and by his signature, that his name was Amerigo; and he answers the observation that the continent, if named after Vespucci, ought to have been called *Vespuccia*, by an appeal to Humboldt, who says: "The preference shown by Waltzemüller for the prænomen, over the family name of the Florentine navigator, is easily explained by the inferior sonorousness of the name Vespucci and its derivative Vespuccia, as well as by the Italian and Spanish custom of indicating distinguished persons by their baptismal names. The account books, which are preserved in the archives of Seville, have in many places the words: 'Amerigo, Cr.'"

Mr. Hugues observes also that while the name of Vespucci is found in Spanish documents under the various and uncertain forms of Vespuche, Espuche, Vispuche,

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\* Sul Nome "America." Memoria di Luigi Hugues. Torino: Ermanno Loescher, 1886. (Pamphlet, 48 pp.)

Despuchi, and, as written by Columbus, Vespuchy, the name "Amerigo" is correctly given.

On a sober review of the subject the first and sufficient objection to Mr. Marcou's theory is that it does not take into account Waltzemüller's repeated declaration that the name "America" was made by him from the name of Vespucci. He shows, indeed, a preference for the form "Amerige," evidently because this reproduces almost exactly its original. The positive testimony of Waltzemüller as to a fact of which he could not but have entire knowledge must be accepted.

Admitting, however, for the sake of discussion that he might have made a mistake when he wrote the name, and that it was brought by the Spaniards from the New World, how is it to be explained that no one of them has left a hint of it in any writing or tradition, in or out of Spain? The name is not found as a native American name in any record of the sixteenth century; and yet Mr. Marcou would have us believe that Columbus himself and all his companions on the fourth voyage heard this magical name for days together, and were impressed by it to such a degree that the fame of it, never having been told in Spain, leaped the Pyrenees and crossed France secretly to the Vosges Mountains, and was there whispered in the ear of Waltzemüller. There is no more wonderful story than this in the history of America, or in the Arabian Nights.

In his letter from Jamaica Columbus tells of the gold mines he is looking for, and if any one of the native names he heard could have taken hold of his imagination as a synonym for fabulous riches, it would have been *Ciguare*, of which he writes :

"la provincia de Ciguare que segun ellos es descrita nueve jornadas de andadura por tierra al Poniente: alli dicen que hay infinito oro, y que traen corales en las cabezas, manillas á los pies y á los brazos dello, y bien gordas; y del, sillas, arcas y mesas las guarnecen y enforran. Tambien dijeron que las mugeres de allí traian collares colgados de la cabeza á las espaldas. En esto que yo digo, la gente toda de estos lugares conciertan en ello, y dicen tanto que yo seria contento con el diezmo."

"the province of Ciguare, which according to their description is nine days' march towards the west: there, they say, there is infinite gold, and the people wear coral ornaments on their heads, and bracelets and anklets of gold, very thick; and they line and cover with gold their chairs and chests and tables.\* They said also that the women of that region wore necklaces which reached from the head to the shoulders. In this that I report all the people of these places are agreed, and they say so much that I should be satisfied with the tenth part of it."

Mr. Marcou's theory does not seem to possess the advantages claimed for it. He holds that if the name "America" is found to be American, nothing is taken from the glory of Columbus. What possible relation can there be between the two? The name is, in any case, not derived from the name of Columbus, and the injustice done to him remains the same; but how does this affect his glory? It is with him as with Cassius and Brutus in the funeral procession of Junia; the eyes seek him in vain in the place that should be his, but he is present all the more in the thought of every one.

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\* Mr. R. H. Major, in his "Select Letters of Columbus," translated and edited for the Hakluyt Society, has missed the sense of this passage by failing to observe the grammatical relation of the pronouns *dello* and *del*, and translating *coral* where he should have written *gold*.

A comparison with the account of the Fourth Voyage in Herrera, Dec. 1, lib. 5, cap. 5, where some of the expressions are taken almost literally from the narrative of Columbus, would have corrected the misapprehension. The passage reads:

"i como con tanto cuidado le veian preguntar los Indios por el Oro, dabanle muchas palabras, señalando que por tales i tales Tierras havia tanta cantidad de Oro, que traian Coronas de ello sobre la cabeça, i Manillas en los pies, i en los braços, bien gruesas: las Sillas, Mesas, i Arcas aforradas de Oro" . . .

"and as the Indians saw that he asked with so much anxiety for gold, they gave him many words, declaring that in such and such regions there was so great an abundance of gold that they wore crowns of it on their heads, and anklets on their feet, and bracelets on their arms, very thick; and that their chairs and tables and chests were covered with gold" . . .

There is no charge against Vespucci, and men must accept the accidental greatness he has won.

Mr. Marcou is not happy in the next point made, since, if there be a name of which it can be said that it admits of no confusion between the whole and a part, that name is surely not "America"; for while it properly belongs to the whole Western continent, it is often, by familiar usage, limited in application to a part of North America.

The argument next in order shows, more than is strictly necessary, the cheering influence of the tune of "Yankee Doodle"; and it may be fairly met by the question why any one name in Central America should be allowed the exclusive privilege of facing the Atlantic and turning its back upon the sunset, and stretching itself in long lines to the North and to the South.

Whether the great Admiral ever heard of the *Amerique* chain or not, it is a fact to be noted that map-makers leave it out of their maps, as if by common consent; and students of geography, finding themselves continually baffled in the search for a chain so important, may be tempted to believe at last, in their haste, that Mr. Marcou has created these mountains out of his inner consciousness. In this they would do him wrong. He seems to have been led into error by a mistaken spelling of the name.

There does exist in the province of Chontales, in Nicaragua, a chain of mountains called by the name of the *Amerisque*\* range, and if this word does not readily

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\* NOTE.—His Excellency Manuel M. de Peralta, Envoy of Costa Rica, at Washington, has taken some interest in this question, and has kindly furnished for publication the following letter from President Cárdenas, of Nicaragua :

MANAGUA, Mayo 22, 1886.

AL SEÑOR MANUEL M. PERALTA,

Ministro de Costa-Rica en Washington.

ESTIMADO SEÑOR Y AMIGO :—He recibido su apreciable carta del 26 de Marzo, en que U. se sirve preguntarme si existe, en el Departamento de Chontales de esta



fall into line with the significant names in *ic* and *ique*, the fault lies with the nature of things.

In one word, Mr. Marcou's *Amerique* is a delusion :

" The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,  
And this is of them."

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República, una cadena de montañas, conocida con el nombre de *Amerique*, *Amerrique*, ó *Americ*, la cual ha sido mencionada por el Señor Thomas Belt, en un libro que publicó en Londres el año de 1873, con el título de " The Naturalist in Nicaragua ": en contestacion tengo el gusto de informar á U. que efectivamente existe en esta República, y en el mencionado Departamento, una cadena de montañas con el nombre de " *Amerrisque*," la que es muy probable haya visitado el Señor Belt, por estar próxima al mineral en donde residió por mucho tiempo. Habita en la cadena mencionada una tribu de indios llamados los " *Amerrisques*," poco numerosa el día de hoy, pero que parece haber sido anteriormente de alguna importancia, segun los indicios que por allí se encuentran. Dichos indios han estado siempre en comunicacion mas ó menos frecuente con el Cabo de Gracias á Dios y la Mosquitia, en nuestra Costa del Atlántico.

Espero haber satisfecho así los deseos de U. y quedo su att'  
seguro servidor y amigo

AD. CÁRDENAS.

[Translation.]

MANAGUA, May 22, 1886.

TO MR. MANUEL M. PERALTA,

Minister of Costa Rica at Washington.

DEAR SIR AND FRIEND :—I have received your valued letter of the 26th of March, in which you inquire of me whether there exists in the Department of Chontales, in this Republic, a chain of mountains known by the name of *Amerique*, *Amerrique*, or *Americ*. This chain, you say, has been mentioned by Mr. Thomas Belt in a book which he published in London in 1873, under the title of " The Naturalist in Nicaragua."

In reply it gives me pleasure to inform you that there really does exist in this Republic and in the Department named a chain of mountains known by the name of " *Amerrisque* "; and it is very probable that Mr. Belt visited these mountains, which are in close proximity to the mine where he resided for a length of time. There lives in this chain a tribe of Indians called the *Amerrisques*, feeble in number at the present day, but apparently of some importance in former times, to judge by the indications found in the region.

These Indians have always been in communication more or less frequent with Cape Gracias á Dios and Mosquitia, on our Atlantic coast.

I hope that this information will be satisfactory to you, and I remain,  
Most faithfully,

Your friend and servant,

AD. CÁRDENAS.