Martin Behaim Encyclopedia Article

Martin Behaim

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Martin Behaim

1459-1507

German-Portuguese cartographer and navigator who created the first world globe. Behaim was born to a well-to-do merchant family in Nuremberg, Germany. After studying with the famed astronomer Regiomontanus, he traveled to Lisbon, Portugal, where he was appointed to the "junta dos mathmaticos" commission of King John II. The purpose of this commission was to find a better method for determining latitude, which Behaim accomplished by ascertaining the position of the Sun, Moon and stars. Behaim gained the respect of the Portuguese elite, and was offered the chance to set sail with Diogo Cão to the west coast of Africa (1485-1486). On this journey, Cão discovered the mouth of the Congo River. Upon his return to Nuremberg in 1490, Behaim constructed the very first globe, with the assistance of painter Georg Glockendon. On it is represented the equator, one meridian, the tropics and the constellations of the zodiac.