

Small folio (298 by 198mm). Cancels: ?3, ?4. Slip-cancels: e*1r blank slip over last 5 lines of side-note; B4r, line 19, ‘A sword, keepeth peace’ (altered from ‘maketh’); E2r 25-line side-note. Title with large woodcut, 18-line initial of Queen Elizabeth in majesty and woodcut plate of the arms of Sir Christopher Hatton all fully coloured by a contemporary hand, 3 woodcut 13-line initials. Contemporary calf, skilfully re-backed, covers with two panels outlined in single gilt and double blind fillets, central gilt medallions, gilt edges, joints cracking, extremities rubbed.

A HAND-COLOURED EXAMPLE OF THE FIRST WORK TO DISCUSS THE LAW OF THE SEA, THE FIRST TO USE THE TERM “BRYTISH IMPIRE”, AND THE FIRST TO PROPOSE A “PETY-NAVY-ROYALL’.

General and Rare Memorials Pertayning to the Perfect Arte of Navigation.

Author
[DEE, John (1527-1608)].

Publication date
1577

Publisher
John Daye,

Publication place
London,

Physical description
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Dimensions

Notes
First edition of the first work to use the term “Brytish Impire”. This is the only part published of Dee’s proposed great project ‘The British Monarchie’. Stemming from his strong antiquarian interests, ‘Dee was a firm believer in the historicity of… “British history”‘ (ODNB). This led to his interest in the legendary voyage of Madog ab Owain Gwynedd to North America, and to his claiming large parts of the new world for Queen Elizabeth. Dee acted as advisor to a number of Elizabethan explorers, including John Davis and Humphrey Gilbert, and advised Elizabeth I on her rights over foreign lands, emanating from her alleged descent from the Trojan Brutus and King Arthur. The large allegorical woodcut on the title shows the Queen at the helm of the Christian ship of Europe, while the figure of Britannia stands on the shore and beseeches her with a Greek motto that translates as “the guardian of safety is an armed fleet”. The context thus set, in this work Dee calls for the creation of a ‘Pety-Navy-Royall’ to secure England’s fledging colonial interests. It is also the first work to discuss the law of the sea; he proposes the taxation of foreign fishermen in British waters as a way of securing the fisheries. Dee also promoted the sciences of navigation and cartography. He studied closely with Gerard Mercator, and he owned an important collection of maps, globes and astronomical instruments. He developed new instruments as well as special navigational techniques for use in polar regions. Dee served as an advisor to the English voyages of discovery, and personally selected pilots and trained them in navigation. The dedicatee, Christopher Hatton, one of Elizabeth’s closest advisors and confidants, invested in the dream of Empire by co-funding Drake’s circumnavigation voyage of 1577-1580. Dee himself invested in the voyages of Martin Frobisher in 1576-1577; later he was actively involved with advocating North-East and North-West Passages.

Fittingly for man known for astrology and esoteric leanings, although Dee’s name is explicitly stated in the third person in the dedication, it is also encoded in the signatures of the first three quires (‘?ee’), in the letter inset on e3r, as well as in other places.

Extremely rare. We are not aware of any other coloured example. A statement on p.79 says that only 100 copies were printed of this work, although in the Huntington copy this has been amended in manuscript in a contemporary hand to 50 copies. We have been able to locate some 15 institutional examples (Birmingham; Cambridge; Edinburgh; Glasgow; King’s College, London; Leeds University; National Library of Scotland; National Library of Wales, Newcastle, Oxford; NMM, Greenwich; Trinity College Dublin, Ireland; Huntingdon, USA; LOC, USA, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Germany). Only 6 examples can be traced as selling in the past 100 years. They are as follows:

1985 – Sotheby’s $17,600
1982 – Nebenzahl $36,000
1980 – Sotheby’s £4,600
1972 – Sotheby’s £5,200
1971 – Sotheby’s $9,120
1946 – Francis Edwards £50

Bibliography

Provenance
Provenance: A.H. Bright (bookplate).

Allan Heywood Bright (24 May 1862 – 3 August 1941) was a member of the Liverpool firm of Rogers and Bright, tinplate merchants and ship agents, and a British Liberal politician. He was married to Edith Turner, a prominent campaigner for women's and workers' rights. He bequeathed his library of 1951 volumes to the University of London.

Price:

Inventory reference: 3206

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