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BLAEU'S MONUMENTAL WALL MAPS OF THE CONTINENTS

[Set of the maps of the four continents].

Author
BLAEU, Willem

Publication date
c1646].

Publisher
Stefano Scolari,

Publication place
[Venice:

Physical description
Set of four engraved wall maps, each printed on four sheets, joined, flanked by side-panels featuring 16 vignettes of diverse people in local costume, and a lower register featuring 12 birds-eye views of cities, with title above, contemporary full-wash hand-colour. As is almost invariably the case with large seventeenth century wall maps, a certain amount of conservation work has been undertaken, including elements of re-touching to some of the coloured areas of the maps. A full conservation report is available on request. Mounted on linen on wooden stretchers.

Dimensions
1100 by 1530mm. (43.25 by 60.25 inches). (Framed)

Notes
Rare complete set of Blaeu's iconic wall maps of the four continents.

Willem Blaeu's wall maps are considered to be among the most influential and artistically virtuous masterpieces of the great era of baroque cartography. Blaeu, who apprenticed from 1594 to 1596 under the eminent Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe, returned to the Netherlands and quickly established himself as one of Amsterdam's leading globe makers. His enterprise, the 'Officina Blaviana', maintained close connections with intellectuals and political leaders across Europe, granting him privileged access to the most advanced geographical knowledge. This was reflected in Blaeu's decision to produce monumental wall maps of the four known continents, and separately one of the world. The publication of the first set of his wall maps in 1608 was responsible for initiating his ascendancy to the pre-eminent position in the highly competitive global map market. For this endeavour, no expense or effort was spared and Blaeu charged Hessel Gerritsz (1580-1632), known as a great cartographer in his own right, to devise the overall artistic design, and to investigate the latest sources exhaustively, in order to create the most accurate depiction of the continents possible. While Gerritsz personally engraved the geographical elements, Blaeu hired the superbly talented Joshua van de Ende (b1583/4), to engrave the surrounding pictorial panels and the decorative cartouches. Blaeu published a second state of his wall maps in 1612, before the plates found their way to Hendrik Hondius, who published an edition in 1624, and, finally, passing to Nicholas Visscher, who employed them in 1655-7. All editions of Blaeu wall maps are extreme rarities, with only one incomplete set of the 1608 original surviving (missing the map of Africa), having been discovered in Switzerland in 1979.

Wall maps occupied a prominent place in contemporary Dutch culture, as icons of affluence and intellectual curiosity, as demonstrated by their appearance in several of Johannes Vermeer's paintings. One of the leading lights of the era, Constantijn Huygens (1596-1687), remarked how he employed his own set of Blaeu's wall maps of the continents as a tool to enlighten his children: "To encourage them even more, I had the four parts of the world by Willem Blaeu mounted in my entrance hall, where they often played, in order to provide them with a fixed image of the world and its division". This ethic was greatly admired in Italy, which had by then enjoyed a highly consequential tradition of cartographic exchange with the Low Countries going back many decades, with the annual Frankfurt Book Fair being the most important nexus. The mutual transfer of information was generally balanced during the sixteenth century, with the Lafreri mapmakers of Venice and Rome occupying the dominant position in the map market from the 1550s to 1570s. However, by the time Blaeu published his wall maps, leadership had passed to Amsterdam and Antwerp, ushering in the golden era of Dutch baroque cartography, which mirrored the Netherlands pre-eminence in global trade.

This sets the scene for the entrance of Stefano Mozzi Scolari (1598-1650), the clever and industrious printer who established his workshop at Allinsegna delle Tre Virtu a S. Zulian, in Venice. Scolari developed a reputation for producing extremely high-quality derivatives of important maps and prints. Blaeu's wall maps were extremely expensive and did not travel well, yet were in great demand by the Italian aristocracy and merchant class. These groups had maintained their own tradition of monumental decorative cartography, as attested by the various map murals in Florence and Rome and Jacopo de Barberi's celebrated wall map of Venice (1500). Scolari saw an opportunity, and like Blaeu, spared no expense or effort to duplicate Blaeu's wall maps, brilliantly succeeding in creating masterpieces that showed fidelity to the superlative engraving and the cartographic content of the originals. Typographic and geographic details suggest that the 1612 second edition of Blaeu's

originals were used as the models (the 1624 third state in the case of the Americas map). An editio princeps, or first state of the Blaeu-Scolari continents is recorded as having been produced, however, no examples are known to have survived.

Five variants of each of the continental maps are recorded, with this set representing an unrecorded sixth variant. While the four central map sheets are uniform in their appearance across the variants, the presence and arrangement of the surrounding panels and registers determines the distinctions between them. This is due to the likelihood that, as luxury items made to custom order, the side panels would have been added or excluded based upon client preference. All of the maps of the present set include the pictorial side panels and lower register, but do not include an upper register featuring the title. While other editions of Blaeu's wall maps, produced in both Amsterdam and Italy, maintain the same arrangement, the recorded variant most closely relating to the present set is to be found at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. All aspects of the map sheets and side panels are identical, save for the fact that the Greenwich maps each include an upper title register. Curiously, in each case, these title registers show signs of being hastily executed in a fashion dissonant from the careful engraving of the general composition. It seems as if the title register was an afterthought, perhaps never added to the maps of the present set. The condition in which the present set has come down to us is very fine, especially in relation to other surviving examples of the genre.

The map of Africa depicts the European conception of the continent at the dawn of the seventeenth century, an especially interesting juncture when the coastlines were well-explored, but its heart remained an enigma. Blaeu was influenced by Giacomo Gastaldi's large map of 1564, which was copied in Antwerp by Cornelis De Jode, as well as Abraham Ortelius's maps of 1595. He also considered the maps present in Filippo Pigafetta's book on the Congo, based on the explorations of Duarte Lopes (1591) and the map included in the second edition of Giovanni Battista Ramusio's 'Navigatione et Viaggi' (1550), in addition to Portuguese sources included in Jan Huygens van Linschoten's 'Itinerario' (1596).

In west Africa, Blaeu depicted territorial divisions similar to Gastaldi and Ortelius, labelling both Barbaria and Libya Interior. The Niger and Senegal Rivers combine to flow into the Atlantic as one great system, with an apocryphal Lake Niger being the source for the latter. The great entrepot of Tombotu (Timbukto) is shown and the Gold Coast is based on a map by Luis de Texiera, which found its way to Amsterdam in 1602. Central Africa is derived from Ortelius and Pigafetta, and South Africa is updated by the inclusion of Dutch nomenclature, such as Mossel baij, from the reconnaissance of Cornelis De Houtman, 1595-97. The southern interior is based on Portuguese sources, with the frontier fort Cast[ellum] Portugal labelled on the map. The source of the heart of the continent, entirely unknown, is derived from the ancient maps of Ptolemy, which show both the sources of Nile and Zambezi Rivers as being lakes on other side of the mythical Mountains of the Moon. Abyssinia is taken from Ortelius's imaginative maps of the legendary Christian kingdom of Prester John.

The map is lavishly decorated, with four cartouches, one playfully adorned with a monkey. Sea monsters inhabit the seas and elephants, rhinoceroses, camels and ostriches roam the continent. The side panels each feature vignettes depicting the peoples of different regions in what was thought to be their local costume, including the inhabitants of Senegal, Guinea, Gabon, the Congo, Madagascar, the Cape of Good Hope, Morocco, Malta, Tripoli, Algiers Ethiopia, Egypt, Abyssinia, and Mozambique, as well as a scene of pilgrims traveling to Mecca for the Hajj. Gerritsz derived his artistic inspiration from various sources including Theodore De Bry, Pigafetta, and the Italian mannerist draughtsman Enea Vico.

The lower register features 12 bird's-eye views of towns taken from the early volumes of Braun &

Hogenberg's Civitas Orbis Terrarum (1572-1618), and depicts Tangiers, Ceuta, Algiers, Tunis, Alexandria, Cairo, Quiloa (Mozambique), Mozambique town, Sofala, Fort St. George of El Mina, the Canary Islands, and Safi (Morocco).

Scolari's faithfulness to Blaeu's original is such that the original engraver's name appears in the lower left, as 'I. vanden Ende sculp.' As with the maps of Europe and Asia, Blaeu's name is printed in Italian as 'Autor Guglielmo Blaeu' inside the cartouche to the lower right.

The map of the Americas proved to be one of the most influential and detailed depictions of the continent of the baroque era. Blaeu and Gerritsz acquired advanced sources, and while the largely unexplored Pacific coast of North America extends too far to the west, the overall proportions of the continent are well assured for the time. On the Atlantic coast, 'Nova Scotia' has taken shape, based on the voyages of Samuel de Champlain and Pierre Gua de Monts from 1604. New England is less defined, indicating that intelligence of the English reconnaissance of the region in 1602 had not yet reached Amsterdam, while the depiction of the southeast is quite advanced. The width of South America is overly attenuated, consistent with all maps of a period in which the determination of longitude was an inexact science. The Blaeu-Hondius 1624 third state was likely the model, as it depicts Jacob Le Maire's discovery of the passage around Cape Horn ('Streso lemaire') during his voyage of 1615-7. A recent addition not present on the original relates to Abel Tasman's discovery of southeast Australia and New Zealand, shown by the notation 'OLLANDIA NOVA DETCETA 1644'. The two cartographic insets respectively depict the contemporary fixation with the search for a Northwest Passage and the mysterious South Pole.

The cartouche in the lower right depicts the discoverers of the New World; Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci. Below are four roundels containing the portraits of the four circumnavigators: Ferdinand Magellan, Sir Francis Drake, Sir Thomas Cavendish, and Olivier Van Noort. The Atlantic features a resplendent depiction of the King of Spain riding a sea chariot, supposedly on a figurative visit to his New World possessions, while in the Pacific, a trident-wielding Neptune and sea nymphs share the seas with battleships.

The side panels are adorned with vignettes of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, including the inhabitants of Greenland, Virginia, Florida, New England, Hispaniola, Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Chile, and Patagonia. Gerritsz's sources were Theodore de Bry's engravings of John White's original watercolours made during his voyage to Virginia and Carolina in 1585, as well as Jacques Le Moyne's travels in Florida.

The lower register features bird's-eye views of New World cities and settlements, including the Virginia native village of Pomeiooc, from De Bry and White; Port Royal, Carolina from Le Moyne; St. Augustine, Florida, and Santo Domingo, Cartagena from Batista Boazio's 1588 engravings celebrating Francis Drake's pirate raids on these towns; Mexico City and Cuzco from Braun & Hogenberg; Mocha, Chile and Rio de Janeiro by Van Noort; and Havana and Potosi (Bolivia) from unknown sources.

Blaeu's map of Asia captures the continent right at the critical period when the newly formed Dutch East India Company (the VOC) was challenging Portuguese hegemony in the Far East. Willem Blaeu, who would later be appointed the official hydrographer to the VOC, had access to the unrivalled map collection of Petrus Plancius, who, in addition to Dutch sources, also acquired, by way of espionage, in 1592-94, manuscripts from Bartholemmeo de Lasso in Lisbon. Blaeu first employed these sources on his 1605 folio map of Asia. Ceylon and the Maldives are derived from Linschoten, and Java and Bali show advanced information from Willem Lodewijksz's map during his recent voyage with De Houtman. The enigmatic nature of eastern Borneo and the Celebes is betrayed by their delineation with dotted lines and the spice island of Banda features Dutch nomenclature. New Guinea shows the

most advanced depiction of the period, and Honshu, Japan is derived from Ortelius's 1595 map. The mythical Strait of Anian, the gateway to the Northwest Passage, appears in the northeast. In homage to the imagination, China features Cambalu, a capital city with an immense 28 mile perimeter, governed by the Great Cham. In the Arctic, the recent attempts by Willem Barentsz to navigate a Northeast Passage are indicated by the appearance of the island of Novaya Zemlya. The Aral Sea is notably absent, and the Caspian maintains the egg-shape prevalent until the 1730s.

The side panels contain vignettes representing the peoples of various Asian civilizations in local costume, including Syrians, Arabs, Armenians, Persians, Gujaratis, Burmese, Sumatrans, Javans, Moluccans, Japanese, Chinese, Tatars, and Russians. Gerritsz was influenced by various sources including De Bry, Linschoten and Enea Vico.

The lower register features bird's-eye views from Braun & Hogenberg and Linschoten including Rhodes, Farmagusta, Damascus, Jerusalem, Aden, Hormuz, Goa, Calicut, Candy, Bantam, Gammalamme (Moluccas), and Macao.

Blaeu's map of Europe is especially magnificent in design, and its advanced geography is indicative of his sourcing of manuscript pilot maps drafted by the North Holland School of Hydrographers. The large cartouche resting in the Atlantic features Gerritsz's brilliantly executed double-hemispheric map, surmounted by the Arms of the City of Amsterdam, a reference to Blaeu's official privileges.

The side panels are adorned with vignettes of Europeans in local costume including English, Irish, French, Belgian, Norwegian, Lithuanian, Polish, Bohemian, German, Portuguese, Cantabrian, Castillian, Tuscan, Venetian, Greek, Hungarian, and Swiss peoples. Gerritsz's precise models are not known, but stylistic similarities are evident by comparison to engravings from Han Weigel's 'Habitus praeciporum popularum' (Nuremberg, 1577) and Sebastian Vrancx's, 'Diversarum gentium' (Venice, 1558).

The lower register contains 12 bird's-eye views of cities, including London, Paris, Lisbon, Toledo, Rome, Venice, Amsterdam, Nuremburg, Prague, Vilnius, Moscow, and Constantinople (Istanbul). All the views are taken from Braun & Hogenberg, with the exception of Prague, which was adapted from Johan Willenberg's 1601 engraving, and Amsterdam, which is sensibly based on a first-hand account.

GÃ¼nter Schilder records only three other complete sets of the Venetian edition of the Blaeu's continents. These are located at the University of Perugia, (Italy), the Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.), and the National Maritime Museum (Greenwich). This edition represents the earliest full-sized derivatives of Blaeu's unobtainable Amsterdam editions.

Bibliography
Cf. Schilder, Günter, Monumenta Cartographica Neerlandica V, p.196-197.

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 1057

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