

Fourth state. Double-page engraved map of Southeast Asia, with contemporary hand-colour in full, German text on verso.

“… EXPORTING ALL OVER THE WORLD A GREAT ABUNDANCE OF FRAGRANT SPICES” (CAPTION)

Indiae Orientalis Insularumque Adiacientium Typus.

Author
ORTELIUS, Abraham

Publication date
1602.

Publisher
Johannes Baptista Vrients,

Publication place
Antwerp,

Physical description
Fourth state. Double-page engraved map of Southeast Asia, with contemporary hand-colour in full, German text on verso.

Dimensions
352 by 495mm (13.75 by 19.5 inches).

Notes
Generally speaking, Abraham Ortelius’s map of Southeast Asia follows the geography of Gerard Mercator’s large wall-map of the world of 1569. Nevertheless, along with Ortelius’s companion map

‘Asiae Nova Descriptio’, it is the first published to definitely map Formosa, although as a group of islands, rather than one; and they both improve enormously on preceding Italian maps in regards to the highly sought after, and fiercely contested, Moluccas, or “Spice Islands”.

There are hundreds of islands in the group, but Ortelius depicts only a very select group, which feature in the more than two-hundred years of colonial strife that was the European spice trade, and even adds fuel to fire by literally waving a banner over them in his map: “Insulæ Moluccæ ob maximam aromatum copiam, quam per totum terrarû orbem transferunt, 5.sunt, iuxta Gilolo nempe, Tarenate, Tidore, Motir, Machia et Bachia” – Of the famous Moluccas islands there are next to Gilolo five, exporting all over the world a great abundance of fragrant spices, namely Tarenate, Tidore, Motir, Machia and Bachia. Until the eighteenth century, these rain-forested islands were the only obtainable source of cloves, nutmeg, and mace.

Perhaps to counterbalance this open invitation, Ortelius has added a few visual caveats: to the east a galleon is under attack from two ferocious sea-monsters, in imminent danger of foundering; and beneath them, two mermaids are preparing to lure any unwary survivors to a an uncertain fate.

In the bottom right-hand corner “Nova Guinea” makes an appearance, and since the inference is that it continues beyond the neatline, Ortelius nicely sidesteps the question of whether it is part of “Terra Australis”, or an island, and confuses things further, by adding a caption: “NOVA GVINEA quam Andreas Corsalis Ter:ram Piccinaculi appellare vi:detur. An insula sit, an pars continentis Australis incer:tum est” – New Guinea, which seems to be called Piccinaculusland by Andreas Corsalis. Whether this is an island or part of the South Land is uncertain.

To the top left another caption confirms that: “PERSIAE siue So:phorum Im:perij li:mites ad In:dum flu:uium vsque pertin:gunt” – The borders of Persia, or the empire of the Sophies, extend all the way to the river Indus. A rudimentary northwest coast of North America appears upper right.

Like Mercator before him, Ortelius includes a tantalizing glimpse of the mythical coastal kingdom of “Beach” on a promontory, superficially similar to what would be known as Cape York on the northern coast of Australia, of the vast south land of “Terra Australis”. According to Suarez, the “error can be traced to the 1532 ‘Novus Orbis’ of Huttich, which was published in Paris with the map of Fine, and in Basle with the map of Munster/Holbein. This volume contained the text of Marco Polo’s journey, but it mistakenly corrupts Polo’s “Lochac” to “Boeach”, which in turn was shortened to “Beach””. An error Mercator duplicated on this on his large world map of 1569, and which persisted on maps, well into the 1600s.

Abraham Ortelius’s general map of Southeast Asia remained a standard component of his ‘Theatrum…’, from the time it first appeared in 1570 to the last edition of 1612, when Ortelius had been long dead.

The mapmaker

Abraham Ortelius (1527-1598) took an active interest in cartography from an early age. He began his career as a “kaarten afzetter” (illuminator of maps) purchasing single (generally wall) maps from booksellers and colouring them for re-sale. He travelled extensively in his search for new material and was a well-known face at the Frankfurt bookfairs. It was whilst travelling that Ortelius built up his unrivalled web of contacts, which included many of the leading historians, scientists, and cartographer’s of the day.

These contacts would prove invaluable in the compiling and completion of his ‘Theatrum orbis Terrarum’ first published in 1570. The work was “the first true atlas” (van der Broecke): all the maps were of a uniform size and style, with an engraved title, accompanying text, and – hitherto unheard

of in cartographic publications – a list of the source material. With its comprehensive scope, the atlas was a huge step forward compared with the contemporary “Lafreri” atlases, which were bound up to order and so reflected the whims of the customer. Even though it was the most expensive work published at the time, it proved an instant success with four versions of the first edition being printed in 1570 alone. The work would go on to be published for 42 years, with some 31 editions being produced.

Bibliography

Literature: Clancy, ‘The Mapping of Terra Australis’, 5.16; Suarez, ‘Early Mapping of Southeast Asia’, pages 164-167, image 86; Tooley, ‘The Mapping of Australia’, 937.

Provenance

Price: £3000

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