

Engraved map with outline hand colour.

THE EMPIRE OF JAPAN

L'Empire du Japon. Divise en sept principles, et subdivise en soixante et six Royaumes. Par. Le S.r Robert Geog. Ord. du Roi. Avec Privilege. 1750

Author
ROBERT DE VAUGONDY, Gilles

Publication date
1750 [but 1757].

Publisher
chez les auteurs, Boudet],

Publication place
[Paris,

Physical description
Engraved map with outline hand colour.

Dimensions
544 by 769mm. (21.5 by 30.25 inches).

Notes
Included in the 'Atlas Universel', a collection of 108 maps by Gilles (the father) and Didier (his son) Robert de Vaugondy, but published by Antoine Boudet in large and small paper editions. Boudet had first collaborated with the Robert de Vaugondys when in 1751 he had published Didier's 'Usages des Globes celestes et terrestes faits par ordre du roi', for which he was created 'geographe du roi'.

Pedley describes Boudet as “enterprising and somewhat unscrupulous”, and the publication of the ‘Atlas Universel’ was prolonged and controversial, explaining the disparity between the date engraved on the map of Japan, and its date of publication in the atlas. Boudet came under criticism for being involved in the publication of maps, since he was a bookseller not a geographer; for the quality of the first 17 maps, which were full of errors, and deemed unoriginal; and for not paying his engravers, Jean-Henri Delahaye, his wife, his sister-in-law, and their extended workshop for their work. The maps were eventually approved by Cassini. The map of Japan was not one of those considered to be inaccurate, and was taken from Bellin’s map of 1735, with the exception of the northernmost part of Honshu, where the Robert de Vaugondys have borrowed from D’Anville’s 1732 depiction of the strait of Tsugaru and the general shape of southern Hokkaido in his ‘Carte Generale de la Tartarie Chinoise’ The depiction of Korea also follows the D’Anville map.

As Pedley reports, the ‘Atlas Universel’ was the first atlas ever sold in France by subscription. It also included an introduction by Didier, ‘Essai sur l’Historie de Geographie’, a history of geographic thought and cartographic activity from antiquity to the eighteenth century, which had already appeared in book form in 1755. For this atlas, the essay also included an analytical description of their map sources, and a list of subscribers.

The Robert de Vaugondy family of cartographers was “securely based on the stock in trade of the great Nicolas Sanson, inherited in 1730 by Didier’s father Gilles” (Katherine Swift). Gilles entered the map trade rather late in life, being already 46 when appointed ‘geographe du roi’ in 1734. “He was a professor of mathematics who, according to later sources, had travelled a great deal in his youth. After befriending the ailing and aging Pierre Moullard-Sanson in 1730, he became one of the three heirs to Moullard-Sanson’s geographical ‘fonds’ along with Jean Fremont, a lawyer, and Jacques-Simon Perrier, a priest. Robert and Fremont bought out Perrier’s share of the Sanson stock, and Robert added to this collection by buying the plates of Nicolas Sanson from Jean Mariette in 1733. Robert’s earliest map dates from 1731 (‘Cours de la Meuse’, in ‘l’Historie de Verdun’, 1745); much of his early work appeared as maps supplementing texts of books. Nonetheless, it is fair to say with Buache, that Gilles Robert de Vaugondy mostly issued Sanson maps with minor modifications. It was his son Didier (1723-1786) who wrote the theoretical books, taught geography and mathematics, presented memoires to the Academy of Sciences, as well as publishing new maps” (Mary Sponberg Pedley, ‘New Light on an Old Atlas’, for Imago Mundi, 1984, volume 36, pages 48-63).

Bibliography
Hubbard 101.1.

Provenance

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