Double-page engraved map, with hand-colour.

THE FIRST ENGLISH PRINTED MAP OF ASIA

Asia with the Islands adioyning described, the atire of the people, & Townes of importance, all of them newly augmented by I:S: Ano. Dom: 1626.

Author
SPEED, John

Publication date
1626, [but 1627-1632].

Publisher
Are to be sold in pops-head alley against the Exchange by G. Humble,

Publication place
[London],

Physical description
Double-page engraved map, with hand-colour.

Dimensions
400 by 510mm. (15.75 by 20 inches).

Notes
The first English printed map of the continent of Asia, from the first atlas compiled and published by an Englishman, Speed’s ‘Prospect’.

The map is heavily influenced by Hondius’ 1623 map – and inherits the gaps in his geographical

understanding of Asia: Korea is presented as a peninsula, and an anonymous stretch of water separates Asia from America, identified only as a blending of ‘The Tartarian Sea’ and ‘The West Ocean’. In India, one finds the mythical ‘Lake Ciamay’, a common feature of European maps of Asia from the 16th to the 18th c., the imagined source of the major rivers of south-east Asia. The map is not without topographical accuracy, however. In China, the Great Wall of China is depicted, described as ‘a bulwarke […] against the suddaine infall of ye Tartars on this side’.

Vignettes in the border at the top of the map depict bird’s-eye views of important towns, among them ‘Goa’ and ‘Aden’. Illustrated in the borders along the sides of the map are costumed figures.

Accompanying text in English, ‘The Description of Asia’, is printed on the reverse.

John Speed (1552-1629) was the outstanding cartographer of his age. By trade a merchant tailor, but by proclivity a historian, it was the patronage of Sir Fulke Greville, poet and statesman, that allowed him to pursue this interest in earnest. His ‘Theatre of Great Britain’, first published in 1611 or 1612, was the first large-scale printed atlas of the British Isles. The ‘Prospect of the Most Famous Parts of the World’, from which the present work is drawn, appeared in 1627, bound with the ‘Theatre’, and is the first world atlas compiled by an Englishman to be published in England. Engraved in Amsterdam, many of the maps are anglicized versions of works by Dutch makers in distinctive carte-à-figure style, featuring borders with figures in local costume and city views.

Bibliography
Chubb, XXV; ‘Mapping the Continent of Asia’, 30; Shirley [Atlases], T.SPE-2a; Suárez, 200.

Provenance

Price: £2500

Inventory reference: 21912

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