

First edition, second issue. Folio (565 by 355 mm). [14], 125, [1b.] pp.; 219 pp. Engraved allegorical frontispiece by F.H. van Hoven and 29 double-page astronomical maps, all finely coloured by a contemporary hand. Publisher’s Dutch vellum, gilt-panelled with large central arabesque, smooth spine in eight compartments, yapp board-edges, gilt edges, recased in original binding.

THE ONLY CELESTIAL ATLAS PUBLISHED DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF DUTCH CARTOGRAPHY

Harmonia Macrocosmica sev atlas universalis et novus, totius universi creati cosmographiam generalem, et novam exhibens.

Author
CELLARIUS, Andreas.

Publication date
1661

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Physical description
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Dimensions

Notes
First edition, second issue – the first being dated 1660 – of the only celestial atlas published during the Golden Age of Dutch cartography, and probably the finest celestial atlas ever realized.

The first 21 sumptuous Baroque style charts beautifully represent the three competing astronomical models of the day: the Ptolemaic, Tychonic and the Copernican. The Ptolemaic, named after the second century A.D. astronomer Ptolemy, was the oldest of the celestial theories, and, until the beginning of the sixteenth century, was the accepted doctrine on planetary motion. Ptolemy proposed a geocentric solar system with the sun and planets and fixed stars born on concentric spherical shells orbiting a stationary earth. The theory was endorsed by the church, that saw it reinforcing Man's position at the centre of God's universe, and its emphasis on the dichotomy between the ever changing sinful earth and the immutable motion of the heavens. The theory was giving some scientific credence by the church's reference to the 'father of physics': Aristotle. By the turn of the sixteenth century and the dawn of the Age of Discovery, the model was beginning to show signs of age. The star charts and tables used for navigation on the high seas, by the likes of Columbus and da Gama, were soon found wanting. This led men to seek new and more accurate observations of the heavens. One such man was Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543), whose observations led him to publish 'De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium' ("On the Revolutions of the Celestial Orbs") in Nuremberg in 1543. In it he placed the sun at the centre of the solar system with the planets orbiting in perfect circular motion. It would, however, take a century and a half for a new physics to be devised, by the likes of Galileo Galilei, to underpin Copernicus's heliocentric astronomy. Tycho Brahe (1546-1601) offered a rather inelegant third theory, which attempted to keep faith with the old Ptolemaic model, whilst embracing aspects of the new Copernican system. His theory kept the Earth in the centre of the universe, so as to retain Aristotelian physics. The Moon and Sun revolved about the Earth, and the shell of the fixed stars was centered on the Earth. But Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn revolved around the Sun. This Tychonic world system became popular early in the seventeenth century among those who felt forced to reject the Ptolemaic arrangement of the planets (in which the Earth was the centre of all motions) but who, for reasons of faith, could not accept the Copernican alternative.

The last eight plates represent celestial hemispheres and planispheres depicting the constellations: they are the most ornate of all, and their level of artistic detail has made these plates very popular.

Andreas Cellarius was born in Neuhausen, a small town near Worms in Germany. From 1625 to 1637 he worked as a schoolmaster in Amsterdam and later The Hague, and in 1637 moved to Hoorn, where Cellarius was appointed to be the rector of the Latin School.

The coloured maps of the present copy are particularly attractive, with the pastiness and the opulence of the colours lending the maps pictorial significance.

Of the various engravers and authors who worked on the plates of the atlas, only two have signed their work: Frederik Hendrik van den Hove, author of the frontispiece, and Johannes van Loon, who engraved ten plates. Moreover, all the designs of the classical constellations were taken from the ones created by Jan Pieterszoon Saenredam.

Bibliography
Brown Astronomical Atlases, pp. 40-41. Biblioteca Civica Bertoliana, Vicenza, Teatro del cielo e della terra, p. 33-34; 36. Brown, Astronomical atlases, pp. 40-42. Honeyman Coll. II, 658; Lalande, p. 248; Lister, p. 48. Poggendorf, I, 409 Koeman, Atlantes Neerlandici, IV, Cel I

Provenance

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