



First state. Double-page engraved map, with contemporary hand-colour in full, Latin text on verso.

“A VERY NEW DESCRIPTION OF THE PEACEFUL SEA, COMMONLY CALLED SOUTH SEA WITH THE REGIONS LYING AROUND IT, AND ITS ISLANDS, SCATTERED EVERYWHERE” (ORTELIUS)

Maris Pacifici, (quod vulgo Mar del Zur). Cum regionibus circumiacentibus, insulisque in eodem passim sparsis, novissima description.

Author

ORTELIUS, Abraham

Publication date

1609.

Publisher

Jan Baptist Vrients,

Publication place

Antwerp,

Physical description

First state. Double-page engraved map, with contemporary hand-colour in full, Latin text on verso.

Dimensions

346 by 499mm (13.5 by 19.75 inches).

Notes

This, the first printed map to focus on the Pacific Ocean, is the “most important sixteenth-century

cartographic statement of the considerable Spanish contribution to exploration of the southern seas. Following the initial circumnavigation in 1519-22 by Magellan's ship 'Victoria', Spaniards such as Mendana and Quiros sought the east coast of Terra Australis" (Clancy).

Indeed, the 'Victoria' features large in this beautiful map, and she has something to say, which appears in a caption beneath her portrait: "Prima ego velivovis ambivi cursibus Orbem, Magellane novo te duce ducta freto. Ambivi, meritoque vocor VICTORIA: sunt mi Vela, alae; precium, gloria: pugna mare" - I was the first to sail around the world by means of sails, and carried you, Magellan, leader, first through the straits. I sailed around the world, therefore I am justly called Victoria (Victory), my sails were my wings, my prize was glory, my fight was with the sea.

As with his map of the Americas, Ortelius has ostentatiously signed his name to it, in a magnificent dedicatory cartouche to the honourable Lord Nicolaus Roccoxius, patrician of Antwerp, and senator of that city, lower left: "Abrahamus Ortelius Regiae Mts. geographus sub. merito dedicabat. 1589" - Abraham Ortelius, geographer of his royal Majesty because of merit, has dedicated [this map] in 1589". And proclaimed his privilege to publish it for ten years, lower right: "Cum privilegiis Imp. & Reg. Maiestatum, nec non Cancellariae Brabantiae, ad decennium" - with privileges of the imperial and royal Majesties, as well as of the Brabant council, for a period of ten years.

This is only the third map that Ortelius would inscribe in such a way. "Ortelius took pride in the practice of crediting his maps' authors, whose names often appear in the dedicating cartouche. But here he credits only himself. The map is probably his own composite of data from various sources. Additional fuel to the mystery surrounding this map lies in its depiction of New Guinea. Although New Guinea had been discovered possibly as early as 1511, the question of whether it was an island or part of Terra Australis remained unanswered until Torres's incredible voyage of 1605. As his discovery was concealed and officially forgotten, it remained an enigma until the first voyage of James Cook" (Suarez).

The present example is the first state of the map, first published by Christopher Plantin in 1589, in general, the map based upon Gerard Mercator's world map of 1569, with details from 25 Portuguese manuscript maps of Bartolomeo de Lasso which Plancius obtained and later used for his own world map. Ortelius shows the Moluccas and the Philippines, already the site of considerable Dutch activity and a misshapen Japan. An odd 'Isla de Plata' appears above Japan, which appears in its 'turtle-shape' configuration for the first time, derived from the 1568 manuscript of Vaz Dourado. Guam ('Isla de Ladrones') is shown. The Solomons, or Melanesia, are located, as are some of the islands of Micronesia.

The treatment of America and most notably the Northwest Coast is reminiscent of Hondius' America. This map, and the Hondius and Le Clerc rare map of 1589 (known only in the 1602 edition) have a curious and not fully understood relationship as to which is truly the first map of the Pacific, although because no example of the 1589 Hondius-Le Clerc has been discovered, this map retains primacy. As Wagner comments: "it constitutes a distinct departure, being unlike any other map...published before 1589". The breadth of the Northwest Coast now encompasses almost 65 degrees, the previously used place-names from Niza and Coronado have been deleted and replaced with new ones, and the Gulf of California appears in a new fashion. And in South America, the infamous bulge (1570) and its somewhat indented correction (1587) now appears in a straighter, compromised version.

Ortelius's 'Theatrum Orbis Terrarum' is widely regarded as the first modern atlas. At the time of its publication, it was the most expensive book ever produced. Between 1570 and 1612, it was issued in 31 editions and seven languages.

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.

The publisher

Joannes Baptista Vrients (1552-1612), Dutch cartographer and publisher, with a close connection to Cornelis Claesz, “the dominant printer and merchant in the Dutch Republic for printed and hand-drawn maps, charts, rutters and atlases relating to overseas trade” (Zandfliet), for the period 1580-1610. Vrients is probably best known for acquiring the plates and stock printed by Christopher Plantijn of Abraham Ortelius’s ‘Theatrum...’ Ortelius’s heirs in 1602. In spite of publishing some important and beautiful maps, and editions of the ‘Theatrum’, Vrients was bankrupt within ten years, and his stock was sold at auction in April 1612 when the Plantin-Moretus family bought several hundred plates.

Bibliography

Literature: Burden, ‘The Mapping of North America’, 74; Clancy, ‘So Came They South’, page 48; Clancy, ‘The Mapping of Terra Australis’, 5.6; Suarez, ‘Early Mapping of the Pacific’, 65; Suarez, ‘Shedding the Veil’, plate XV; Van den Broecke, ‘Ortelius Atlas Maps: An Illustrated Guide’, 12.1 1609L6.

Provenance

Price: £10000

Inventory reference: 23135