



Double-page engraved chart.

“FRETUM LE MAIRE”

Untitled charts of the Pacific, New Guinea, and the Strait of Le Maire.

Author

SPILBERGEN, Joris van; and Jacob Le MAIRE

Publication date

1619].

Publisher

apud Nicolaum à Geelkercken,

Publication place

[Lugduni Batauorum,

Physical description

Double-page engraved chart.

Dimensions

155 by 435mm. (6 by 17.25 inches).

Notes

A detailed chart of the route taken by Jacob Le Maire and Willem Schouten from Porto Desire across the Pacific to New Guinea, with insets of their route along the north coast of New Guinea, and through the strait that was named for him: “Fretum le Maire”, to the south of Tierra del Fuego.

Published in Joris van Spilbergen’s ‘Speculum orientalis occidentalisque Indiae navigationum’ (1619). In 1614 the VOC enjoined Spilbergen to sail with six vessels to the Moluccas via the Straits of Magellan. The five-year circumnavigation was the first carried out with the official support of the Dutch government. Although officially a trading mission, Spilbergen was authorised by the VOC to use force to disrupt the Spanish Pacific trade (Allen).

Once the Seventeen Provinces had freed themselves from Spanish rule in 1581, they no longer had access to the Habsburg trading empire and needed to establish their own presence in the Pacific. Spilbergen himself believed that “the best and only means of reestablishing our affairs in the Indies and of making ourselves entirely masters of the Moluccas is, in my opinion, to dispatch a fleet and armada direct to the Philippines, in order to attack the Spaniards there, and to overpower all the places and strongholds it may be possible to conquer” (Zaide).

After various mutinies and even more numerous acts of piracy, Spilbergen sailed through the Straits, he and his fleet captured and occupied Acapulco for a week, and then commenced their voyage across the Pacific in November of 1615. En route they discovered many islands, eventually reaching the Ladrões or Mariana Islands, and finally the Philippines where they spent a month raiding Manila-bound shipping, and the Dutch East Indies. There Spilbergen met up with Le Maire, who had discovered a new passage to the Pacific and had explored the Tuamotou Archipelago. Le Maire’s voyages gave decisive evidence against the supposed existence of a massive southern continent and formed a catalyst to Tasman’s discovery of New Zealand and Australia.

Jacob Le Maire and Cornelis Schouten’s voyage from Texel in June 1615, was a mission to find a new route to reach the Spices Islands which would break the trade monopoly of the VOC (which had been granted a monopoly trade through the Strait of Magellan). The pair succeeded by rounding South America south of the Straits of Magellan. The new cape was named “Horn” (or “Hoorn”) after Schouten’s ship which had been lost due to fire at the Patagonian port Desire. In doing so they also dispelled the myth of a great southern continent joined to South America.

Le Maire and Schouten would continue to sail across the Pacific, discovering numerous islands along the way, and sailing up the northern coast of New Guinea. By September 1616 Le Maire reached Ternate in the Moluccas, the headquarters of the VOC. Initially well received, they were soon accused of having encroached on the rights of the Company and were tried, found guilty and shipped home on Spilbergen’s ship which was completing its own trip around the world. Le Maire died on the return voyage and his journals were taken by the Company. Schouten and Spilbergen published an abbreviated version of the journals; but it was not until 1622, after a long trial, that Isaac Le Maire was able to regain custody of his son’s journals and to publish them in full.

Bibliography

Allen, ‘North American Exploration: A New World Disclosed’, 1997; Suarez, ‘Early Mapping of Southeast Asia’, 1999, pages 202-204; Zaide, ‘Philippine Political and Cultural History: The Philippines since pre-Spanish Times’, 1957.

Provenance

Provenance: Freycinet family archives

Price: £1400

Inventory reference: 22667