

First issue. Double-page engraved map, with contemporary hand-colour in full, skilful restoration of blank margin at lower left, not affecting image.

THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE GALLEGO STRING

Orbis Terrae Novissima Descriptio. Authore Gerardo Mercatore, nuperime vero iuxta recentiores Cosmographos aucta et recognita. I. Hondius sculp. I. le Clerc excu.

Author
LE CLERC, Jean; and Jodocus HONDIUS I

Publication date
1602.

Publisher

Publication place

Physical description
First issue. Double-page engraved map, with contemporary hand-colour in full, skilful restoration of blank margin at lower left, not affecting image.

Dimensions
330 by 515mm (13 by 20.25 inches).

Notes
Dated 1602, but later impression with a crack appearing in the top left-hand corner of the plate. Published separately, but also found in Mercator-Hondius atlases of the time, and issued in conjunction with a series of maps of the continents, that of the Americas being dated 1589. The maps is “significant for its depiction of a string of Pacific islands that span the ocean from the tip of

South America to just south of New Guinea, skirting what would be the north coast of Queensland. The only prior map to show this chain was a 1589 miniature, also by Hondius, known in only two copies (Shirley 164). Gallego explored off southern Chile in 1557, and sighted some Pacific atolls. The Gallego string was later popularised by Hondius in 'Polus Antarcticus' and Jansson in his Pacific map" (Brown).

Engraved by Jodocus Hondius I, after the work of his colleague Gerard Mercator, although the delineation of South America has been improved, and incorporates hypothetical information from Sir Francis Drake's explorations. It anticipates Le Maire's discovery of a sea route to the south of Tierra del Fuego into the Pacific. Drake, navigating towards the Magellan Strait, had suspected that open ocean lay south of the Tierra del Fuego, previously assumed to be part of the massive southern continent, Terra Australis, and that therefore the Pacific could be entered by sailing south around it. If that geography, as expressed on Le Clerc's map, was correct then the monopoly held by the Dutch East India Company on all trade through the Strait, could be circumvented, allowing for an eastern entrance to the Pacific, and all the wealth that it contained.

It is likely that this map, as well as the so-called "Drake Broadside" engraved by Hondius several years earlier, helped influence Jacob Le Maire and Schouten in their voyages which sought to test the theory. Jacob's father, Isaac Le Maire, organized an expedition under the auspices of a new company, the Compagnie Australe, which was granted a charter securing the rights to the first four voyages to countries it could discover by "new passages". In the first of these, the voyage of 1615-1617, Jacob Le Maire and Captain Schouten succeeded in navigating what is now called Cape Hoorn. However, their expedition, perhaps the greatest of Dutch exploratory voyages, ended in Batavia in humiliation: the resident colonial officialdom did not [want to] believe the news and the implications of their discovery, and so seized their cargo, for infringing the VOC monopoly, and dispatched them back to Holland as prisoners. Le Maire did not survive the journey home.

Bibliography
Literature: Shirley, 'The mapping of the world: early printed world maps, 1472-1700', 233.

Provenance

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