

Latin text, folio (485 by 330mm), engraved allegorical title-page, double-page portrait of Mercator and Hondius, three engraved selctional titles, 164 engraved maps (all but one double-page), all with FINE ORIGINAL HAND-COLOUR IN FULL, title heightened in gold, title page with ink owner inscriptions of Dr. P. J. Esteve, Chaplain of the church at Palau, and of Baron de Wetzel, the latter dated 1720, Iceland map soiled and with old tape repair to long curving tear from tail edge to fore edge, two other maps with repairs just slightly touching their images, perhaps a score of other leaves with marginal restoration, eighteenth century Dutch spotted calf, gilt, covers with large elaborate centerpiece of tulip, daisy, dove, and nautilus shell tools enclosed by two gilt frames of wide floral rolls with flower sprays at corners, raised bands, spine ornately gilt in compartments with floral spray centerpiece and scrolling corner tooling, gilt lettering, all edges gilt and gauffered, small repairs to head and tail of spine, joints and extremities a little rubbed.

THE MERCATOR-HONDIUS ATLAS, BEAUTIFULLY COLOURED AND BOUND

Atlas Sive Cosmographicae Meditationes de Fabrica Mundi et Fabricati Figura.

Author
MERCATOR, Gerard

Publication date
1630

Publisher
Henricus Hondius,

Publication place
Amsterdam,

Physical description

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Dimensions

Notes

A gloriously hand-coloured and handsomely bound example of the 1630 Mercator-Hondius atlas.

The birth of the modern atlas as we know it was far from simple. The first collections of maps representing the world were put together in Italy and are loosely called Lafreri atlases after their main proponent, Antonio Lafreri. These, however, contained maps by various cartographers and therefore were in different styles and sizes, many maps often forced to bear disproportionately large margins to make the pages uniform. In 1570, Abraham Ortelius published the ‘Theatrum Orbis Terrarum’, the first collection of maps with a uniform size and style. It was an immediate success.

Only towards the end of his life did Gerard Mercator (1512-94), the inventor of the projection named after him, undertake the ambitious project of creating a cosmography that would contain an account of the creation of the world, a description of the universe, descriptions of the countries and oceans of the world, genealogies and political histories of the countries, and a chronology of the cosmos. He intended to draw all the maps, write all the text and cut all the plates himself. Unsurprisingly, the weighty task would require more time than he could afford to give it, and he was only able to complete a few of the parts: the creation; the maps for Ptolemy’s ‘Geographia’ — part of the geographical section — in 1578; four of the modern parts. The first three were published together in 1585 and included France, the Low Countries, and Germany. The fourth part, of Italy, the Balkans, and Greece, appeared in 1589. Mercator died on December 2, 1594, leaving the responsibility for completion of the cosmography to his son Rumold. The ‘Atlas Sive Cosmographicae’, bearing the first use of the term ‘atlas’ in the modern sense, was finally completed by his son, Rumold Mercator, who published the work in 1595 with 107 maps.

In 1604, the prominent Amsterdam map publisher Jodocus Hondius (1563-1612) acquired the plates, issuing the first Mercator-Hondius “Atlas” two years later, having added 37 newly engraved maps to the original 107. Hondius’ brother-in-law, Pieter van den Berg, a teacher, wrote the introduction and the text on the versos of the maps. A 1611 edition increased the number of maps to 150, and a further six were added in 1619. Henricius Jodocus took over publication of the atlas in 1620, and made the first real updates in some time, adding nine newly engraved maps for the 1630 printing.

According to Dr. Marco van Egmond, Curator of Special Collections at the University of Utrecht, “The expansion of the 1630 edition up to a total of 164 maps cannot be viewed separately from the new competition in publishing atlases.” Willem Blaeu had produced his first terrestrial atlas that same year, and Amsterdam was becoming recognised as the European centre of cartography, a position it would hold through the seventeenth century. Thus, the Mercator-Hondius atlas is an emblem not only of cartographic development, but also of an intense and productive commercial

rivalry.

The present example shows fine contemporary hand-colour, with even the smallest details, such as the historiated initials, enlivened by the colourist. Its attractive binding was almost certainly executed by an Amsterdam workshop, and, although it is in the style popular in the Dutch capital during the eighteenth century, we have been unable to match the tools used with those recorded in Jan Storm van Leeuwen's "Dutch Decorated Bookbinding."

Bibliography
Van der Krogt: 1:107.

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 20492

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