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Nova et Exacta Asia Geographica Descriptio . . .

Stock#: 89862
Map Maker: Blaeu / Scolari
Date: 1646
Place: Venice
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: See Description
Size: 55 x 40 inches
Price: \$ 92,500.00



Description:

Blaeu's Monumental Map of Asia—Rare Italian Edition

Remarkably well preserved example Blaeu's famous, and exceedingly rare, wall map of Asia.

Published in Venice in about 1646 by Stefano Scolari, this is the earliest example of the map published outside of Amsterdam, the present example being a previously unknown early state.

As described in greater detail below the map is a tour de force in contemporary cartographic information, most notably in Southeast Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, China and Korea.

First published in about 1609, Blaeu's original map of Asia was, at the time of publication both a monumental work of visual artistry and at the cutting edge of cartographic knowledge. Blaeu enjoyed the benefit of access to the newest information coming early Dutch explorations in the region, and would later become the official mapmaker of both the Dutch East India Company and Dutch West India Company. His first set of maps were issued in 1608 and 1609, a wall map of the World, the four continents and the Holy Roman Empire. With no recorded examples of the complete 1609 Asia map surviving to this date and only a few examples of the later printings. Beginning with the present map of 1646, several Italian and French publishers made close copies of the original Blaeu wall map of Asia, with the present example being the earliest known example.

The present map is a spectacular example of the grand genre of wall, or parlor, maps that enjoyed an iconic place in 17th and early 18th-century Europe. At the pinnacle of this genre were the maps of the Blaeu family, generally regarded as the finest wall map makers of the Golden Age. Large, highly



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decorative and expensive productions, they were considered to be the ultimate signs of wealth and intellectual sophistication. In this vein, Blaeu wall maps appeared prominently in works of fine art, most notably the paintings of Johannes Vermeer. Displayed in the salons of leading merchants and noblemen, the maps were especially prone to damage and their survival rate is extremely low, especially in this condition.

Contents and sources

The map shows Asia in great detail, utilizing Portuguese charts and sources from early Dutch expeditions to the East Indies. It stretches from Egypt to the Marianas (Ladrones), and from the Arctic to Java.

The major cartographic change by Scolari is the re-engraving of New Guinea. Blaeu's original shows the island of Ceiram. However, the 1615-1617 circumnavigation of Le Maire and Schouten added new information about the coast of New Guinea (and Tierra del Fuego), which is shown on this map. The western end of the previous island is still visible.

Beyond this change, the map offers a well-researched overview of Asia as understood in Amsterdam at the start of the seventeenth century. The Great Wall of China is included, as are many narrative notes borrowed from voyage and travel accounts as old as Marco Polo and as recent as the first Dutch voyages to the East Indies and Japan at the turn of the seventeenth century. The Dutch were expanding their trading empire at this time, as well as starting to dominate the map trade. When this map was originally compiled in the first decade of the seventeenth century, the Dutch were making inroads in the East Indies spice trade and the China trade in places like Macao. The map does not include Australia, but the Dutch would also encounter that landmass in the first decades of the century.

Inland areas are thickly blanketed with towns, mountains ranges, deserts, and other features. For example, the Arabian Peninsula shows many settlements ringing the coasts before giving way to a desert interior. It also has sites that are still familiar today. These include Bahrem (Bahrain), Mt. Sinai, Mecca, and Medina.

The map shares many details with Blaeu's 1605 world map. Both show the Strait of Anian (see below). Southeast and East Asia are drawn from Portuguese maps and charts. The Ganges is shown on a mistaken course and there are no Himalayas, underlining that there was much still to be learned. Indeed, the Malaccan Peninsula and the Gulf of Siam are more precise and detailed here than on the 1605 world map, showing how Blaeu was improving his geography in a few short years. Similarly, Korea is still shown as an island here, but it is elongated rather than circular (see below).

On the Malaccan Peninsula is Sincapura, or Singapore. At this time, the name referred to a trading



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settlement, although the town had earlier ties to both the Kingdom of Siam and the Majapahit Empire. Soon after this map was made, in 1613, the Portuguese burned the settlement, making this a fleeting glimpse of the place in a time of transition.

Much here has been taken from the voyage accounts of Jan Huyghen van Linschoten. As a young man, Linschoten traveled the world as part of the Portuguese East Indies trade. In 1583, his brother secured him a position as the Secretary to the Archbishop of Goa, a Portuguese colony. While abroad, he kept a diary, and began collecting other travelers' diaries and accounts upon his return.

In 1594, Linschoten set out with Willem Barentsz on an exploratory expedition to find the Northeast Passage. The crew had many adventures, including an encounter with a polar bear, which they killed while attempting to capture it. Eventually, the crews had to turn back because of ice, a situation that also happened with a similar expedition the following year. Upon his return, Linschoten published his journal from the Barentsz voyages. In 1595, he also published *Reysgheschrift vande navigation der Portugaloyzers in Orienten* (Travel Accounts of Portuguese Navigation in the Orient) based on his research. The work includes sailing directions in addition to descriptions of lands still new to Europeans, like Japan.

The Arctic here is based on Linschoten and other recent exploration. Novaya Zemla and Spitsbergen were both drawn from the first two voyages of Henry Hudson in 1607 and 1608. The image of the reindeer and the sleigh, and of the "*Samoiedae*" are based on Linschoten's account of his time with Barentsz. The inset is meant to show off these recent expeditions. The text translates as:

Four different times, viz. in 1594, '95, '96 and 1609, the Dutch bravely tried to locate a passage through the northernmost regions of Europe and Asia close to the North Pole in order to find an easier navigational route to Cathay and China. As the situation of these regions cannot be seen accurately enough, because they are not depicted in an overlapping way, we have decided to present them to the conscientious observer on a separate map (Schilder, MCN, vol. V, p. 138).

In 1597, Linschoten published again, this time a description of the African coast. His most famous work, however, is *Itinerario: Voyage ofte schipvaert van Jan Huyghen van Linschoten naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien, 1579-1592* (Travel account of the voyage of the sailor Jan Huyghen van Linschoten to Portuguese East India). It was published in 1596 by Cornelis Claesz, an associate of Blaeu's in Amsterdam. It was quickly translated into English (1598), German (1598), and French (1610). Latin editions appeared in Frankfurt and Amsterdam in 1599. It also contained important, detailed maps by the van Langrenns which formed the foundation for this map's depiction of the East Indies and for the information about spices and local animals.

Another text cartouche, this one in the interior of Africa, explains how to calculate distance with a pair of



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compasses. This indicates that, however ornate the maps were, they were intended for at least some practical use as well. The translation is:

The distances of places to be calculated with the pair of compasses. On a drawn circle AENMBSD, divided into 360 parts, and with a diameter ACB, the difference in longitude of two places must be subtracted, from A down; a radius should be drawn to the end of the count, here for instance D. Then the largest latitude must be drawn, from A upwards, where one ends in E. A perpendicular EF must be dropped on the underlying diameter AB. However, the smallest latitude must be subtracted from D in the direction of B. From that point, here G, a perpendicular GH is dropped on the radius DC. The distance of the points FH is cut off (from the diameter) from F in the direction of B, and this equals FK. Then, provided the latitudes are homogenous, (that is; both belonging to either the northern or the southern hemisphere), one cuts off EI, which equals the perpendicular HG, from the long perpendicular EF from E in the direction of F. Then the straight line IK (the connection between the points I and K) is the chord of the required distance of the places. If one draws this upwards from B to the circumference of the circle, the arc BM indicates how many degrees and consequently how many miles the places you postulated are apart from each other. If the latitudes are heterogenous, the straight line FE must be drawn as far as L, so that EL equals the perpendicular GH. Then KL is the chord of the distance you asked. You draw it upwards to the circumference of the circle and BN provides the distance of your places in degrees (Schilder, MCN, vol. V, pgs. 137-8).

Decorative elements

Blaeu's continental maps also well known for the decorative borders. The decorative elements were originally etched by Hessel Gerritsz and have been skillfully rendered here on this Italian edition.

Blaeu's use of these decorative elements would make these paneled maps with costumes and cities framing the cartography the highest form of decorative artwork on maps. While Abraham Ortelius, Jodocus Hondius and Claes Jansz Visscher had issued similar maps in the prior decades, it was Blaeu's work that most widely disseminated the genre. . They were first seen in Amsterdam thanks to the work of Van der Keere in 1596, but they were most successfully utilized by Hondius, back in Holland, and Blaeu. For example, there are superb borders on Jodocus Hondius' fifteen-sheet map of Europe (1595), the first to introduce costumed figures on the sides. They are also present on Jodocus Hondius's twenty-sheet map of the world (1605), which adopted round and oval town views for the first time. The trend of decorative borders spread across Europe and lasted in the Netherlands until the that later part of the 17th Century.

The costumed figures shown here are drawn from a variety of sources including costume books, popular prints, and travel literature. The Chinese come from De Bry images, while the Japanese and the Marianas



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islanders are taken from De Noort's voyage account. The Tartars are inspired by the prints of Eneo Vito, while the Muscovites are based on the work of Joost Amman. The Syrians are from Nicolas de Nicoloy and the Gujaratis from Linschoten.

The twelve town and city views also originate from travel writing and city books, especially Braun and Hogenberg's *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*. Goa is from the evergreen Linschoten, Bantam from the work of De Houtman, and Gammalamme from Van Neck.

Rarity and states

All states and editions of Blaeu's map of Asia are rare.

The 1609 first state is known in three states:

- State 1: circa 1609. Schilder notes incomplete examples of this state appear in the collections of the BnF and the Rittersaalverein, Burgdorf. Both of these are without the decorative borders and text and may in fact be later states. An earlier example with the borders and text is [here](#).
- State 2: 1612. One known example, Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Dresden (Schr. II, Mappe 32 b, Nr. 3).
- State 3. 1624, Henricus Hondius imprint. Here, the text has been reset and the imprint line changed, but the geographical plates appear to have been untouched. Known in one surviving example, Herzogin Anna-Amalia Bibliothek, Weimar.

A later state by Claus Jansz Visscher is known only from external evidence with no surviving examples (fourth state, pre-1632). Nicolaas Visscher produced two states; a fifth state (dated 1657) survives in one state, and a sixth (n.d.) is known in two institutional examples and one Sotheby's sales catalog from 1980.

The map proved popular in Italy, resulting in several re-engraved editions. The present example is the 1646 edition printed in Venice by Stefano Scolari, the earliest of the Italian editions. It is apparently a unique survival, similar to the example held at the Perugia University, which has a Latin text added with the date 1646. Similar maps with slightly different titles than the present map and the Perugia example are held at the Library of Congress and the National Maritime Museum.

There were also sets of the continental maps printed in Paris in 1699 by Hubert Jaillot, Bologna by Pietro Todeschi (1673) and in Rome by R. B. de Rossi (1666 and 1686).

Detailed Condition:

Old color, retouched. Copperplate engraving on eight sheets of 17th-century laid paper. Some expert and



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near-invisible reinstatement of image in facsimile. Expertly restored tears. Overall, an extremely attractive example of a wall map often seen in poor condition.