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Orbis Terrae Compendiosa Descriptio Quam ex Magna Universali Mercatoris . . . MDLXXXVII

Stock#: 56971
Map Maker: Mercator
Date: 1587
Place: Geneva
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG
Size: 21 x 14 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

The Only Obtainable Mercator World Map--Early Edition!!

Attractive, separately published example of Rumold Mercator's map of the world, first printed in Geneva in 1587. It is based on Gerard Mercator's celebrated 1569 world map and was made while Gerard was still alive (1512- 1594). This is the only collectible world map with direct input from Gerard Mercator, the greatest geographer of his era. Both his 1538 and 1569 world maps are unobtainable rarities.

This is the early edition of the text, which was changed by 1595, when the first edition of Mercator's *Atlas* was published. The map is readily distinguishable from the later atlas editions dating from the beginning of the seventeenth century, which include first one and then two cracks in the copperplate, both in the title. After the text was changed below the image in 1595, it was thereafter discontinued in editions after 1603.

The present work is a reduced version of the 1569 wall map of the world, on which the revolutionary Mercator Projection was introduced. Oddly, this folio version recast the map into a double-hemisphere format; Rumold chose not to employ his father's namesake projection.

To the left is the western hemisphere. The prominent bulge in South America, a characteristic introduced by Gerard Mercator and evident on his 1569 world map, has been retained here. Tierra del Fuego forms part of a gigantic southern continent that continues in the eastern hemisphere. At the north pole, two of the four islands that Gerard Mercator thought surrounded the pole are evident. There is also a suggestion of a Northwest Passage via the Straits of Anian.



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Anian derives from Ania, a Chinese province on a large gulf mentioned in Marco Polo's travels (ch. 5, book 3). The gulf Polo described was actually the Gulf of Tonkin, but the province's description was transposed from Vietnam to the northwest coast of North America. The first map to do so was Giacomo Gastaldi's world map of 1562, followed by Zaltieri and Mercator. The Strait then became shorthand for a passage to China, i.e. a Northwest Passage. It appeared on maps until the mid-eighteenth century.

Quivira, south of Anian, refers to the Seven Cities of Gold sought by the Spanish explorer Francisco Vasquez de Coronado in 1541. In 1539, Coronado wandered over what today is Arizona and New Mexico, eventually heading to what is now Kansas to find the supposedly rich city of Quivira. Although he never found the cities or the gold, the name stuck on maps of southwest North America, wandering from east to west.

In the eastern hemisphere, Japan appears as a large round island. The islands of Southeast Asia are arrayed with relative accuracy for the time. To the south, the names of Beach, Maletur, and Lucach reveal again Mercator's use of toponyms from Marco Polo. Farther east on the southern continent is Psitacorum regio, which appeared on Gerard Mercator's 1541 globe and his 1569 world map. It was supposed to have been sighted by Portuguese sailors.

The hemispheres are ringed with impressive strapwork, adding a pleasing decorative element to the map. At the top center is an armillary sphere. It is paired with an elaborate compass rose in the bottom center.

Publication

The map was first printed as part of Isaac Casaubon's publication of Strabo's *Geographia* in 1587. Examples from this printing have columns of text underneath with the heading, "*Lectori S. P.*" Then, the map became a staple in the Mercator atlas, which Rumold compiled. In 1603, the plate developed cracks in the top edge of the plate; two distinct cracks can be seen in the title.

The Mercator's only published two editions of their atlas (1595, 1602) and then sold the plates to Jodocus Hondius. Hondius and his collaborators reissued the map in many of the atlases from 1606 until the 1630s. It was included in both Latin and French editions and, later, in English editions. The plate was never changed during its entire print run.

The map proved very influential, as did the entire Mercator atlas. The world map was copied with some alterations by Petrus Plancius in 1590 and reproduced by Hieronymo Porro in 1596 in Venice.

The Mercator Hondius Atlases



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Gerard, the patriarch of the cartography dynasty, died in 1594. Since at least the late 1550s, Mercator had wanted to compile an atlas of the modern world. At the time, this had never been done. He planned a five-volume work that covered the creation of the world, a cosmographical description, a geographical description, a history, and a chronology.

The chronology was published first, in 1569, the same year as Mercator's world map. Then he moved to the geographical description. He was able to release his own edition of Ptolemy, in 1578, but he died before finishing the modern atlas. In 1585 he managed a volume on the German lands, with a volume on Italy in 1589. In sixteen years, all he had finished was the bulk of Europe; the Iberian Peninsula was lacking even from that.

The delay was caused by a variety of causes. There was supposedly a lack of copper plate and, when attained, a lack of engravers to help Gerard. He mentions in a 1583 letter that Hogenberg sometimes helped, but was distracted with his own commissions, and his grandson Johannes also lent a hand.

The year after his death, the entire atlas appeared together, thanks to the work of Gerard's son, Rumold, and grandsons. This would be the first work to use the word "atlas" in the title, *Atlas sive Cosmographicae meditationes de fabrica Mundi et fabricate figura*. In addition to several more maps of Europe that Gerard had finished, Rumold included this world map. Rumold also completed a map of Europe, while Africa and Asia were by Gerard Mercator the younger. Their younger brother, Michael, engraved the America map. Together, the atlas contained 107 maps, of which 102 Gerard Mercator had prepared, if not published, before his death.

Gerard had six children: Arnold, Emerentia, Dorothes, Bartholomeus, Rumold, and Catharina. In 1552, Mercator moved to Duisburg from Leuven, where lived for the rest of his life. Arnold (1537-1587) produced his first map in 1558 and took on the quotidian operations of the family business. The second son, Bartholomeus (1540-1568), taught geography in Duisberg, but he died in 1568, aged 28. Rumold (1545-1599), the third son, also became an engraver and mapmaker. He spent much of his adult life in London but returned to Duisberg in 1587—the same year this map was completed.

Arnold died the same year Rumold returned, leaving his three sons (Gerard, Johann, and Michael) to help Rumold and their grandfather. As previously mentioned, Gerard the Younger, Arnold's older son, contributed to the atlas, as did Johann. Rumold died in 1599, followed by Michael in 1600. These early deaths help to explain why the Mercators only published two editions of their atlas, in 1595 and 1602, before selling the plates in 1604 to Jodocus Hondius.

This map was directly influenced by Gerard Mercator himself. It is the only obtainable Mercator world



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map and would make a striking contribution to any world map or early printed map collection. It is an important piece of cartographic history due to its geography and maker.

Detailed Condition:

Minor loss at lower centerfold, just affecting text. Old color, with some minor retouching.