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Theatrum Orbis Terrarum (1570A - First Edition, First Issue)

Stock#: 80561
Map Maker: Ortelius
Date: 1570
Place: Antwerp
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG+
Size:
Price: SOLD



Description:

First Edition, First Issue. "A landmark in cartographic publication, for it is the first large modern atlas." (PMM, 91)

Exceptional, unsophisticated example of the first state of Abraham Ortelius's *Theatrum*, one of the most important works in the Western Canon.

Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (or "Theater of the World") is widely considered to be the first true modern atlas. When it was published in 1570, the *Theatrum* was the best available summary of 16th-century cartographic knowledge, covering much of the exploration of the world in the century following the discovery of America.

The book's enormous importance in its own time is evidenced by its republication in 36 recorded editions, issued consistently from 1570 to 1612, and inconsistently to 1641. Its continued importance in more recent times has led to at least six facsimile editions being published. The broad appeal of the *Theatrum* saw demand from many consumers who preferred to read the atlas in their local language. Thus, in addition to Latin, the book was published with text in Dutch, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and English.

Ortelius was the artist of all of the maps; he drew them by hand, and those drawings were interpreted into prints by his engravers Frans Hogenberg, Ambrosius Arsenius, and Ferdinand Arsenius.

After Ortelius's death in 1598, the copper plates for his atlas passed to his heirs. They, in turn, sold the collection to Jan Baptist Vrients (1522-1612) in 1601. Vrients added new maps and published the atlas



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until his death in 1612. Vrients's widow then sold the plates to the Moretus brothers, who were the successors of Christoffel Plantijn.

The Printing of the First Edition of Ortelius's Theatrum Orbis Terrarum

Ortelius's *Theatrum* has its genesis in the 1550s when the merchant Gilles Hooftman was building a practical map collection. Hooftman had business concerns closely tied to international commerce and political and military events in Europe. Apparently, Hooftman found unrolling large maps to be unwieldy, so it was suggested to him by Jan Radermaker to bind his maps up in book form. When Radermaker befriended Ortelius in 1555, he evidently passed the task off to him. At the time, Italy was the center of global cartographic publishing, as only eight or nine maps had yet been published in the Low Countries. Therefore Ortelius ordered from Rome an "Italian Assembled to Order Atlas" (or "Lafreri School" atlas) with 38 maps. Radermaker recounted this story in a 1603 letter to Jacob Colius Ortelianus, who had wanted to know how his uncle came up with the idea for the *Theatrum*. (See, Peter van der Krogt, "The Theatrum Orbis Terrarum: The First Atlas?" in *Abraham Ortelius and the First Atlas*, page 61, 1998) Elsewhere it has been suggested that Gerard Mercator was the progenitor of the idea for the first standardized atlas, but that he held back from competing with Ortelius out of a spirit of friendliness. That being said, because of Mercator's work habits, he would not have been able to produce a work like the *Theatrum* by 1570, even if he had that in mind.

Van der Krogt (Abraham Ortelius..., page 65) further explains:

The first edition of the Theatrum is dated May 20, 1570 (vdK 31:001). It had been finished the year before, as appears from the privileges by the Brabant Council and the Privy Council from respectively February 21 and October 23, 1569. The basis for the first edition of the Theatrum, with 53 maps, is formed by the 38 maps of the atlas which Ortelius had composed for Hooftman.

The first edition of the Theatrum was printed at Ortelius' own expense by Egidius (Gielis) Coppens van Diest, an Antwerp printer who had experience with printing cosmographical and cartographical works. From 1539 onwards, Van Diest had printed various editions of Apianus' Cosmographia, edited by Gemma Frisius, and in 1552 he printed the small atlas of Honterus, Rudimentorum Cosmographicorum... Libri IIII.

It is interesting to reflect on the direct connection between Ortelius's *Theatrum* and the Italian composite atlases that preceded it. Those earlier works are often thought of as the spiritual antecedents of the Low Countries' atlas tradition, but this story of direct influence is not well known outside of a few scholarly works.



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Differentiating the 1570A Edition

According to Van Den Broecke, the *Theatrum* was issued in at least four different configurations in its first year of publication. These are commonly categorized as the 1570A, B, C, D states. In addition to these, there are also hybrids, combining plates and text settings from multiple standard variations.

Van Der Krogt (IIIA, 31:001A) provides an extensive list of changes between these variants. The present atlas accords with all of the requirements for a 1570A; the following is an incomplete list of those issue points:

- The colophon reads "XX. MAII. M.D.LXX."
- The last names on the four pages of the *Catalogus Auctorum* are "Bartholemaeus Scultetus", "Humphredus Lhuyd Denbygiensis", "Nicolaus Genus", and "VWolfgangus Wiffenburgius Basilien".
- The first line of verso text for the first five maps reads, respectively: "ORBIS TERRARVM"; "NOVVS ORBIS", "ASIA", "AFRICA", "EVROPA".
- The title page is in its first state (with drooping grape leaves), with no text printed on the verso.

Rarity

Van Den Broecke states that 100 copies of the 1570A were printed, of which 40 were initially sold to Plantin.

RareBookHub records one example of the 1570A having appeared at auction, at Arenberg Auctions in 2019. We purchased that book, which had condition issues, and subsequently resold it to an American institution. We had previously sold another 1570A to an American collector. In the intervening years, the *Theatrum* has been the subject of considerable price increases in the auction market, with a 1592 edition selling at Christie's in 2021 for \$237,500 and an example described as a late 1570 issue (but probably a mix of late 1570 and early 1571 text and plates) for 118,000 Euros at Fonsie Mealy.

In *Koeman's Atlantes Neerlandici IIIA*, Peter van der Krogt records the following examples of the 1570A: Amsterdam UB I; Antwerp PM I; Brussel KB I; Chicago Newberry I; Dillingen SB; Haarlem SB; Haarlem AvK; Leiden UB I; London BL; New York PL; Providence JCB; Strasbourg BNU I; Washington LC I. Thus 13 examples, of which 4 are in the United States. To this, we can add the example at the University of Michigan. Later in KAN, van der Krogt lists an example at Solothurn ZB, which might have been left off the initial census list.

Not only is the condition of this atlas superior to the previous 1570As that have traded, it surpasses virtually all other Ortelius *Theatrum*s that we have seen; the book is as close to pristine as one could hope



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to encounter.

Detailed Condition:

Folio. Contemporary limp vellum (small loss to the tail of the spine; a bit unevenly warped at the edges, possibly a temporary publisher's binding intended to be replaced later). 53 double-page engraved maps (all in first states). Collation: [A, engraved title], AII, B, BII, C, CII, D, DII, 53 double-page engraved maps, a, aII, b, bII, c, cII, d, dII, e, eII, f, fII, g, gII, h, hII, i, iII, k, kII, l, III, m, mII, n, nII, o (not photographed but present), oII. Complete. A handsome, crisp, clean copy.