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**Carstvajuschoi Grad Moskva Nachalnoi Gorod Vseh Moskovskih Gosudarstah (or  
Gospodarstah) . . . Urbis Moskvae**

**Stock#:** 37726  
**Map Maker:** Gerritsz / Blaeu  
**Date:** 1662 circa  
**Place:** Amsterdam  
**Color:** Hand Colored  
**Condition:** VG+  
**Size:** 20 x 15 inches  
**Price:** SOLD



**Description:**

**Blaeu's Striking, Detailed Plan of Moscow—a Landmark in Cyrillic Printing**

An impressive plan of Moscow (Moskva), which appeared in Joan Blaeu's *Atlas Maior* for the first time in 1662. It is the most desirable plan of Moscow from this period published in a commercial atlas.

This plate has a sibling, [a simultaneously engraved plan of the Kremlin](#). Both plans are oriented to the west-by-south.

The city itself, with its various walled sections, intersecting waterways, winding streets, and individual buildings. The detail is remarkable, as is the craftsmanship. A coat of arms bearing a double-headed imperial eagle, a sign of Russian rulers, is in the top left. A highly-stylized Cyrillic title is included along the top.

Indeed, this use of Cyrillic lettering makes the engraved plans of Moscow and the Kremlin unique in Dutch cartographic heritage. In the Moscow city plan, the names of the gates in the external wall are signed in Cyrillic characters using traditional shorthand elements. This notation uses superscripted symbols and has roots in Church Slavonic. More importantly, the prominent title of the plan is rendered in a very special Cyrillic calligraphy style which combines a two-dimensional arrangement of letters with the extensive use of ligatures. This is known in Russian as "вязь" (*Vyaz'*, meaning linking or weaving). The title thus reads in translation "Reigning city of Moscow, the main city of all Moscovian states."



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The plan has an extensive text legend, presented on a scroll on the right-hand side. The legend starts by introducing the quadripartite division of the city: *Kitaygorod*, the inner city; *Kremlenagrad*, the Castle; *Tzargorod*, the middle city; and *Skorodum* with *Strelzka Slaboda*, the outer ring. It then proceeds with the list of the landmarks and the properties of prominent individuals, identifying 33 features in *Kitaygorod*, ten in *Tzargorod*, and three in *Skorodum*. The legend also lists the names of ten external wall gates in Latin transliteration. No landmarks are identified in *Kremlenagrad*, as those belong to the sibling plate.

#### **States and origins of the plates**

The plate was first engraved by Hessel Gerritsz, who had previously worked with Willem Janszoon Blaeu, in Amsterdam in 1613 or 1614. While the Moscow plate itself bears no dedication or privilege, it is referred to in the dedication of the Kremlin plate, which says, "*Castellum cum tribus contiguis Urbibus Moskuae.*" It is also explicitly mentioned in the privilege of the Kremlin plate, "*Tabulas Civitatis et Castelli Moskuae.*"

Very few prints were pulled from the Kremlin and Moscow plates in their respective first states. Those first imprints were likely intended to serve as gifts to the Tzar and key Moscow government figures. Offered here is the Moscow plan as pulled from the second state of the plate, which was made by Joan Blaeu and used, along with the second state of the Kremlin plate, in his *Atlas Maior* starting in 1662. The curling bottom of the scroll in the second state is fully engraved, whereas in the first state, it was only outlined.

Many theories circulate about this plate and its sibling. One says that the map is believed to be derived from a Russian survey prepared at the orders of Boris Fyodorovich Godunov (c. 1551-1605), Tsar of Muscovy from 1598 onward. The original Russian plan has apparently not survived. Versions of this widely-circulated theory attribute both the Kremlin and Moscow plans to a single hypothetical manuscript source (presently lost without trace), which allegedly originated within the Moscow government offices in 1597-1605.

This theory, which was deeply rooted in Imperial Russian and early Soviet historiography, was solidified in its present form by S.A. Klepikov under the direction of M.N. Tikhomirov. It has become historical canon in post-Soviet Russia, and sometimes casts its spell upon Western scholars as well. The cornerstone argument in favor of this theory is the "inherently Muscovite style" of the plan's calligraphic title. A careful analysis, however, casts doubt on the validity of this argument.

A wealth of information about Cyrillic calligraphy, unmatched to this day, can be found in the works of Vyacheslav Nikolaevich Shchepkin (1863-1920), a historian and paleographic linguist. From the second

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half of the sixteenth century, Moscow overtook Pskov and Novgorod as the leader in developing the Vyaz' writing style. Moscow's influence in this field was centered at the so called "Grozny calligraphic school", a loose community of scribes and illuminators, primarily monks, who assembled under the patronage of Ivan IV (the Terrible).

The development of calligraphy during that period may be characterized both quantitatively and qualitatively. The former involves measuring the "script indicator" (показатель вязи); that is, a ratio between the height and width of a typical two-stem capital letter, such as H or N. For a square script, the indicator value is 1. With the evolution of the Vyaz' style, the indicator increased: in twelfth century Byzantine texts, the prevailing values were around 2.5; in early-sixteenth century Novgorod they were 5. In Moscow during the last quarter of the sixteenth century, a typical work of the Grozny school had an indicator value that varied between 6 and 7. In the seventeenth century, the value was between 8 and 9, sometimes reaching 10 or even 12, at which point a word resembled a cryptographic puzzle rather than a readable text.

The qualitative characteristics include the multitude of graphic techniques and specific ligatures borrowed from elsewhere or invented by individual artists. The cooperative nature of the Moscow calligraphic community ensured rapid proliferation of the newly acquired techniques. V.N. Shchepkin named several of them and identified the following four primary techniques:

- (A) Stem splitting (дробление), that is, a modification of traditional stem-sharing ligatures in which the common stem is partitioned into two or more vertical elements positioned exactly underneath each other.
- (B) Semi-stems (полуштамбы), whereby the vertical elements of the letters that do not form a ligature are shortened and aligned with each other. The result is graphically indistinguishable from splitting.
- (C) Linearization (штамбовка), that is, replacing the open and closed curved strokes of the letters like C or O with vertical stems;
- (D) The use of the distinctively elegant CT ligature.

The script indicator of the Moscow plan title has a modest value of 3 to 3.5. The artist or artists adhered to traditional stem-sharing ligatures and simple vertical subordination arrangements (two letters placed over each other). The title calligraphy omits any of the new techniques, including two missed opportunities to use the CT ligature. Therefore, one has to conclude that, according to both the quantitative and qualitative



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criteria, the style of Gerritsz' plan is definitely archaic in comparison with the Moscow calligraphic style at the end of sixteenth century. On the other hand, the artists responsible for the title showed a remarkable mastery of multi-character glyphs, binding together up to five letters, as in the second word "градъ" (city), which at one point has to be read from right to left upwards.

Above all, the makers of the plan made a new way of writing the name of the capital. Had this invention been made in Moscow by a church or a government scribe, it would have taken the city and the surrounding area by storm. Multiple members of the artistic community would have reused and experimented with it, as was the case with other newly invented graphic techniques. But nothing like that happened in this case. This calligraphic gem never appeared in monuments, manuscripts or printed books of medieval Moscow.

Furthermore, its subsequent fate is no less surprising. In 1837, that is to say, in modern times, Gerritsz' Moscow plan got into the hands of Imperial Russian scholars, thanks to a single printed copy discovered in an archive in St. Petersburg. Then it passed to the historians of the Soviet period, and finally became an enormously popular image in post-Soviet Russia. Throughout all these years, until very recently, the graphic invention made in the 1600s remained hidden in plain view.

The case at hand is the representation of the stressed O in the seventh word of the title "Москóвских" (the genitive plural form of Moscovian). Ethnographer Ivan Snegirev (1793-1868), who was the first to publish on and describe Gerritsz' Moscow plan in Russia in 1842, transcribed the title adapting it to the language of his time. He apparently noted an unmarked omission of the vowel, and complained that the Vyaz' title was, "incorrectly depicted by a foreigner." Following his comment, "the obvious errors committed by a foreign engraver" have become a common theme in subsequent scholarly articles, popular literature, and blogs.

One should recall, however, that for a foreign engraver, a Cyrillic text in Vyaz' calligraphy hardly represented a word as a sequence of letters, but rather as an ornament which had to be copied in its entirety. Therefore, making an error in an individual letter is quite unlikely. Academician M.N. Tikhomirov (1893-1965), a historian who was very involved in the intensive study of the Moscow origins of the plan, acknowledged the "omission of the stressed vowels", but claimed such an omission to be an "error characteristic of a Muscovite." Those scholars who cared to transcribe the title exactly how they saw it written, rather than how they thought it should look—N.A. Skvortsov in 1913, S.A. Клепиков in 1956, P.I. Goldenberg in 1966, A.L. Kusakina in 2007—invariably indicated a contraction: "Моск[о]вских". However, is there a contraction?

It has been said that the omission of the stressed O represents an "obvious error". Who is responsible for



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that error - the artist, or the engraver? The answer is: neither. The responsibility lies with the reader! The Greek letter omega, which was a part of the Cyrillic alphabet in the form  $\omega$ , became fully interchangeable with O, and was formally eliminated from the language by the Petrine Reforms of 1708. This was 130 years prior to the rediscovery of the plan by the Russian imperial scholars in 1837. For the next 180 years, there seems to be no evidence that anyone could find the omega hidden in plain view in the Moscow title.



From the perspective of Cyrillic calligraphy,  $\omega$  is a difficult letter. Its wide and curvy shape makes it unfit for the characteristic fast rhythm of the vertical stems, and it participates in very few ligatures. The achievement of the artists who designed the title of Gerrtisz' plan is absolutely remarkable: exploiting the curvy shape of  $\omega$ , they created a unique and impressively elegant ligature.

What do we know about them? They either worked in Amsterdam or corresponded with Hessel Gerritsz. They knew Russian reasonably well. An argument can be made that they were of Polish origin, but could also have been Novgorodians, Pskovians, or Russian-speaking Litvins from the Great Duchy of Lithuania. They could also have been expat Muscovites. It is unlikely, however, that they worked in Moscow or had any association with the government of Boris Godunov.

Once engraved, the prints from the two plates were integrated into Blaeu's *Atlas Maior*, the most expensive book ever made to that time. In February 1672, a fire ravaged Blaeu's publishing house in Amsterdam. The Gerritsz Moscow plate disappeared and was likely destroyed.

However, another similar plate survived and was later used by Frederik de Wit under his own signature.



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This other plate bears the same topographic image of the city, the same title, and the same explication. Its decorative border was identical to those of the original Moscow and Kremlin plans. However, its composition was less appealing and, obviously, unfinished. Presumably, this was Gerritsz' trial version of the Moscow plan, a project he nearly completed, but then chose to abandon and restarted from scratch.

This plan is important to the history of calligraphy, print, and of European interaction with Russia in the seventeenth century. It contains significant innovations and would be a remarkable, and rare, addition to any collection of Blaeu, Russia or Moscow maps.

**Detailed Condition:**

Old Color