



# Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard  
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## Africae nova descriptio . . .

**Stock#:** 57727  
**Map Maker:** Blaeu  
**Date:** 1635 circa  
**Place:** Amsterdam  
**Color:** Hand Colored  
**Condition:** VG+  
**Size:** 22 x 16.5 inches  
**Price:** SOLD



### Description:

#### *Finely, Beautifully-Colored Example of Blaeu's Map of Africa*

Striking example of the second state of Blaeu's expansive map of the continent of Africa, the most iconic map of Africa of the seventeenth century.

The map is tightly framed around the continent, with the Arabian Peninsula in the upper right corner. Madagascar hooks to the right slightly, and the island chains in the Indian Ocean underline the intense exploration that had occurred since Vasco da Gama reached India via the Cape of Good Hope in 1498. The Dutch had not yet settled the Cape when Blaeu made this map, so the toponyms there reflect its use as a stopping point for ships, not as a budding settlement of colonialism.

The continent is divided into political units. Some, like Nubia and Biafara have elephants wandering the land, as well as lions, monkeys, and ostriches. To the west, there are more lions, mountain goats, and camels driven by a caravan rider. All the kingdoms and empires are riddled with place names; settlements are marked by a small building symbol.

The largest single geographic feature in the interior are two large lakes in the south, which give rise to numerous large rivers. Blaeu drew on several sources to create his version of the source of the Nile, complete with Ptolemy's Mountains of the Moon. The development of the lake system is discussed below.

Slightly farther south is another, smaller lake, this one called Sachaf lacus. It gives rise to the Zambere, or Zambezi, River and, farther south, the Spirito Sato, or the Limpopo. This feature reveals some of the



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sources Blaeu consulted while making the map. Waldseemuller includes a similar lake, Sacaff Lacus, on his 1507 world map. This was copied as Sachaf Lacus or Saphat Lacus on later works. The lake seems to be borrowed from the *Egyptus Novelo*, a *tabula nova* drawn by Pietro del Massaio. Although the lake has rivers rising from it, Waldseemuller never attached these to the Nile. However, in 1525 Laurent Fries did just that and later authors followed his convention. Here, Blaeu has followed closely the lake as it is drawn in Mercator's 1569 world map. He has not drawn any rivers flowing north, as if to put a stop to the possible connection of the lake with the continent's largest river.

The map shows major African cities across the top border. These include Tangiers, Ceuta, Algiers, Tunis, Alexandria, Cairo, the island of Mozambique, the mine at St. George in Guinea, and the Canary Islands. Each are birds-eye views of coastal settlements, some under attack. They offer a hint of the rich port economies that ringed the continent in the seventeenth century.

Along both sides of the map are a series of drawings showing the local dress of cultures from across the continent. From top left, they show Moroccans, Senegalese, traders in Guinea, Congolese, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Mozambicans, the King of Madagascar, and those of the Cape of Good Hope. They reflect the diversity of African cultures as filtered through European eyes. They are based on the border vignettes that had adorned later states of Blaeu's 1608 wall map of Africa.

At sea, the waters are filled with flocks of birds, ships in full sail, and spouting sea monsters. A richly decorated compass rose sits on the equator. The cartouche is tucked into the Arabian Peninsula. It is topped with a lion and surrounded by garlands of greenery. The simple title, *Africae nova descriptio*, is emblazoned within the cartouche, as is the author's name.

### **Mapping the continent of Africa in the early modern period**

In the Medieval period, Africa formed one part of a tripartite worldview that combined the *oikumene*, or known world, of the Greeks with a Christian worldview. This was best symbolized by the T-O map, which are east-oriented diagrams, some with Jerusalem at their center, which show Asia, Europe, and Africa surrounded by the world ocean.

This understanding of the continents began to change rapidly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as the Portuguese explored farther south along the western African coast. Finally, in 1498, Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of the Good Hope and arrived in India. The opening of the trade routes rewrote the existing world maps. The 1506 Contarini-Roselli world map is the first surviving printed map to include the discoveries; Waldseemuller's 1507 world map also shows them.

Early printed editions of Ptolemy—the first with maps was printed in 1477 in Bologna—would increasingly

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include *tabula nova*, or new maps, which supplemented Ptolemy's ideas with more modern observations. The first modern map of the entire African continent was in Sebastian Munster's edition of the *Geographia* published in 1540. Over the course of the sixteenth century, the African coastline was entirely refined from a Ptolemaic model with a closed Indian Ocean, to a peninsular Africa surrounded by sea.

Abraham Ortelius' map of the African continent, based on an earlier map by Giacomo Gastaldi, was the most widely-distributed map of the sixteenth century and it affected maps of the continent well into the seventeenth century. This Blaeu example was the next map to prove influential in altering how the landmass was understood.

Blaeu added many place names from the Portuguese discoveries and those of the Dutch as they came to dominate the East Indies trade. Blaeu used his favored status as hydrographer to the Dutch East India Company and his central location in Amsterdam to access the latest published and manuscript sources, for example a drawing of the Gold Coast from Luis Teixeira that had been taken to Amsterdam via Cornelis Claesz. The place names of the southern coast derive from De Houtman's recent voyage to the area.

### **Depicting the source of the Nile**

Europeans had been interested in the source of the Nile since ancient times. Ptolemy, in his second century *Geographia*, postulates that the source lies near the Mountains of the Moon, where water flows into two large lakes at the same latitude. This theory came from Diogenes, who supposedly saw the mountains ca. 110 CE. Ptolemy describes such a lakes-and-mountains layout in his works, although the precise identification of the Mountains of the Moon may have been a fourth century addition to his text.

Sixteenth-century mapmakers, including Waldseemuller, chose to follow the Ptolemaic model. This was typical of cartographers at the time, who had abandoned Ptolemy's coastlines in favor of the more recent Portuguese outlines yet who also clung to Ptolemaic place names for the interior of Africa well into the nineteenth century.

Gastaldi, most likely thanks to sources he read via Ramusio, chose to abandon the Mountains of the Moon entirely. Instead, he drew a massive central lake from which flows the Nile, Zaire (Congo), Cuama (Zambezi), and Spirito Sancto (Limpopo) Rivers. To the east is another, smaller lake at roughly the same latitude, which also feeds part of the Nile. Therefore, Gastaldi created an entirely different view of the interior of Central Africa, while still embracing Ptolemy's twin lakes theory.

Ortelius also included a large central lake, called Cafates. He rejected the name of Zaire-Zembere used by Gastaldi. To the east and just slightly north is another, smaller lake. Rivers from the north of both lakes wend northward and join to form the Nile. The Zaire (Congo) flows from the northeast of Lake Cafates,



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while the Zuama (Zambezi) exits at the south of the lake. It branches into the Spiritu Sant, or the Limpopo.

Here, Blaeu has changed his geography from Ortelius and even from his own 1608 wall map. In the 1608 map, a single river rises from Sachaf Lacus, the Zamiberi. This then splits into the Cuama and Spirito Santo rivers. Here, the Cuama flows instead from the peaks of the Lune Montes, Ptolemy's Mountains of the Moon. Blaeu has adopted Gastaldi's names for the two lakes, Zaire-Zembre and Zaflan. Together, northern streams from each river form the Nile as it flows north. The Congo also flows from the western lake.

### **Publication and states**

This is a second state of Blaeu's significant map. The first state, published in 1617, included the author's name as Guil. Janssonio. On the second state, it has been changed to Guiljelmo Blaeuw. The second state was issued separately from 1621, then it was included in the *Atlantis Appendix* from 1630. Joan Blaeu also included it in his famous *Atlas Maior*.

A Spanish edition of the *Atlas Maior*, including this map, was in the process of being printed when the Blaeu workshop burned in 1672. The Africa copperplate is not thought to have survived the fire.

Additionally, there is a second state variant, which lacks the decorative borders, and a third state dating from ca. 1647 with significant re-engraving. This third state is the most common, while a second state like the present example is rarer.

The map gave rise to numerous imitators, including works by Jaillot, Danckerts, Valk, Jodocus Hondius, and Visscher. It was the most influential depiction of the continent in the seventeenth century and would be the cornerstone of a collection of African maps.

### **Detailed Condition:**