Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

Asia Noviter Delineata

Stock#: 61949
Map Maker: Blaeu

Date: 1635 circa
Place: Amsterdam
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG+
Size: 22 x 16 inches

Price: SOLD



Description:

Blaeu's Iconic Map of the Continent of Asia with Decorative Vignettes

Fine old color example of Blaeu's highly-stylized map of the continent of Asia, one of the most recognizable representations of the continent from the seventeenth century. The map is framed by ten pairs of people meant to personify Asian cultures. At top, nine Asian cities show the rich trading opportunity that Asia represented for Europeans.

Blaeu's geography was most up to date for its time, thanks in large part to his access to Dutch East India Company (VOC) charts, but a few features are still notable for their surprising appearances to the modern eye. Korea is shown as an island just barely unconnected to the Asian mainland, while Japan is oddly projected in a horizontal style that was typical to this period. The coast north of Korea is only roughly drawn, as it had not been surveyed in detail. To the south, large portions of the Borneo coastline and other parts of the islands in Southeast Asia are incomplete or highly inaccurate.

Separating North America ("America Pars") and Asia is the "Fretium Anian", or the Strait of Anian. This was a representation of the much-hoped-for Northwest Passage, a still-undiscovered navigable water passage from Europe north to the Pacific. 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 in 1567. It appeared on maps until the mid-eighteenth century.

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As if to underline the fanciful nature of unknown borders and wandering islands, the map includes many embellishments. Several ships patrol the waters, with two large ships locked in battle to the east of the Philippines. Another fires a broadside at a whale in the northeast of the map. West of Sumatra, a merman blows on a conch shell.

On land, a lion watches over the entire scene from the interior of eastern Africa. The Great Wall of China is drawn in detail, with a camel nearby. An elephant marches purposefully near the Chismay Lake, said to be the source of the Ganges. The title cartouche is placed within Europe; two archers hold up the cartouche's frame, which proclaims that this is a newly delineated version of Asia.

The decorations within the map are amplified by the decorations bordering the map. The pairs of figures, which are meant to exemplify the dress and customs of an Asian culture, are representative of the highly decorative style of seventeenth century maps. The cultures shown here—Syrians, Arabs, Armenians, Persians, people from Balaghat (Deccan), Sumatrans, Javans, Moluccas and Banda islanders, Chinese, Moscovians, and Tartars—are a mixture of descriptions from voyage accounts and travelers' tales, mixed with imaginative creativity.

The cities—Kandy, Calcutta, Goa, Damascus, Jerusalem, Hormuz, Bantam, Aden, and Macao—shown in ovals along the top of the map show major trade centers. Some, like Jerusalem, Damascus, and Aden, were in the Middle East. Others, like Macao and Goa, were at the center of the trade routes of China and India, where Europeans had been flocking for over a century to gain access to spices, porcelain, silks, and other luxury goods.

The Dutch in the East Indies

Although the map shows all of Asia, of especial importance are the islands of Southeast Asia: Borneo, Sumatra, Java, Celebes, the Moluccas, and others. The Moluccas were the vaunted Spice Islands, originally the only source in the world for nutmeg, mace, and cloves. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to gain power in the region, trading for spices in the Moluccas and controlling the spice market in Europe.

The Dutch wanted in on the lucrative trade, but they also had to contend with the Portuguese. The first Dutch expedition, led by Cornelis de Houtman in 1595, avoided India, the Strait of Malacca, and the Moluccas—Portuguese strongholds—in favor of the Sunda Strait. The Dutch set up their trade centers on the island of Java, at Bantam and, later, Batavia. After Houtman, the second Dutch expedition (1598-1600) quickly set sail for the East Indies. It was followed by five others; the Dutch merchants were eager to exploit the opportunity. In 1602, the most powerful of these merchants and the Dutch government, the States General, created the Dutch East India Company (VOC), a monopoly to control the East Indies trade.

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The VOC employed an official hydrographer who provided their ships with charts. The VOC's archive was a closely guarded secret, yet the official hydrographers were also private businessmen, which means that many details about Asia's cartography slipped into more general use via the maps they sold. The first VOC hydrographer was Hessel Gerritsz. When he died, the title transferred to Willem Janszoon Blaeu, who made this map.

Blaeu first published this map, a reduced version of his great wall map of Asia (1608), in 1617. It was used from 1630 onward in Blaeu's atlases and those of his son, Joan. It is a beautiful and highly sought-after map and would be an influential part of any collection of Asian cartography.

Detailed Condition:
Old Color.