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Theatrum Orbis Terrarum

Stock#: 68136
Map Maker: Ortelius & Claesz
Date: 1598
Place: Amsterdam & Antwerp
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: Good
Size: 17 x 11 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Exceptionally Rare Dutch Edition of the Theatrum Published in Amsterdam by Cornelis Claesz.

A superb, full original hand-color, Dutch-language Ortelius atlas published by Cornelis Claesz, Amsterdam's "great motive force behind publications in the fields of cartography, topography and the art of navigation." (Schilder, page 7)

In 1598, Cornelis Claesz was approaching the height of his career; he published the Loedwijcks journal covering the first Dutch expedition to the East Indies, as well as the *Caert-Thressor*, which gave him a pocket atlas to compete with those of the Antwerp publishers who still dominated that market. The one thing is his impressive repertoire of cartographic offerings still lacked was a folio atlas of the world. Rather than assume the expense of creating a wholly-new atlas, with hundreds of copper plates to be engraved and printed, Claesz came up with a clever solution; if you cannot beat the Antwerp publishers join them. To this end, he arranged to print and publish a Dutch language edition of Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, at that time the greatest atlas of the world ever produced.

The evidence connecting Cornelis Claesz is quite extensive; first, the Plantin archives have no record of the production of a Dutch edition of 1598 (Van Der Krogt & Koeman 31:121); second, the typeface and initials of this edition are not found in any other edition from the Plantin press, but they do match those used by Claesz - "The type font and the initials that were used for this Dutch edition certainly came from that printing house." (Schilder, page 470; and Van Der Krogt & Koeman); third, the Moretus brothers acquired copies of the Dutch Ortelius from the heirs of Cornelis Claesz (Schilder, page 469).



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In all likelihood, Claesz had the maps themselves printed in Antwerp and the text sheets (two at the front and two at the back of the book) and the verso text printed in Amsterdam. Schilder suggests that the maps were printed first, possibly by Vrients, and that the text was printed later, the reverse of how the process usually worked, but the sale to the Moretus brothers in 1612 of a large number of sheets containing only text complicates this theory. (Schilder, page 470) Van Den Broecke's work points to the text being printed first; the text for the 1598D came in two settings, and those settings reappear in the 1610 and 1613 Dutch editions, in which some of the maps have been changed.

Claesz may well have made the contract for the publication of the atlas with Ortelius before the latter's death in June of 1598, with the printing of the maps fulfilled by Vrients. Alternatively, Claesz, ever the savvy businessman, could have swooped in with the proposal immediately following Ortelius's death as a way for Vrients or Ortelius's heirs to make money immediately following the great cartographer's death. (Vrients as the printer, as he did not formally acquire the plates from Ortelius's heirs until 1601.) The latter seems somewhat more likely, as Claesz and Vrients collaborated consistently on cartographic publications from at least 1592 to 1604. (Schilder, pages 470-471)

It should be noted that an Ortelius *Theatrum* was offered for sale under the name of Cornelis Claesz at the Frankfurt book fair in the spring of 1603: "Theatrum orbis terrarum, Abrahami Ortelij, tabulis aliquot novis illustrata prostat apud Cornelium Nicolai." (Schilder, page 471)

There remain some intriguing unanswered questions about the nature of the 1598 Dutch Ortelius.

A key bibliographic issue relates to the world map included in the book. According to Van Den Broecke (1-3), the 1598D either contains the final state of the first plate of Ortelius's world map (1.6), the final state of the second plate (2.3, as is the case here, with the corrected South American coastline), or the first state of the final plate (3.1). This in spite of the fact that the book was published eleven years after the creation of the third and final world map plate, which appeared in a few of the 1589G, in the 1592L, 1595L, 1598F, 1601L, etc. editions but not this one. Why would they have used out-of-date world maps for this atlas when a better one existed?

One possible answer could lie in Claesz's publication of Arnold Floris Van Langren's world map of circa 1594 (Shirley 186), which was essentially an updated knockoff of Ortelius's third plate world map (with important improvements in East Asia). Perhaps Claesz did not want to undermine the sale of that separate world map by including a nearly identical version of the map in the atlas. Still other possibilities exist, perhaps there was some bad blood over the map in which Van Langren declares himself the engraver and the *author* despite having followed Ortelius so slavishly. The last possibility is that Vrients or the Ortelius heirs simply sent the remaindered world maps from the Ortelius estate to be used up in the atlas and in doing so sent sheets that were much older. This is complicated by the question of the relative chronology



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of the printing of the maps and text.

It is also worth noting that Denucé mentions a 1598D edition (Plantin Museum, sign. A760) which contains the very rare separately-issued Ortelius-Postel [Gallia](#) map, which appears in no stable editions of the *Theatrum*. (see VDB 35)

Claesz was truly one of the all-time greatest of the Amsterdam map and atlas publishers, and was responsible for some of the great sheet maps and wall maps ever produced. This folio world atlas, published during what might be described as Claesz's *annus mirabilis*, is truly a gem of Dutch cartographic publishing.

Rarity

Most editions of Ortelius's atlas can be rated for rarity based on the print-run research that Marcel Van Den Broecke did in the Plantin archives. As this Dutch edition was published by Claesz, not Plantin, Vrients, or Moretus, the print run number becomes a bit more difficult to decipher, but the conclusions are clear; this is in all probability the rarest Ortelius atlas edition. Van Den Broecke lists print runs of either 25 or 50 for the 1598D and a combined print run of only 100 for the final three Dutch editions (1598, 1610, and 1613) combined. For comparison, the next rarest run is probably the famed 1570A, the first edition, first issue of the atlas, of which 100 copies were printed. 300 copies of the 1606 English edition were printed.

Detailed Condition:

Folio. 19th-century half calf over black-and-yellow mottled paper. Engraved title and engraved portrait of Ortelius by Philippe Galle; 90 (of 91, lacking map 37 "Vrieslandt") double-page engraved maps, all of which in full original hand-color. Full contemporary hand-color. Repairs in places to blank margins throughout (no resultant loss of text or image), map 11 "Engelandt" with a repaired tear running into image, lower blank margin varyingly dampstained throughout, coloring in places slightly affected by dampstain, though in general the dampstaining is confined to the blank margins.