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AMSTERDAM

A newly discovered wall map of Europe

NOVA ET ACVRATA TOTIVS EUROPAE TABVLA
[NEW AND ACCURATE MAP OF THE WHOLE OF
EUROPE]

by Willem Jansz. Blaeu, circa 1612



DE WERELD VAN HET SCHIP

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NOVA ET ACVRATA TOTIVS EVROPE TABVLA. 2102. Guil. Ianssoni



Willem Jansz. Blaeu (1571-1638)

NOVA ET ACVRATA TOTIVS EUROPAE TABVLA

Wall map of Europe in four sheets with title border, four decorative borders and three text-leaves.

Combined technique: engraving, etching and letterpress.

Paper mounted on linen, contemporary hand-coloured, 118.5 x 166.7 cm.

The map is signed and: Guil. Ianssonio AMSTELÆDAMI.

The engraving was probably done by Josua van den Ende (1581/4-after 1638), the decorative parts are likely by Henel Gerritz (1580/1-1631).

This unknown state must be dated between the second state of 1612 and the third one of 1614.



Willem Jansz. Blaes (1571-1658), engraving by Jeremias Falck after a
 painting by Thomas de Keyser, with underneath a poem by Barlaeus.
 Nederlandsche Schepvaartmuseum, Amsterdam.

Willem Jansz. was the founder of a large publishing firm, that would become famous in the field of cartography under the name Blaeu. Willem Jansz. came originally from Alkmaar, but moved to Amsterdam at the age of 23 to work in the office of his uncle's haring trade business. He was more interested in mathematics and astronomy, however, and after two years, he left for Denmark to study with the astronomer Tycho Brahe, who had his own observatory as well as a workshop for the manufacturing of instruments and a printing office. This enabled Willem Jansz. to acquire both theoretical and practical knowledge and provided him with contacts among like minded people. After a year he returned to the Netherlands, and applied himself to astronomy for several years in his native Alkmaar. At the end of the sixteenth century, Willem Jansz. moved to Amsterdam with his family. He set up a shop in celestial and terrestrial globes and astronomical instruments, all manufactured by himself. A printing office and publishing firm, De (Vergulde) Sonnewyser ("The Gilt Sundial") would follow soon. In 1605 he moved to a new location at the Damrak (op 't Water; "on the water").

His first publications were in the area of cartography and navigation. The voyages of discovery in the fifteenth and sixteenth century had created an interest in cartography. The newly discovered territories offered opportunities for trade and it was not only essential to know how to reach these places but also how to return to the country of origin. Knowledge increased with every journey made and, as a consequence, maps became more accurate. The unfolding of new opportunities caused a rise in the demand for good maps. In addition to charts, used specifically for navigation, growing numbers of people became interested in maps. They wanted to satisfy their curiosity about the new territories even if only on paper. The first large centre for the production of maps was found in the Southern Netherlands in the sixteenth century with Plantin, Ortelius and Mercator as leading publishers. They were the first printers of world atlases. Mercator's name is indissolubly connected with his invention, the Mercator projection, a system of increasing latitudinal degrees, destined to be used at sea.

Because of Amsterdam's growing role in international trade from the end of the sixteenth century, it is not surprising that the market for maps and pilot guides, slowly moved northwards, initially led by publishers who had emigrated from the south. Amsterdam was a favourite place for political refugees, victims of religious disputes and fortune seekers. During the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621) the city expanded enormously. The economy flourished and this was reflected in the production of maps. Willem Jansz. was not the only publisher of maps and globes in Amsterdam. When he started his business, Cornelis Claesz (1546/7-1609) and Jodocus Hondius I (1563-1612), both originally from the Southern Netherlands, had already made a name in this field. Following Claesz's death, Willem Jansz. succeeded in acquiring a large part of his estate, which strengthened his position as map publisher. However, he faced fierce competition from his neighbour Jan Jansz, or Johannes Janssonius. Because Willem Jansz. had also latinized his name, (Guilelmus) Janssonius, in accordance with general custom, this caused much confusion and was also abused by Jan Jansz. Therefore Willem Jansz. decided to change his name and to carry the surname of his grandfather ("blauwe Willem"; "blue Willem") as family name in 1621. From then on, he called himself Willem (Jansz.) Blaeu. Willem Jansz. produced his first maps in 1604 and his reputation as maritime cartographer was once and for all established in 1608 with the publication of *Licht der Zeevaert* ("The Light of Navigation"), a pilot guide compiled by himself and later replaced by the *Zeespiegel* ("Sea-Mirror"). He also printed loose maps on parchment, the so-called "overzeilers" ("maps to cross oceans and seas") intended for use at ships and produced by an especially wide printing press. In addition to charts, Blaeu also published assembled wall maps as well as a series of profiles of cities all over the world in a large format. The production of globes was also an important and lucrative component of the business. In the second half of the seventeenth century, after the copperplates of all rival firms had been bought, the Blaeus were even the sole producer of globes in Amsterdam. In addition to his activities as publisher, Blaeu continued his scientific pursuits. He used

his findings to improve his maps and guides, and in this manner each discipline strengthened the other. His expertise won official recognition at his appointment as cartographer and examiner of navigating officers by the Amsterdam chamber of the VOC in 1613. As official cartographer, Blaeu had the best craftsmen at his disposal, and his own work continued to reach higher levels of quality. The artists, drawing and colouring the maps, worked usually at the firm, which meant that the quality of their work was continually supervised.

Willem Jansz. Blaeu did not only sell his products in Amsterdam but throughout Europe, for which the twice annually held Frankfurter Buchmesse played an important role. Book and print sellers from all over Europe convened in Frankfurt to show and sell their latest publications.

After his death in 1632, Willem Jansz. was succeeded by his sons Joan I (1598/99-1671) and Cornelis (ca. 1610-1642) Blaeu. Joan's sons formed the third generation, until the publishing firm was closed down in 1706. The printing office was already sold in 1695.





Johannes Vermeer (1632-1691), *Woman reading a letter*, ca. 1665-1684.
Oil on canvas. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

WALL MAPS IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY DUTCH INTERIORS

The seventeenth century saw a growing market for wall maps, which were mainly sold to affluent merchants, governors and scholars. The first two groups needed not only to be well informed about the area where their professional activities took place, but maps were also displayed as status symbols and for their aesthetic value. The *Allegory on Painting* by Johannes Vermeer clearly shows the overwhelming eye-catching qualities of a lavishly printed and decorated map in an interior. In addition to their decorative function, wall maps could also serve educational purposes. In this respect, it is interesting to mention that Constantijn Huygens hung Blaeu's maps of the four continents in the room in which his sons often played. He wanted them "to get an impression of the large form of the world and its division" ("daerbij sij een' vaste gestaltenisse van 'swerels maecksel ende verdelinghe in den sinn kregen"), as he wrote in his diary.

The rear side of large wall maps was reinforced with linen and the upper and lower margins were provided with sticks to prevent the hung maps from curling. Smaller maps were often displayed in ebony frames.

It becomes clear from inventories that maps were often listed along paintings, which might mean that both were accorded the same status. Johannes Vermeer's painting *The sleeping girl* in the Metropolitan Museum in New York shows that paintings and maps could be displayed together. Little is known about prices because the administration of large publishers has hardly been preserved. Most publishers offered maps in different executions, ranging from simple to added decorative borders and ornaments, the so-called "ornamental sheets" (*Cieraet-bladen*). The large wall maps, which consisted of several sheets, were understandably more expensive and their price was similar to those of paintings.

Like atlases, decorative wall maps were often hand-coloured. First the paper was prepared to prevent the running of the inks. This was done with animal size, sometimes with the addition of alum (a mordant) or starch. A skillful colourist could raise the value of the maps considerably, both artistically and financially. Coloured maps were twice as expensive as uncoloured ones in Plantin's days. Prices had dropped a century later, but a coloured

map still fetched about thirty percent more than an uncoloured copy. Maps were also treated with varnish to lend them a shining finish and protect them from humidity. In the long term the varnish often turned white thereby rendering the map unreadable and unusable. In many instances, the protective layer turned out to be a formidable enemy for conservation, because it was almost impossible to remove the varnish. Additionally many maps were lost because they were displayed in smoke filled or humid rooms or because the linen deteriorated. As a result, few of the maps, which were originally printed in large quantities, have been preserved.



BLAEU'S WALL MAPS OF THE FOUR CONTINENTS

In 1608 Blaeu published a series of wall maps depicting the four continents, Europe, Asia, Africa and America. On August 5 of the same year, the States of Holland and West-Friesland had granted him a privilege for ten years to protect him from reproduction of his work by his rivals.

The first state of the series consisted of four sheets, while a title border, decorative borders and marginal text-leaves were added to the second state of 1611. The fact that a reprint was published after merely four years is indicative of the success of Blaeu's maps. It is therefore unclear why Willem Jansz. sold the copperplates to Henricus Hondius, who published a third state of the series in 1624. Map and title sheets remained unchanged, as did the contents of the text but the latter part was reset and Hondius's address was added. In his turn Hondius sold the plates to Claes Jansz. Visscher, who, together with his son Nicolaas, would publish an additional three states of the wall maps. The map image remained unchanged, but the cartouche with the privilege of 1608 was removed and the imprint of Claes Jansz. Visscher was added. There were some changes to the title border and a new text in three languages was included as well.

The series of the four continents was granted a long career as can also be seen from the gouache by Gesina ter Botch from 1669, which shows an interior with Blaeu's Europe map hanging on the wall. More than sixty years after publication of the first state the map was apparently still appreciated and not judged outdated.

Hondius and Blaeu were the first to add decorative borders to wall maps. These illustrations were directly connected to the chartered area and could consist of town plans and views and depictions of costumes worn by prominent citizens from different regions. These additions by skillful artists contributed in no small way to the informative and, especially, to the decorative value of wall maps.

Blaeu cooperated often with the engraver Josua van den Ende (1581/4-after 1638), who engraved a large number of his maps on copperplate. Although his signature appears only on the second state of the Africa map, there is little doubt that he has also been responsible



Gerrit van Borch, *Portrait of Sylvius Achilleus and Jansken ter Borch*, 1664.
Gouache. Blac's map of Europe hangs on the wall.
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

for the maps of the other continents. The author of the decorative borders and cartouches is most likely Hessel Gerritsz (1580/1-1632), who also cooperated with Van den Ende at Blaeu's wall map of the Seventeen Provinces in 1608.

A NEWLY DISCOVERED STATE OF THE EUROPE MAP

No copy of a complete set of Blaeu's four continents in possession of a private collector is known. Two copies of the first state of the Europe map of 1608 have been preserved (Rittersaalverein, Burgdorf, Switzerland and The British Library; only the map sheets of both copies have been preserved); of the second state of 1612 one copy is known (Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Dresden); of the third state, published by Hondius in 1624, one copy is known (Herzogin Anna Amalia-Bibliothek, Weimar); no copies are known of the fourth state published by Claes Jansz. Visscher; one copy of the fifth state published by Nicolaas Visscher in 1655 is known (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; decorative borders and text lacking); one copy of the sixth state is known (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, lacking title border and text).

The present copy of the Europe map differs from the other previously known states. The first state does not contain an address, contrary to the second one, which also carries the signature *Guil. Ianssonio*. The text for the third state was reset and the title *NOVA EUROPAE DESCRIPTIO* was added, with in the lower right corner the address of Henricus Hondius. The title of the present copy is the same, but the address merely states *AMSTELODAMI* in the type and format used by Blaeu. Based on this information one can conclude that this copy is an unknown variant of the second state of 1612. Among the seven known extant copies, the present copy is the third complete one and is, compared to the others and considering its age, in a remarkable condition.

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Johannes Vermeer (1632-1691), *Allégorie de Peinture*, ca. 1665.
Oil on canvas. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.