

Queen Mary I Atlas, 1558

Cartographer: Diogo Homem

Date: 1558

Location: British Library

Description: There are very few national treasures that relate to Britain's Catholic Queen Mary I. Her short and unpopular reign was from 1554 to 1558 and the *Queen Mary Atlas* is considered to have been commissioned by her as a gift to her husband Philip II of Spain. The *Queen Mary Atlas*, though now incomplete, is one of the most magnificent examples of Portuguese mapmaking. Its charts track the progress of Portuguese sailors who since 1415 had sailed down the west coast of Africa, far beyond the confines of the known world, in search of spices, non-Christian souls and slaves. A century later they reached Brazil and India. The maps provide some of the first relatively accurate depictions of these regions. Derived in style from medieval Mediterranean sea charts [*portolans*], they are enlivened by colorful heraldry, banderoles and depictions, based on direct observation, of non-European rulers, peoples and animals.

As mentioned, the atlas was probably commissioned by Mary I as a gift for her husband, Philip II of Spain, a few months after their marriage in June 1554. Its creator, Diogo Homem, belonged to a distinguished Portuguese mapmaking dynasty. Diogo had fled Portugal to escape a murder charge in 1544 and the atlas shows he had no qualms about working for Portugal's enemies: the maps in the atlas all reveal a strong pro-Spanish bias, even at the cost of truth. Philip never received the atlas. It seems only to have been completed after Mary's death in November 1558.



Detail: Brazil, Patagonia

Not a great deal is recorded about Diogo Homem except as a member of a prolific Portuguese family of chart-makers whose skills and knowledge of world cartography were widely recognized. It seems he worked on the atlas from early in the Queen's reign but did not finish it until after her death in 1558 and so it is unlikely to

have reached King Philip's hands. Moreover, there is evidence that the atlas that we have today is incomplete, lacking a further five or six charts and may never have been bound up for royal presentation. The 'missing' charts may form part of an unsigned atlas in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Besides lunar and solar tables the atlas consists of a circular zonal map, a large rectangular world map, maps of northwest Europe and the Mediterranean, two maps of West and East Africa, one of the East Indies and three maps covering North and South America. The large world map, as the commentary says, is the most sober and technically accomplished of the set and has Diogo Homem's signature and the date 1558. All the others are decorated and embellished in the finest *portolan*-chart style, with criss-cross lines radiating from elaborate compass roses, many ports and other localities marked along the coasts but few inland features shown. Instead, there are rich imaginative images of local rulers, their banners and heraldry, animals (even a rhinoceros), and local scenes such as a Bedouin encampment placed across North Africa. Sea monsters and ships enliven the open seas. It is unlikely that Diogo Homem himself provided all these details: professional miniaturists were engaged to paint such scenes. For its pictorial details and its ornamentation the Queen Mary Atlas ranks among the grandest of its epoch.

The map of northwest Europe has one singular feature, the large escutcheon conjoined with the arms of both Philip II of Spain and Mary of England. However, it can be seen that the arms of Philip have been angrily defaced and, as Cortesao and Teixeira da Mota say in their six-volume *Portugaliae Monumenta Cartographica*: 'When Queen Mary died on November 17th, 1558, the atlas was presented to the new Queen. It may not be too daring to suppose that she [Elizabeth I] then violently scraped off his arms, awkwardly impaled with her own'.

The maps of the Americas show an astonishing amount of coastal detail, reflecting the many subsequent sea voyages in the sixty years since the discovery of the New World in 1492. On the map of South America there are gruesome paintings of cannibalism and – uniquely for a Portuguese map – a depiction of the army of Pizarro, Spanish vanquisher of the Inca Empire. Homem's map of the East Indies is unlike that in the *Rotz Atlas*, presented to Henry VIII in 1542 by the Dieppe cartographer Jean Rotz, and still in the British Library. There is no suggestion of any lands south of Java that some schools of thought have equated with Australia. The true origin of such land forms, and who indeed first 'discovered' northern Australia, remains contentious among historians of cartography today.

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South America

Mundus Novus [New World], *Quarta orbis pars* [Fourth Continent], *America*. All three names appear here, the least prominent being America. In the Amazon region (the mighty river is depicted like a snake) Indians are portrayed engaging in distinctly unsavoury activities ('*Canibales carnibus umanis*'); Brazil (controlled by the Portuguese) is reduced to little more than a coastal strip, with the rest of the continent firmly Spanish, and a splendid encampment represents Pizarro's army, which subdued the Inca empire in 1534 – signs of how keen Homem was to please Philip II. Although Homem depicts the giants reportedly seen by Magellan's fleet in 1521, he marks the southern tip of the mainland *Terra Incognita* and the mythical Great Southern Continent is also depicted.

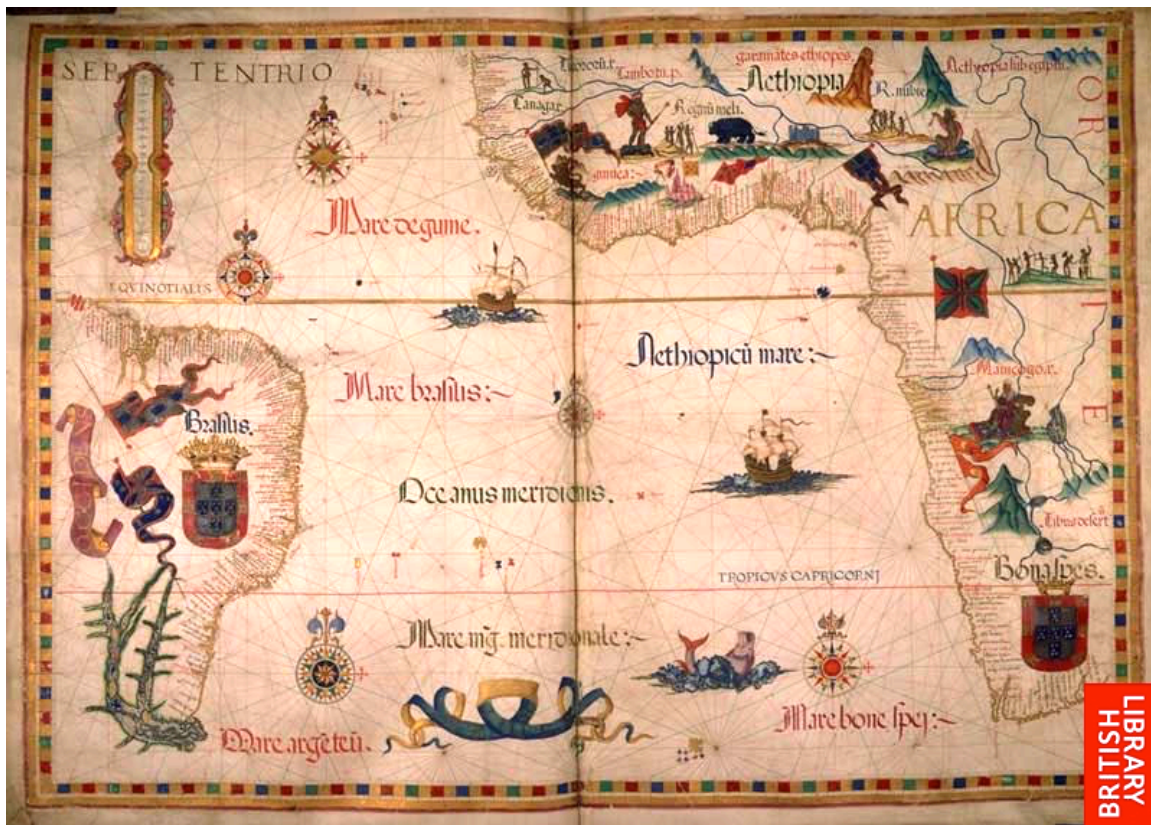


North Atlantic, first known map of Nova Scotia by Diogo Homem in Queen Mary I Atlas, 1558

A map of North America and the North Atlantic by Diogo Homem, 1558. London, British Museum, Add. Ms. 5451.A, fos 19b and 20a. Two features of this map by the capable Portuguese cartographer Diogo Homem are especially noticeable: the interpretation of Jacques Cartier's discovery of the St Lawrence, and the representation, surprisingly belated, of the Bay of Fundy. These features first appear in a map of 1554 by Lopo Homem, Diogo's supposed father, and are repeated in their later maps. The St Lawrence River is open to a great ocean on the north, the *Paramantium Sea*, separated from it by a series of islands with non-Cartier names gratuitously added on the seaward coast. Apparently Homem drew openings wherever Cartier reported that he had tried to find a westward passage to the Pacific on the north shore of the Gulf and River.

The second and more important feature of the map is the great bay on the New England coast which represents the Bay of Fundy. Why so important and large a coastal indentation as the Bay of Fundy was not shown on earlier maps is difficult to

understand. Professor Ganong suggests that Verrazzano sailed across the mouth of the bay without noticing it, and that Gomes did not sail far enough north to discover it. The east coast of Newfoundland on this map, he adds, shows the explorations of Joao Alvares Fagundes before 1521. Shortly after 1521, Fagundes, or other Portuguese associates, attempted to settle Cape Breton Island, and at that time must have discovered the Bay of Fundy. Apparently the Homers knew and used Fagundes' documents which other cartographers did not use. These documents were in all probability lost, with many other important primary sources, in the fire following the great Lisbon earthquake of 1755. South of New England to Florida the Homers, although dependent on Spanish maps, differ from them in so many details that they must have used independent sources or reports.



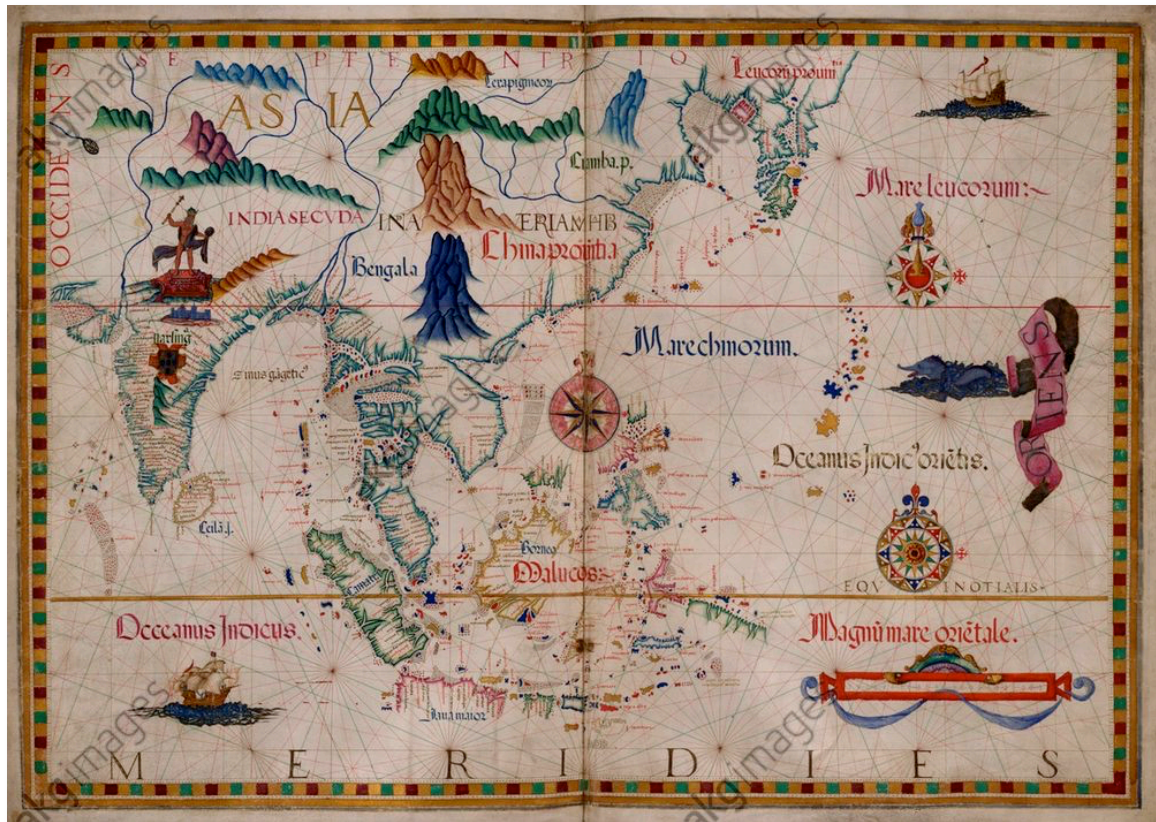
The Southern Atlantic, Brazil and West Africa



Eastern Pacific



British Isles, France, Spain and Portugal



Southeast Asia

In the *Queen Mary Atlas*, this chart is decorated with mountains, a single crest with the arms of Portugal (over India), a Portuguese ship headed west, and the lonely, unlabeled figure of what is presumably the Sultan of Gujarat, nearly nude and standing upon a damask-draped pedestal. Almost nothing in the way of specific cultural information on Southeast Asia, or the nature of its flora and fauna, is disclosed by these miniatures. But the presence of Portuguese mariners is underscored on two of the chart's captions: *aqui Jnuernou martin ao de melo* [here wintered D. Martin Antonio de Melo] and *aqui enuernou don Jorge de Meneses* [here wintered D. Jorge de Meneses]. The Jorge de Meneses in question was the first Portuguese voyager to reach New Guinea, and a prominent character in the dramatic narrative of the Spaniard Andre s de Urdaneta, who met the captain in the Moluccas in 1527.

Extending from the Straits of Gibraltar to the Greek Morea, the map shows Christian Europe under threat by Islam. In the bottom right off the coast of North Africa (named *Mahometania*) a Christian galley does battle with an Ottoman ship; in North Africa, Muslim, Spanish and Portuguese banners jostle with each other, with Spanish banners extending as far east as Tripoli (though Spanish armies never actually reached that far); in Italy Lombardy is the only region mentioned by name (probably because it was ruled by the atlas's intended recipient), and the arms of the ruling Medici family surmount the city of Florence; in France the importance of the medieval port of Aigues Mortes is clear to see; the Sierra Nevada mountains – last stronghold of the Moors in Spain – are given more prominence than the Alps.

