

Visscher's Continents: Exacta Totius Americae, Exacta Tabula Asia, Exacta Totius Asiae, Tabula Europe, and Exacta Totius Africa

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A spectacular set of wall maps of the continents (*Exacta Totius Americae, Exacta Tabula Asia, Exacta Totius Asiae, Tabula Europe, and Exacta Totius Africae*), published at the apex of Dutch decorative cartography by two of the most important mapmakers of the era, Nicolaes Visscher II and Hugo Allard between 1682-1685.

In the pantheon of European wall maps published between the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 18th century (when this art truly flourished), this set of four stands out for its extraordinarily elaborate engraved decorations: each map is imposingly embellished with piles of figures - representations of local flora and fauna, and of local peoples, of allegorical vignettes, and of scenes of trade and conquest.

These maps are also unique among Dutch wall maps for their focus on the English-speaking world; the set is dedicated in English to Charles II, with his portrait and inscription on the map of Europe. Furthermore, an elaborate cartouche on the map of Asia centers the coat of arms of Charles II, perhaps indicating the ascendancy of the East India Company.

The maker of the maps, Nicolaes Visscher II (1649-1702), came from one of the all-time most important mapmaking families in the Netherlands. His grandfather, Claesz Jansz. Visscher (1587-1652), was a foundational early mapmaker and engraver of the Dutch Golden Age, and Nicolaes's father, Nicolaes Visscher I (1618-1679), continued that tradition. Nicolaes Visscher II focused first and foremost on the opulence of his cartographic creations; in addition to these wall maps, he was responsible for one of the greatest Dutch atlases ever produced, the 226-map *Atlas Minor*.

Visscher used the standbys of second half of the 17th century Dutch wall maps for the cartography. In Africa and Europe, he closely follows Joan Blaeu's 1659 wall maps (*Novissima Africae Descriptio* and *Europæ Nova Descriptio*, respectively). Burden (555) notes that the Americas closely follows De Wit's wall map of 1672. There may be no direct antecedent for the map of Asia; the inset of Australia is unusual, and we can find no other wall map in which this has been done. In that case, the map could be an original compilation based on sources such as Blaeu's 1659 Asia and his wall maps of Australia and Southeast Asia.

The maps were, from the outset, intended as a set, with a remarkable dedication to Charles II, the King of England, which is found on the map of Europe:

To The Most Illustrious and Puissant Monarch, Charles the II, By the Grace of God of England, Scotland, France and Ireland King Defender of the Faith &c. This Geographical and Hydrographical Map of Europe Together with three other Parts of the World, to wit Asia, Africa, and America, composed with great Experience and Labour, is with all Submission Dedicated, By His Majesties most humble and obedient Vassal. Nic. Visscher.

These maps have traditionally been dated 1682-1685 in the literature (Betz and Burden). The set in Stockholm (KB) on which previous studies have been based should be dated to 1688 or later, as the map of Europe has been revised with a portrait and dedication to William III, and the map of Asia has been updated with his coat of arms. Thus the present set represents the maps in their first state (with dedication and iconography of Charles II, who died in 1685.)

Dedicated in English to Charles II, probably prepared on the advent of the *Triple Alliance* (1668-1672) and the *Expansion of Rights of the EIC* (1670).

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Unlike most wall maps of the period, the set of four maps were almost certainly created specifically to celebrate an important historical event. In fact, this is the only example of which we are aware where the title of a wall map specifically notes that it is being prepared in conjunction with three other wall maps to form a set of four. Equally fascinating is the Visscher's choice of an English language title for the map of Europe, with a remarkable dedication to Charles II. This is the only Dutch wall map of which we are aware which includes an English title.

The creation of the *Triple Alliance* (1668 - 1672) was an event of monumental importance for the Netherlands, Sweden and England. The alliance was short-lived since both Sweden and England backed France at the outset of the Franco-Dutch War four years later, but it marked the point at which England and the Dutch came to see France as a common threat. The *Triple Alliance* was the forerunner of the *Grand Alliance*, which fought the 1688-1697 *Nine Years' War* and the 1701-1714 *War of the Spanish Succession*.

Issued in collaboration with Hugo Allard, patriarch of the Allard map publishing family, Visscher's set of continental maps are among the most lavish continental wall maps produced during the *Golden Age of Dutch Cartography*, and were likely commissioned to commemorate the creation of the *Triple Alliance*, possibly as gifts from the Dutch to English and Swedish royalty. Remarkably, there were previously no other known sets of the first state until the discovery of this set in the Ericsson Palace, which came to market in June 2022. The only other surviving complete set of Visscher's four continental wall maps is a later state in the Swedish National Library, with a revised dedication to William III (William of Orange) and revisions in the map of Asia, published shortly after William III's ascent to the throne of England in 1689.

The unique survival of the set of maps is made all the more fascinating by its remarkable original condition. The survival rate of these wall maps is extraordinarily low and those that do survive are typically in poor condition, heavily oxidized, browned, soiled or extensively restored.

Dating the Map Set. Relatively little is known about this remarkable set. This is in large part because other than the Swedish National Library set, there are no other surviving individual examples of the wall maps to include the city views, text and decorative title banners. All other known examples are limited to the six map sheets, except a single example of the map of America which Burden describes as having decorative panels of all four sides of the map.

While Burden and Betz believed that the maps of Africa and America were issued in about 1682 or after, this conclusion was reached without the benefit of knowing the contents of the current set, which includes both the dedication and portrait to Charles II of England on the map of Europe and the coat of arms of Charles II in the upper left corner of the map of Asia. The Bibliotheque National de France also holds a copy of this map of Europe with the portrait of Charles II, which they dated to 1660-1685. By contrast, in the Swedish National Library set, both are included a portrait of William II on the map of Europe and a completely revised coat of arms in Asia, as well as several changes to the content of the inset of Australia.

The inclusion of the coat of arms of Charles II on the map of Asia likely coincides with his decision to grant autonomous governance to the East India Company (EIC) over the lands it controlled. In an act aimed at strengthening the power of the EIC, King Charles II granted the EIC (in a series of five acts around 1670) the rights to autonomous territorial acquisitions, to mint money, to command fortresses and troops and form

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alliances, to make war and peace, and to exercise both civil and criminal jurisdiction over the acquired areas.

Visscher's maps are drawn from virtually unobtainable wall maps of the continents created by the Blaeu family between 1655 and 1659, which at the time were considered among the most cartographically advanced work of the period and available only to the wealthiest patrons.

The present maps are a spectacular example of the grand genre of wall or parlor maps that enjoyed an iconic place in 17th and early 18th century Europe. During the *Golden Age of Dutch Cartography*, these large, highly decorative and expensive productions were considered to be the ultimate signs of wealth and intellectual sophistication. By the second half of the 17th century, these lavish Dutch works were also being copied by leading mapmakers in France and Italy, as the demand spread through the continent.

Visscher's maps of Europe and Africa are drawn from Blaeu's wall maps of the 1650s. The maps of America and Asia would seem to be far more original in their content. Each is printed on six sheets, with an elaborate title at the top, two series of city views on the sides, and text below.

Contextually, there is strong evidence to suggest that this set of maps was custom made for a Swedish royal family. Contextually, there is strong evidence to suggest that this set of maps was custom made for a Swedish royal family, after Sweden joining the *Triple Alliance*. Unlike most of the surviving wall maps from this period, the present set is heightened in gold and includes an elaborate blue and gold leaf title banner, employing a lapis lazuli blue which at the time was even more expensive than gold. No other surviving example of the set exists and no other single map includes the same lavish decoration.

The only similar set, held by the Swedish National Library, includes revisions to reflect a changing British Monarch (William III) and includes the same lavish title banners with gold and lapis lazuli, but with a completely new set of text panels and revised order of city views and decorative embellishments. The text below the maps are in Dutch. Moreover, there are changes to the plate, with the addition of two rivers in western Australia and other revisions. The Hugo Allard text is now in Latin and French (not Dutch), with Allard's shop address in French, strongly indicating very different times of publication. All signs point to a re-issuance of the circa 1670 original issue following the coronation of William III in 1685.

Remarkably, the only two surviving sets of the Visscher's maps were preserved in Swedish royal collections, with remarkably similar color, gold and lapis lazuli finishes. And yet, the maps show significant differences that can only be explained by a significant passage of time.

The set of four wall maps is the only known surviving example of the first state. The Swedish National Library holds a similar set, with significant revisions on the maps of Asia and Europe, reflecting a publication date after the coronation of William III of England in 1689.

Individual examples of the map of America are known to survive in the Bibliotheque National de France (lacking decorative panels) and a private American collection (for decorative panels).

Provenance: Eric'sberg Palace, Södermanland County, Sweden. Acquired by BLR Antique Maps in June 2022, and is for sale for \$950,000.

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Europe

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Savillia



London

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Roma



Parys



Amsterdam



Stockhom



Lisbona



Danzick



Copenhagen



Archangel



Hamborg



Genoa

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Africa



Algiers



Maraco



Amara



DelMina



Alexandria

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Tangere



Salée



Tripoli



Thunis

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African Cartouche



African Cartouche

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African Cartouche

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Western Hemisphere, Americas



America Cartouche

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America Cartouche



Pagus Hispanorum



Port of Acapulco



Cartahana



Serenha



Potosi



Domingo



Callao de Lima



Paranbuca



Mexico

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Salvado



New Amsterdam

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Havana



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North America



The Great Lakes

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North America Natives



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North Pole

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South American Natives

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Asia



Asian Cartouche

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Asian Cartouche



Batavia



Saba



Cangoxuma



Kom



Ierusalem



Derbendi



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Alcair



Saltani

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The Great Wall of China

Reference:
RUDERMAN RareMaps.com