

## A Cataloger's Perspective: Mapping the World and Continents

by Eliane Dotson, Old World Auctions

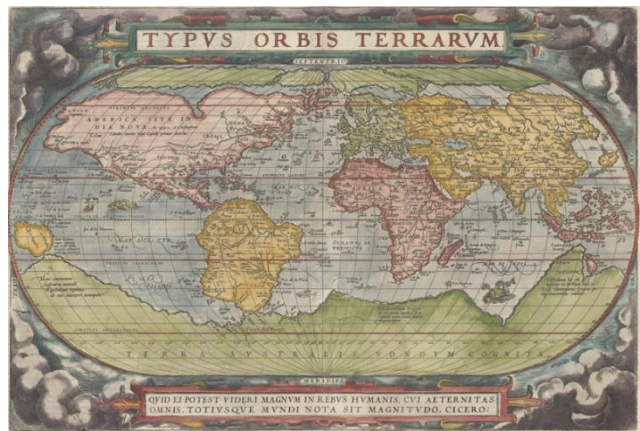
Looking at world maps over the centuries is the best way to see how European knowledge of the earth and its continents changed over time. During the Age of Exploration, new continents and bodies of water emerged, their shapes changed, and encounters with people and animals from faraway lands made the world seem infinite. These discoveries are well documented on maps, although they were often incorrectly depicted for decades or even centuries.

### Map Projection

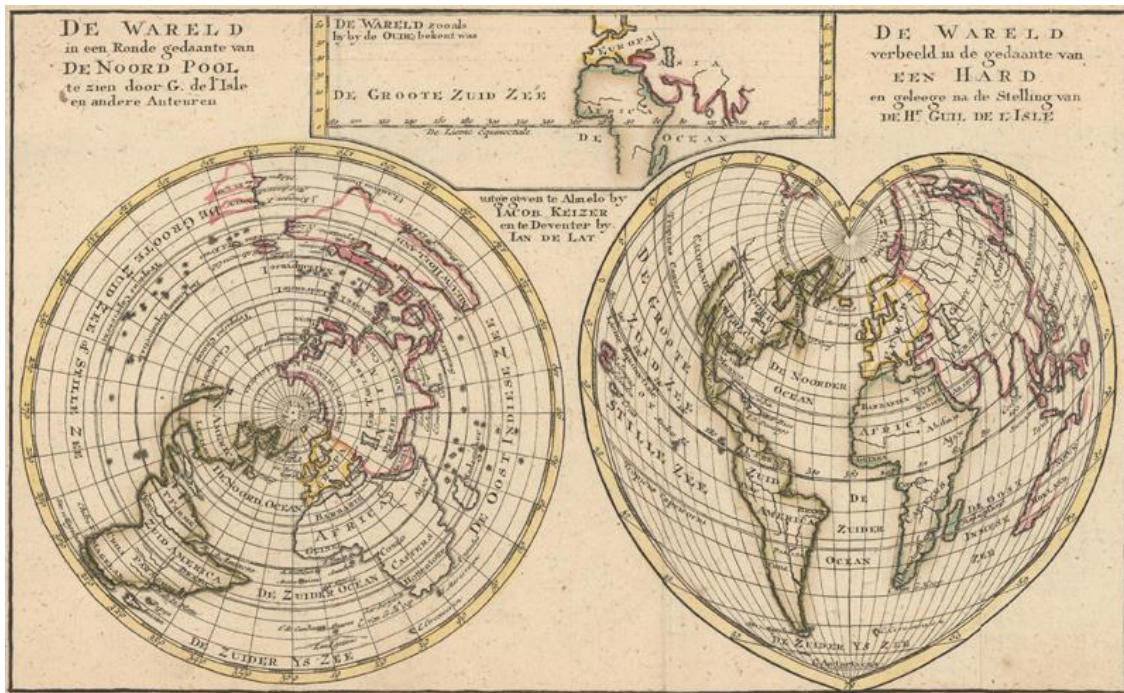
Before I even delve into what is depicted on a world map, I take into consideration how the world is portrayed as a whole. There are many different types of map projections, which help represent a spherical earth onto a flat piece of paper. Some of the earliest maps were shown on a **Ptolemaic projection**, in which the lines of longitude converge as they extend toward the poles, but without completely converging at the poles. **Cordiform projections** were used in the 16th century, and are formed with parallels depicted as equally spaced arcs creating a heart shape. Abraham Ortelius is known for using an **Oval projection** for his world maps, in which the parallels are not evenly spaced and the meridians are circular. Gerard Mercator popularized a cylindrical map projection, now known as **Mercator projection**, with lines of longitude and latitude remaining straight. Another common type is the **Hemispheric projection**, in which each hemisphere is projected into a circle with the lines of longitude converging at the poles. **Polar projections** are a subset of hemispheric projections, as they depict the world as seen from one (or both) of the poles, still within a circular shape. Although there are many other types of map projections, these are the most commonly found on world maps.



**Ptolemaic Projection.** Ptolemy/Mercator, *Universalis Tabula Iuxta Ptolemaeum*, 1695.



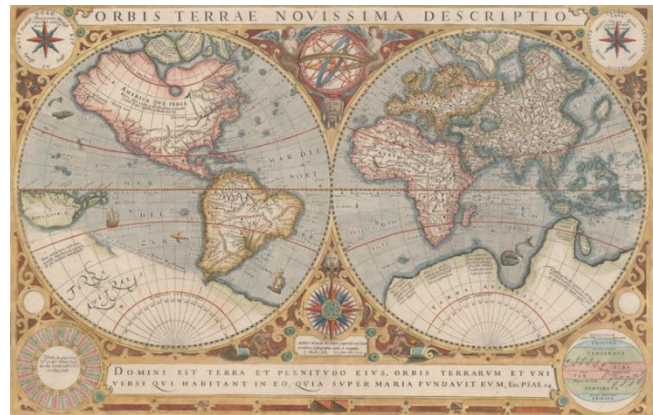
**Oval Projection.** Abraham Ortelius, *Typus Orbis Terrarum*, 1581.



**Polar Projection (left) & Cordiform Projection (right).** Keizer/De Lat, *De Wareld in een Ronde Gedaante van de Noord Pool te Zien...* [on sheet with] *De Wareld Verbeeld in de Gedaante van een Hard en Geleege*, 1786.



**Mercator Projection.** Willem Blaeu, *Nova Totius Terrarum Orbis Geographica ac Hydrographica Tabula*, 1606.



**Double-Hemisphere Projection.** Hondius/Le Clerc, *Orbis Terrae Novissima Descriptio*, 1633.

### The Shape of the Western Hemisphere

Of course the earliest world maps only illustrated the eastern hemisphere, which we typically call the "ancient world." Once details of Christopher Columbus' and Amerigo Vespucci's explorations in the New World made their way to the cartographers in Europe, bits of North and South America began appearing on maps. The shape of the Western Hemisphere changed dramatically during the 16th and 17th centuries, and is one of the key elements to note on a world map. One of the features to look for is the shape of the western coast of North America, which transitioned from an expansive landmass leaning towards Asia, to California as an island, to an interrupted coastline left mostly blank. The shape of South America changed too, as Abraham Ortelius depicted the continent with a large bulge on the

west coast in 1570, which was then copied by other cartographers before Ortelius corrected it in his revised world map circa 1586.



North America is shown as a long slender landmass labeled *Baccalarum*. Peter Bienewitz Apianus, *Charta Cosmographica, cum Ventorum Propria Natura et Operatione*, 1553.



North America is shown with the large cleft nearly separating the east coast from the continent, often referred to as the Sea of Verazano. Sebastian Munster, *Das Erst General Inhaltung die Beschreibung und den Circkel des Inhaltzen Erdtrichs und Moeres*, 1556.



The oversized northwestern coast of North America bulges toward Asia. Rumold Mercator, *Orbis Terrae Compendiosa Descriptio*, 1587.



South America is depicted with an unusual bulged southwestern coastline. Abraham Ortelius, *Typus Orbis Terrarum*, 1581.



California is depicted as an island, but the remainder of the Pacific Northwest remains blank. Frederick de Wit, *Nova Orbis Tabula, in Lucem Edita*, 1670.



An indistinct coastline named *Terra Esonis* appears above California extending west toward Asia, and California is here depicted as a peninsula. Johann Baptist Homann, *Planiglobii Terrestris cum Utroq Hemisphaerio Caelesti Generalis Repraesentatio*, 1744.

### Terra Australis

Terra Australis, or the great Southern Continent, began appearing with consistency on maps in the early 16th century. Although this area was not well explored until later in the 17th century, the theory of a large continent at the southern pole began as early as the 2nd century through the works of Claudius Ptolemy. The theory was that the vast landmasses north of the equator had to be balanced by an equal amount of landmass south of the equator. The shape of Terra Australis changed over the decades with new explorations, such as Jacob Le Maire's discovery in 1616 that Tierra del Fuego was not attached to the Southern Continent, and Abel Tasman's voyages to Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand in 1642-44 that further limited the possible size of the Southern Continent.



A huge *Terra Australis Nondum Cognita* makes up the imaginary Southern Continent. Abraham Ortelius, *Typus Orbis Terrarum*, 1581.



The *Southerne Unknownne Land* shows the large conjectured continent covering much of the southern hemisphere, yet without a continuous outline. John Speed, *A New and Accurat Map of the World*, 1626.



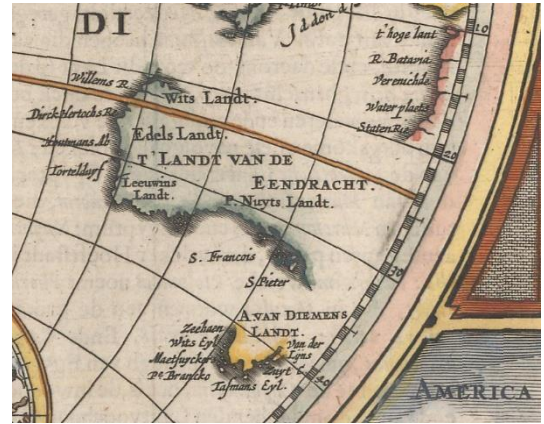
Australia is separated from the Southern Continent, which is faintly outlined and labeled *Terre Australe Magellanique et Incogneue*. Nicolas Sanson, *L'Hydrographie ou Description de l'Eau*, 1652.

### **Australia, Tasmania & New Zealand**

A large landmass east of the Indian Ocean was imagined long before Australia was discovered by European explorers. This is evidenced by 16th to 17th century world maps, which often identify the names of Beach, Lucach and Maletur as part of the Southern Continent in the general vicinity of Australia based on Marco Polo's reports of these southern Kingdoms. Dutch explorations of the northern and western coasts of Australia then began appearing sporadically on maps beginning in the 1630s. Tasman's important voyages added Van Diemens Land (Tasmania) and Staten Land (New Zealand) to the map and further solidified the cartography of the northern and western coasts of New Holland (Australia). Despite the advances made by the Dutch, French cartography from the mid-17th to mid-18th centuries ignored these findings and instead incorporated imaginary and misleading representations of Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand. These were later corrected, particularly in light of French explorers such as La Perouse, Bougainville and Freycinet, which further charted the southern coast of Australia. The first voyage of Captain James Cook (1768-71) finally gave a complete outline for New Zealand and the eastern coast of Australia, and Tasmania was confirmed as an island separate from Australia by George Bass and Matthew Flinders in 1798. In addition to updates in cartography, also note the name changes of the continent, including Terra Australis Incognita, Company's New Netherlands, New Holland, Notasie, and the native name Ulimaroa.



The huge *Terra Australis* includes the lands of Lucach, Maletur and Beach (from the travel account of Marco Polo) noted along the coast in the vicinity of present-day Australia. Rumold Mercator, *Orbis Terrae Compendiosa Descriptio*, 1587.



The Dutch discoveries in Australia and Van Diemen's Land are shown and Australia is named 't Landt van de Eendracht' after Dirk Hartog's 1616 exploration on the ship *Eendracht*. Nicolas Visscher, *Orbis Terrarum Typus de Integro in Plurimis Emendatus, Auctus, et Incunculis Illustratus*, 1650.



Australia is partially delineated, but without the cartographic advances made by the Dutch, giving it a very rudimentary outline. Nicolas Sanson, *L'Hydrographie ou Description de l'Eau*, 1652.



Although the Dutch discoveries in Australia have been incorporated, thus improving the shape of the western portion of the continent, Australia is still connected to the great Southern Continent. Henry Abraham Chatelain, *Mappemonde ou Description Generale du Globe Terrestre*, 1708.



Australia is shown attached to both Tasmania and New Guinea with a conjectural eastern coastline incorporating *Terre du S. Esprit* (New Hebrides). Janvier/Lattre, *Mappe-Monde ou Description du Globe Terrestre, Assujettie aux Observations Astronomiques*, 1762.



Australia is named both *New Holland* and *Terra Australis*, with new place names noted along the eastern coast based on Captain Cook's first voyage. Samuel Dunn, *A General Map of the World, or Terraqueous Globe*, 1794.

### The Northern Passage

Conjectural cartography also abounds near the North Pole, where a direct **Northern Passage** was sought to connect the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, thereby simplifying the lucrative trade route between Europe and Asia. European cartographers imagined this passage heading both east over Europe and Russia, as well as west over North America. After numerous unsuccessful voyages, including Martin Frobisher, Henry Hudson, Hugh Willoughby, and Vitus Bering, the regions surrounding the Arctic Ocean became more accurately portrayed on maps.



A prominent Northern Passage, extending both east and west, snakes its way south of the four islands making up the arctic regions. Abraham Ortelius, *Typus Orbis Terrarum*, 1581.



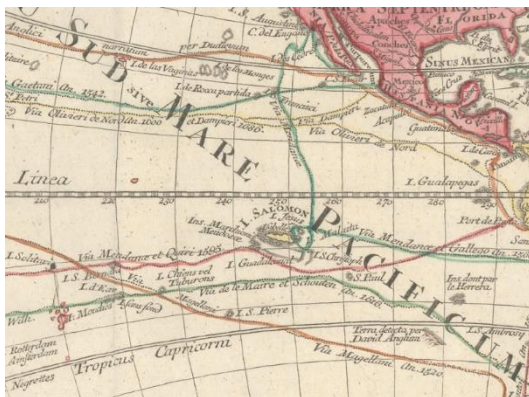
In North America there is a distinct Northwest Passage connecting Hudson Bay with the large Sea of the West and the Pacific.  
 Janvier/Lattre, *Mappe-Monde ou Description du Globe Terrestre, Assujettie aux Observations Astronomiques*, 1762.



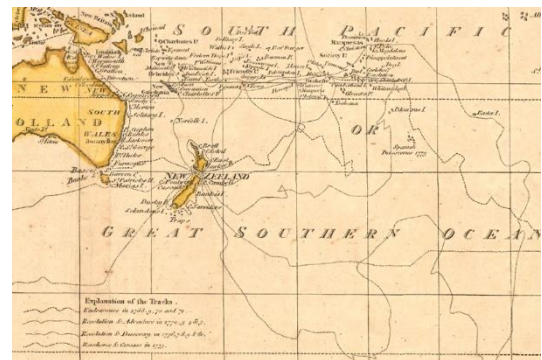
The northwest coast of North America is depicted in an odd configuration, with a Northwest Passage stretching from the Hudson Bay to the Pacific. Robert de Vaugondy/Delamarche, *Mappe-Monde par Robert de Vaugondy Geographe*, 1795.

### Tracks of Explorers

Since world maps depict new geographical discoveries, it is fitting that the explorers who made these findings are also highlighted. Notations of various discoveries (along with the year in which they occurred) are often included on world maps, which demonstrated to patrons that the map was as up-to-date as possible. Many world maps, particularly in the 18th century, focus on the tracks of various explorers, which are shown crisscrossing the seas. Showing the routes of the voyages of Magellan, Drake, Le Maire, Dampier, Anson, Cook, and others helps connect the geography of the map with the history behind it.



The routes of several important explorers and their discoveries are marked, including Magellan, Tasman, Noort, Gaytan, Quiros, and Mendana.  
 Tobias Conrad Lotter, *Mappa Totius Mundi Adornata Juxta Observationes Dnn Academiæ Regalis Scientiarum*, 1775.



The tracks of Captain Cook on his three major voyages of exploration are outlined throughout the map. Samuel John Neele, *A General Chart of the World on Mercators Projection Exhibiting All the New Discoveries and the Tracks, of the Different Circum Navigators*, 1808.



## Decorative Elements

World maps were usually the most lavish maps published in an atlas, so there are numerous decorative elements that can be found. Many early maps feature mythical creatures, such as windheads blowing wind from each direction, putti holding banners or simply filling empty space, and sea monsters warning of the dangers of sailing uncharted waters. Allegorical figures are also common, including figures representing each of the continents, the four seasons, or the four elements (earth, air, wind and fire), as well as Greek and Roman gods such as Zeus, Poseidon, Atlas, Mercury, and Athena. Extraordinary **cartes-a-figures** maps feature figures within the borders, often showing people from various continents in their native costumes, and can even include views of important cities around the world. These elements certainly make the maps more beautiful and desirable, and can also inform the viewer of the extent of European knowledge of the people and places around the world at the time.



This lively allegorical scene represents the element of air as the heavenly realm ruled by Zeus and Hera. Justus Danckerts, *Nova Totius Terrarum Orbis Tabula*, 1680.



This map is surrounded by allegorical representations of the continents complemented by native inhabitants and wildlife. Nicolas Visscher, *Orbis Terrarum Typus de Integro in Plurimis Emendatus, Auctus, et Incunclis Illustratus*, 1650.



The carte-a-figures border of this world map includes allegorical representations of the planets and the seasons. Willem Blaeu, *Nova Totius Terrarum Orbis Geographica ac Hydrographica Tabula*, 1635.



This lovely celestial hemisphere is flanked by figural representations of Fire and Air. John Speed, *A New and Accurat Map of the World*, 1626.

### **From the World to the Continents**

Of course there are many more features to find on world maps, and we hope you will peruse them more thoroughly to note other common themes and interesting changes made over time. Many of these additional changes will be discussed in our future newsletters on each of the continents, so stay tuned!

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