

Map Information Sheet

Nova Totius Terrarum Orbis



Author:	Hendrik (Henricus) Hondius (1597 – 1651)
Date:	1630
Publisher:	Published by Henricus Hondius; first atlas issue c. 1633 Amsterdam
Original Size:	54cm x 38cm

Hendrik Hondius's **1630 world map**, whose full title translates approximately as *A New Geographical and Hydrographical Map of the Whole World*, is one of the celebrated world maps of the **Dutch Golden Age of cartography**. Engraved in Amsterdam at a time when Dutch merchants and navigators were greatly expanding European geographical knowledge, it combines contemporary discoveries with inherited geographical ideas and exceptionally elaborate Baroque decoration. The map was prepared by **Hendrik (Henricus) Hondius the Younger (1597–1651)**, son of the cartographer and publisher Jodocus Hondius, and was created as part of the effort by Hondius and his partner Jan Jansson to renew the famous Mercator-Hondius atlas in the face of growing competition from the Blaeu publishing house.

Cartographic style and imagery

The world is presented in the characteristic **double-hemisphere format**, giving the viewer the impression of seeing the two halves of a terrestrial globe simultaneously. Although Hondius did not invent this arrangement, the map's popularity and long publication history helped establish the double hemisphere as one of the dominant formats for world maps during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The geographical information is surrounded by an extraordinarily rich decorative programme. The spaces around the hemispheres contain allegorical representations of the **four classical elements: Fire, Air, Earth and Water**. A celestial globe occupies the space between the hemispheres above, while the lower centre contains an allegorical scene in which personifications of **Asia, Africa and America offer tribute to Europe**. This imagery is characteristic of seventeenth-century European cartography: a world map was intended not merely to record geography but also to communicate ideas about nature, learning, exploration and European power.

The four corners contain portraits linking the new map with the history of geography: **Julius Caesar**, associated with the surveying of the Roman Empire; **Claudius Ptolemy**, the great classical authority on geography; **Gerard Mercator**, whose projection and atlas profoundly influenced European cartography; and **Jodocus Hondius**, Hendrik's father, who had acquired Mercator's atlas plates and developed the Mercator-Hondius publishing enterprise. The portraits effectively present Hendrik Hondius as the successor to a distinguished cartographic tradition stretching from antiquity to contemporary Amsterdam.

A world partly known and partly imagined

Geographically, the map provides a fascinating snapshot of European knowledge in **1630**. Europe and the major coastlines of Africa and Asia were comparatively well established, reflecting centuries of Mediterranean geography and Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch navigation. Elsewhere, however, accurate observation existed alongside conjecture. North America, for example, lacks the Great Lakes in their recognizable form, while **California is depicted as an island**, one of the most famous cartographic misconceptions of the seventeenth century. The northern reaches of America remain uncertain, reflecting the continuing search for a Northwest Passage.

The southern hemisphere is particularly revealing. A vast hypothetical **Terra Australis Incognita** - the supposed great southern continent inherited from earlier geographical theory - still occupies parts of the map. Yet alongside this speculative geography Hondius incorporated information derived from recent **Dutch voyages to Australia**. The map includes discoveries around the Gulf of Carpentaria associated with Jan Carstensz's 1623 voyage, while treating them separately from the conjectural southern continent.

This juxtaposition is one of the map's most interesting characteristics: **old geographical theory and new empirical discovery coexist on the same sheet**. The map therefore records not simply what Europeans believed the world looked like, but the process by which inherited geographical ideas were gradually being corrected by oceanic exploration.

Historical context

The map appeared at the height of the **Dutch Golden Age**. During the early seventeenth century, Amsterdam had become Europe's leading centre for mapmaking as well as one of its great centres of international trade. Dutch ships operated across the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans, while the **Dutch East India Company (VOC)** and Dutch West India Company generated an enormous flow of navigational and geographical information.

Cartography was also a fiercely competitive commercial business. Hendrik Hondius and Jan Jansson were attempting to maintain the position of the **Mercator-Hondius atlas tradition** against the increasingly successful maps and atlases of Willem Blaeu. The new world map was produced specifically as part of this effort to modernize their atlas with more current geography and more spectacular engraving.

The timing is particularly significant. Europeans were beginning to assemble a genuinely global geographical picture, but enormous areas remained unknown to them. Australia had not yet been circumnavigated; the geography of the North American interior was poorly understood; much of inland Africa remained based on older reports; and Antarctica was entirely unknown as a mapped continent. Hondius's map therefore stands at an important point between the geography inherited from the Renaissance and the increasingly observation-based cartography produced by the great voyages of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Significance

The map is particularly important in the history of the mapping of **Australia**. It has been described as the **earliest dated world map published in an atlas to incorporate a Dutch discovery in Australia**. Earlier Dutch manuscript and printed charts had recorded Australian discoveries - notably Hessel Gerritsz's 1627 chart - but they did not receive the same wide atlas circulation. Hondius therefore helped introduce the emerging outline of Australia to a much larger European audience.

It is also significant aesthetically. The map represents the point at which **geography, art, science and commerce came together in Dutch atlas production**. Its elaborate allegories and portraits may appear ornamental to a modern viewer, but they formed part of the map's intellectual message: geographical knowledge was presented as the culmination of classical learning, scientific observation and European exploration.

In summary: Hendrik Hondius's *Nova Totius Terrarum Orbis Geographica ac Hydrographica Tabula* of 1630 is one of the defining world maps of seventeenth-century Dutch cartography. Its magnificent double-hemisphere design combines Baroque allegory with the latest geographical information available in Amsterdam. It preserves striking errors such as insular California and the hypothetical *Terra Australis*, while simultaneously incorporating very recent Dutch discoveries in Australia. The result is an unusually vivid record of a world whose broad outlines were becoming recognizable, but whose unexplored regions still left considerable room for conjecture. It captures a pivotal moment when **voyage-based observation was beginning to replace inherited geographical tradition**, and when Amsterdam stood at the centre of both global commerce and European mapmaking.

