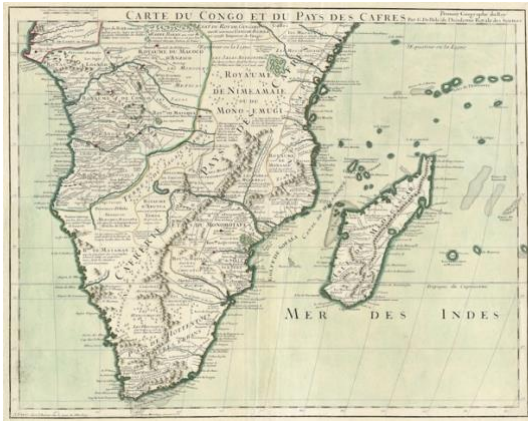


Map Information Sheet

Carte du Congo et du Pays des Cafres



Author: Guillaume de L'Isle (1675-1726)

Date of Publication: 1708

Publisher:

Original Size: 61cm x 48cm

Description

The **1708 map of southern Africa by Guillaume De L'Isle**, titled *Carte du Congo et du Pays des Cafres, avec la Côte d'Afrique depuis le Cap de Bonne Espérance jusqu'au Cap Negro*, represents one of the first scientifically constructed depictions of southern and central Africa produced in the early Enlightenment era. Extending from the Cape of Good Hope north to Cape Negro in Angola and inland to the Congo and Zambezi basins, the map shows the Dutch Cape Colony, the kingdoms of Monomotapa and Congo, and Portuguese outposts along the coasts, while also featuring a large speculative inland lake feeding the Nile. De L'Isle's work, based on improved astronomical observations and the best reports from explorers, missionaries, and traders, replaced the decorative excesses of 17th-century Dutch maps with a new rational clarity. Yet, despite its scientific ambition, it still carried traces of inherited myth and ethnographic generalisation - labelling vast regions as the *Pays des Cafres* ("Land of the Caffres") and perpetuating semi-legendary geography. Published as France sought intellectual parity with Dutch and Portuguese cartography, De L'Isle's map signified a turning point toward empirical, Enlightenment mapping, capturing the Cape's growing Dutch presence, the Portuguese sphere in Angola and Mozambique, and the enduring European fascination with Africa's interior empires and imagined sources of wealth.

Cartographic Content

- Covers a vast area of **southern and central Africa**: from the Cape of Good Hope north to about 15°N (Cape Negro, in present-day Angola), and inland to the kingdoms along the Zambezi and Congo basins.
- Includes the **Cape Colony**, the interior labelled as the *Pays des Cafres* ("Land of the Caffres"), and the regions associated with the kingdoms of Monomotapa and Congo.
- **Cape of Good Hope**: The Dutch settlement is marked, by then nearly six decades established (founded 1652).
- **Ethnographic Labelling**: Khoikhoi groups are generalized as *Cafres* (a European exonym derived from the Arabic *kafir*, meaning "non-believer"), extending across southern Africa.
- **Kingdom of Monomotapa**: Depicted inland, east of present-day Zimbabwe/Mozambique, reflecting enduring European fascination with this gold-rich Shona state.
- **Kingdom of Congo**: Shown on the west coast, with its Portuguese-influenced trade networks.
- **Rivers and Lakes**: The Congo River and Zambezi are marked, though distorted. A large inland lake (*Zaire Lac*), reminiscent of the legendary *Zambeze/Zaire lake*, appears as a supposed source of the Nile.
- **Portuguese Outposts**: Coastal forts such as Luanda, Benguela, Mozambique, and Sofala are named, showing Portuguese dominance along Africa's coasts.
- De L'Isle's map is scientific in intent, abandoning the baroque flourishes of 17th-century Dutch maps. He uses precise latitude/longitude grids, clearer coastlines, and avoids excessive decoration, signalling the rise of Enlightenment cartography.

Significance

1. Scientific Cartography:

- De L'Isle's 1708 map represents a shift toward Enlightenment rationalism in mapmaking: clear grids, rejection of wild speculation, and reliance on verified reports.

2. Colonial Context:

- The map reflects the three great European zones of influence in Africa at the time:
 - Dutch at the Cape.
 - Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique.
 - Indigenous African states like Monomotapa and Congo, still respected in European geography.

3. Persistence of Myth:

- Despite De L'Isle's precision, the inclusion of a great inland lake feeding the Nile shows how older geographic legends persisted into the Enlightenment, blending speculation with empiricism.

Historical Context

• Guillaume De L'Isle (1675–1726):

- A leading French cartographer of the early Enlightenment, De L'Isle introduced a new era of “scientific cartography”.
- Unlike earlier mapmakers who often repeated geographic myths, De L'Isle insisted on using the most reliable reports available - from explorers, missionaries, merchants, and navigators - and plotted them against astronomical observations for latitude/longitude.

• Southern Africa in 1708:

- The Dutch East India Company (VOC) had consolidated its Cape Colony. By 1708, settlers were expanding inland, displacing Khoikhoi groups and beginning encounters with Xhosa peoples.
- Portuguese influence remained strong on the east and west coasts (Angola and Mozambique).
- Inland kingdoms like Monomotapa were still prominent in European imagination, though their political power was waning.

• Ethnographic and Colonial Knowledge:

- European use of “Cafres” as a blanket term for African peoples of the southeast reflected both ignorance and colonial classification systems.
- De L'Isle incorporated reports from missionaries and traders but still repeated inherited myths (such as the inland lake).
- His careful acknowledgement of uncertain areas (labelling some regions “unknown”) marked a departure from the assertive but inaccurate style of 16th–17th-century maps.

• Mapmaking & Imperial Ambitions:

- The map reflects France's growing scientific interest in Africa during the early 18th century, even if France had little direct colonial presence there at the time.
- By publishing an authoritative depiction of the Congo, Cape, and Monomotapa, De L'Isle was positioning Paris as a centre of geographic knowledge, rivalling Dutch cartography.

The Term “Cafres”:

- Derived from the Arabic *kafir* (“non-believer”), the term was adopted by Portuguese and other Europeans as a broad label for Nguni-speaking peoples in southeastern Africa.
- Its use on the map reflects both early European ethnographic categorization and the colonial vocabulary of the time, not how these communities identified themselves.
- Today, “Cafre” and its derivatives are considered offensive and derogatory, and the term is used here solely in its historical context to explain how early European cartographers understood - and often misunderstood - African societies.

