Nova et Acurata Totius Americae Tabula au G. [B.].
["A New and Accurate map of all of America by G. Blaeu].
Willem Blaeu, Amsterdam, circa 1608 (Pietro Todeschi, Bologna, circa 1673).
Size: 104 x 142 cm.

Antwerp, which had been the center of such prolific map makers as Abraham Ortelius, was sacked by the Spanish in 1576 and eventually fell to them in 1585 after a 14-month siege. In retaliation the Dutch blocked sea access to Antwerp via the Scheldt River, strangling the city’s commerce. The tactic inevitably wreaked havoc not only for the Spanish, but for Dutch interests in Antwerp as well. A prime beneficiary was one of Antwerp’s rival Netherland cities, Amsterdam.

By the turn of the 17th century, cartographers in Amsterdam had secured preeminence in the publishing of maps, including the production of spectacular large works intended to adorn the walls of wealthy patrons. Willem Blaeu, from early in his career, had staked much of his commercial success on these works. His wall maps became highly prized and as a result were plagiarized by other makers. The present map is a copy of Blaeu’s wall map of America, originally published in Amsterdam circa 1608. Although no copy of the 1608 issue is known to survive, the map was periodically resurrected by other makers during the century and is here copied by the Bologna publisher Pietro Todeschi circa 1673. Despite its Italian provenance, this work epitomizes Dutch cartography at its zenith.

Dutch and Flemish map-making, the pre-eminence of which began about 1570 with the introduction of Ortelius’ Theatrum and lasted through the close of the 17th century, was closely integrated with Dutch art in general and coincided with the lives of
many of the great Dutch artists. Indeed, many map-makers were influenced by their artist compatriots, just as some artists incorporated the map as art object into their canvases. Most familiar among these was Jan Vermeer, whose *Lady with a Lute* and *Artist in His Studio*, among others, contain hanging maps as compositional elements, demonstrating the popularity of the wall map as fashionable adornment for the walls of the affluent.

Wall maps were envied well before the Dutch period, however. The use of such maps to dress-up the dwellings of the privileged can be traced back to at least the later Middle Ages, when magnificent and quasi-encyclopedic *mappaemundi* were created for the rich, the State, and the Church. With the advent of printing, the woodcut medium was used to produce large city-views as early as 1500, and elaborate, monumental maps of the world at least as early as 1507. The wall map’s transition to the superior copperplate medium occurred at the hands of the Italian school in the second half of the 16th century.

Geographically, the map utilized the finest data available to Blaeu in the first decade of the 17th century. But by the time Todeschi issued this copy in the third quarter of the century, much of it was dated. Even the map’s depiction of California, correctly shown as a peninsula while virtually all contemporary maps adhered to the island theory then in vogue, should fairly be judged as an anachronism rather than as a virtue. The only obvious benefit Todeschi reaped from the intervening years appears in the inset of the south polar region, where the discoveries of Abel Tasman in 1642 are recorded (mistakenly inscribed *detecta 1667*). But because the discovery of Australia in 1612 is not shown, Todeschi’s Tasmania lies among the remnants of *Boach Provicia* (a mis-charting of Marco Polo’s Southeast Asia) and other vestiges of the defunct *Southern Continent*. The discovery by Le Maire of a route around Tierra del Fuego in 1615-16 is noted both on the inset and on the map proper but Blaeu’s pre-Le Maire geography has
been left essentially intact.

Just as Todeschi plagiarized Blaeu's map, the illustrative panels used by Blaeu were themselves pirated from other works. The panels along the left and right sides, illustrating the customs and dress of the various peoples of America, are derived from the *Voyages* of Theodore de Bry. Of these, six along the left border pertain to North America. The second from the top shows the manner in which the women of *Dasemonquepeuc* (Virginia) carry their children, a young woman of *Secota* (Virginia), and chief lady of *Secota*; third from the top shows a chief lady of *Potneiooc* (Virginia) carrying a gourd containing “some kind of pleasant liquor,” and an old man of *Potneiooc* in winter clothes; fourth from the bottom shows a religious man of *Secota*, a conjurer or magician, and a prince set for battle; fifth down depicts a chief and warriors of Florida; sixth down, also Florida, is a king and his first wife out for an evening stroll in the forest, assisted by an attendant; the next depicts sovereigns of Hispaniola; and the second from the bottom shows a king, queen, and attendants in *Nova Albion*, Drake’s landing on the West Coast generally believed to be California. Some of the town views flanking the bottom are taken from the Portuguese cartographer Baptista Boazio.

Like globes, wall maps suffered the ravages of time and the elements to a far greater degree than did maps bound into atlases or other books, and few have survived. Compounding their vulnerability, they were often coated with varnish which yellowed and cracked with age. Vermeer’s painting testifies to the rapidity with which such decay began; a degree of deterioration can be noted even on the Visscher wall map of the Netherlands hanging in Vermeer’s *Artist in His Studio*, frozen in time by Vermeer as it fared in about 1667.
Reference:
*Suarez, T. *Shedding the Veil*, pp. 112-113, Plate XVI