



EDUCATION KIT

Ptolemy's *Geography* and Renaissance Mapmakers

A Newberry Library Exhibition Nov. 3, 2007—Feb. 16, 2008

PTOLEMY TRANSPARENCY #2

“Typus orbis terrarum”

Ortelius, Abraham. *Theatrum; oder Schawbüch des Erdtkrejs*. Antwerp: Christoffel Platin, 1580.
Newberry Library (Gift of Martin D. Jahn): oversize Ayer G1006 .T515 1580

EXHIBIT TEXT:

First published in 1570, the *Theatrum orbis terrarum* of Abraham Ortelius quickly found itself in the same geographical niche as the first editions of Ptolemy's *Geography* had a hundred years earlier—it was seen as *the* authoritative picture of what the world looked like, and it held that rank for the rest of the century, with twenty-four editions published in Latin, Dutch, German, French, and Spanish before 1600.

This is the world map in the second German-language edition, published in 1580.

TEACHER NOTES:

- This was an attempt to map the world using updated coordinates and geographic information acquired from Renaissance explorations of the world.
- The interior of Antarctica had not yet been explored in 1570, but Ortelius mapped it as a large landmass because he believed it must exist as a balance to the North Pole; he indicates as much by labeling the mass *terra australis nondum cognita*, which literally means, “unknown southern land.”
- Insufficient geographic data about the East Asian islands led Ortelius to map them much larger than we know them to be today.
- Insufficient exploration caused cartographers to misinterpret the shape and location of North America in relation to the rest of the world. This resulted in it looking short and fat, with little detail along the coast or inland. Note that there is no indication of the Great Lakes or the Mississippi River and little sign of the Rocky Mountains.
- Some important translations [NOTE: this map is printed primarily in Latin, with occasional German words used as well]:
 - Circulus Aequinoctialis = Equator
 - Mar = Sea/Ocean
 - Nort = North
 - Zur = South

DISCUSSION PROMPTS/SUGGESTED CLASS ACTIVITIES:

- Compare this map to that on “Ptolemy Transparency #1” to identify areas of increased geographic knowledge.
- Identify as many places as possible through *absolute location*, *relative location*, shape, symbol, or written identifications.
- Identify beliefs or geographic understandings of Ortelius' time that have since been modified, changed, or disproven.