



The extremely rare English edition of an important chart of the East Indies

PLANCIUS, Petrus.

Insulae Moluccae celeberrimae sunt ob Maximamaromatum copiam quam per totum terrarum orbem mittunt...

London: John Wolfe, 1598. Coloured. 390 x 540mm.

£65,000

The English edition of Plancius's chart of the islands of the East Indies, engraved by Richard Becket for Linschoten's 'Discours of Voyages into ye Easte & West Indies'. The original was engraved by Johannes à Doeticum, c.1594, to help the Dutch break the Portuguese monopoly on the spice trade in the East Indies. Following the successful Dutch rebellion against their Spanish over-lords in 1579, the Dutch struck out to take a share in the lucrative trade in spices from the Far East. In 1592 Petrus Plancius, a cartographer and Flemish minister in the Calvinist Reform Church, sponsored a covert mission to obtain confidential Portuguese manuscript charts from Lisbon. The Houtman brothers, Cornelius and Frederick, acquired twenty-five manuscript charts by the Portuguese cartographer, Bartolomeu Lasso, from which Plancius compiled this map. It was first published as a loose sheet in 1595, but it was also bound into some copies of Linschoten's 'Itinerario'. Cartographically the map is a huge improvement on previous printed maps of Southeast Asia with the Sunda Islands, the Moluccas, and much of the mainland coast well-delineated. The large islands of the Philippines, such as Luzon and Mindanao, are well-drawn, and although the cluster of islands between them are crude, they are at least well placed

and correctly named. Palawan is confused with the 'Calamianes' a group of small islands to its east. To the southeast a vast New Guinea has been tentatively assigned to the, theoretical, 'southern continent'; Plancius confuses its west coast, present-day Irian Jaya, with the island of Seram (Ceriam), upon which he places the Guinean port of 'Canam'. This confusion was to be compounded by Linschoten a year later and was depicted by Rossi on his map of 1680. On the mainland the fictitious trans-peninsula waterway is shown, as is a phantom lake, dotted with islands, west of Siam. Plancius curiously omits Singapore. At the bottom of the map he depicts the various commodities that the islands have to offer - the key to any prospective Dutch investor. These include cloves (*Caryophyllorum Arbor*), nutmeg (*nux Myristica*) and sandalwood (*Santulum fluvium*). John Wolfe was notorious for his 'Machiavellian devices', which were pirating the work of other publishers, especially Latin grammars, Bibles and The Book of Common Prayer. He was blackballed from the Stationers' Company until 1583, when he is said to have reformed his behaviour following a raid on his premises. This did not stop him from copying the work of foreign publishers, as this map testifies.

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