

Abraham Ortelius, 1570

AMERICAЕ SIVE NOVI ORBIS, NOVA DESCRIPTIO*

ABRAM ORTELIUS'S *Theatrum* was the atlas of its period, one that lasted from its first publication in 1570 until into the next century. Ortelius was the first to appreciate the value of a collection of maps where scale was sacrificed to a single format. The idea was sufficiently successful for the *Theatrum* to require four printings in its first year, and the large size—essential for proper map detail—survives today in the world atlases of Rand McNally and the Times.

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Ortelius's map of America is closely linked to his long friendship with Gerard Mercator, and the cartographic exchange that was central to it. Yes, the 1570 Ortelius map of America is closely copied from Mercator's great world map of the previous year, but that, in turn, had borrowed from earlier Ortelius maps. Unfortunately, as far as the continent's west coast is concerned, this progression did not represent progress.

This is not so surprising, given that the map publishing centers of northern Europe were far from the Spanish ports to which the Pacific explorers returned. As a result, the Mercator wall-map and its Ortelian derivative are noteworthy for two striking errors. The Chilean "bulge," almost the hallmark of the Ortelius *Americae* until it was removed on the third version of 1587, reveals an armchair geographer attempting to reconcile two different sources. Similarly, with the northwest coast, whose projection westwards (roughly at California's northern boundary) by a matter of over thirty degrees, rather than the correct seven degrees, gives Ortelius's map its other "signature." The fictitious southern continent so favored by Mercator is faithfully reproduced by Ortelius, who puts his large title cartouche over the same section that Mercator had masked with a panel.

California—yet to be cut loose as a cartographic island (map 9)—has few place names. Of the four along the coast, three, *Quiuira*, *Cicuic* and *Tiguex*, derive from the 1540 expedition of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado in the Southwest. Cartographers moved these names to the northwest coast from a misunderstanding of the record of the expedition and they offer little to Californian historians. The fourth, *Sierra Neuada*, was a term used promiscuously by Spanish sailors to denote snow-covered mountains in general and cannot be identified with certainty (map 3).

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Americae sive | novi orbis, no- | va descriptio. | Cum Privilegio [Engraved, 36.5 x 50 cm. Published in *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* by Abraham Ortelius, Antwerp, 1570, State 2.]

*AMERICA OR NEW WORLD, NEW MAP

Map courtesy of Glen McLaughlin.

