

## Chapter 1

# Cartography and the Age of Discovery

### Hessel Gerritsz and His Map of Batavia

Although he was highly prolific, the quantity of Hessel Gerritsz's output tended to dip from around November to March each year as the dim winter daylight placed too much strain on his eyes to craft the minute details that his clients required on their maps. Still, though, the demand for his services in the 1620s and early 1630s was undiminished. Thus, as the shopkeepers, city officials, clergy, pick-pockets and even the prostitutes began to desert Amsterdam's streets in the chilly darkening mid-afternoons each year during this period, Gerritsz would roll up his maps, sheathe them in a specially-designed calfskin satchel to protect them from the elements, and make his way along the cobblestone-lined Kloveniersburgwal canal to the imposing headquarters of his principal employer, the Dutch East India Company (identified by its Dutch acronym VOC – Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie).<sup>1</sup> When this monumental late-Renaissance edifice was completed in 1606, it was one of the largest buildings in Amsterdam and embodied in architectural form the financial muscle that the company flexed. While he waited for the main door at the entrance of the company's offices to be opened, across from the inky canal, Gerritsz would be able to see the outline of the neat row of tall, narrow baroque houses on the eastern bank, posing elegantly against the fading light and massing black clouds – a view that has survived to the present day.

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1. The world's first multinational firm owned by shareholders.

After depositing his work, usually with one of the company's directors,<sup>2</sup> and having discussed his current projects and possible new commissions,<sup>3</sup> Gerritsz would head homeward, with only the flickering lanterns outside the doors of a few houses providing faint spots of iridescence along the way. As he walked back, he would hug his *huik* – a heavy hooded cloak – closer to his body to shield himself as much as he could from the icy air that funnelled through the Markermeer from the North Sea. It was a route he had taken for more than a decade since he had been contracted by the Dutch East India Company to produce and improve maps for:

all places, regions, islands, and harbours relevant for the Asian navigation ... all logbooks that he already received and which he will receive from now on through the directors, will have to be stored in the East India House [in Amsterdam]; he will keep a complete catalogue of the logbooks ... he will correct the standard charts only after the directors have approved the corrections; on his death his widow or heirs will hand over all the papers in his possession.<sup>4</sup>

Tucked in at the end of the agreement that Gerritsz had with the company was the requirement that he would 'publish nothing without the permission of the directors ... [and] he should observe secrecy about his work'.<sup>5</sup> Breaching this would incur a fine of 6,000 guilders (the modern equivalent of just under £200,000). Such a heavy penalty was an indication of how commercially valuable maps were becoming to the company, particularly when its commercial empire was in fierce competition in this era with those of Portugal, England and Spain.

In addition to this contract, Gerritsz undertook commissions for the West India Company, the Dutch Admiralty of Amsterdam and other agencies if the work was available. At times, he collaborated with Willem Janszoon Blaeu, a cartographer ten years his senior, who specialised in atlases<sup>6</sup> and who passed on many of his cartographical

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2. There were seventeen in total and they were known as the Heren XVII – the Gentlemen Seventeen.

3. J. Keuning, 'Hessel Gerritsz', *Imago Mundi* 6, no. 1 (1949), p. 56.

4. P. van Dam, *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, ed. F.W. Stapel (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1927-54), Vol. 1, pp. 414-15.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 415.

6. As an example, see W.J. Blaeu, *Atlantis majoris appendix sive pars altera continens geographicas tabulas diversarum orbis regionum et provinciarum octoginta* (Amsterdam, Willem Janszoon Blaeu, 1630).

skills to Gerritsz.<sup>7</sup> These were not the only mapmakers, however, who were employed by the trading companies in Amsterdam in this period and there was consequently a degree of rivalry among the studios<sup>8</sup> over which could produce the most dependable charts as promptly as possible for their wealthy clients.

In 1613, Gerritsz had attempted to further his chosen career as he neared the end of his apprenticeship by publishing a small book containing just one map. It was a copy of an English chart produced by John Daniels around 1611, which had made its way to the Netherlands after an English navigator – Allen Sallowes – deserted his vessel to escape debts he owed in England and befriended a group of Dutch sailors, to whom the map was passed on.<sup>9</sup> Instead of being a compendium of maps and charts, as might have been expected of an up-and-coming cartographer, Gerritsz's book was a scientific treatise on a Norwegian archipelago in the Arctic Ocean then known as Spitsbergen.<sup>10</sup> He saturated his text with geographical coordinates and descriptions of the location's terrain, coast and resources – the sort of information that he hoped would convince the Dutch East India Company of his abilities. Moreover, just in case this was not quite sufficient to arouse the company's interest, he deliberately seasoned the book's subtitle with an anti-English flavour (referring to the 'annoyances which the Whalers, Basque, Dutch, and Flemish, Have endured at the Hands of the English').<sup>11</sup> The ploy was successful and, with his loyalties and capabilities thus demonstrated, he soon entered into the circle of cartographers contracted by the company to map its expansion.

By 1630, Gerritsz was one of the greatest mapmakers in Europe. From his Amsterdam workshop – which was crammed with paints, palettes, props, piles of papers, easels, benches, books, works-in-progress and all the other bric-a-brac of his profession – this 49-year-old cartographer,

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7. G. Schilder, 'Organization and Evolution of the Dutch East India Company's Hydrographic Office in the Seventeenth Century', *Imago Mundi* 28, no. 1 (1976), p. 62.
  8. K. Zandvliet, *De groote waereld in't kleen geschildert: Nederlandse kartografie tussen de middeleeuwen en de industriële revolutie* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Canaletto, 1985), pp. 177-80.
  9. M. Conway, 'The Cartography of Spitsbergen', *Geographical Journal* 21, no. 6 (1903), p. 638.
  10. It is now known as the Svalbard archipelago.
  11. H. Gerritsz, *History of the Country Called Spitsbergen: Its Discovery, Its Situation, Its Animals* [Amsterdam, 1613], trans. (London: British Museum, 1902), p. 11.

artist, publisher, surveyor and engraver produced territorial maps and maritime charts to a standard that was the equal of anything being created at that time.<sup>12</sup>

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In almost every sense, Amsterdam was a world away from Batavia (now Jakarta) – the muggy tropical trading post that was at the farthest reach of Dutch mercantilism in the early seventeenth century and that bordered what was for Europeans in this era the edge of the known world. It was a map of Batavia produced by Gerritsz (based on a preliminary version sketched the previous year by the cartographer Jacob Cornelisz van Cuyck)<sup>13</sup> that he delivered to the company's offices on Kloveniersburgwal one afternoon in 1630. This map – created when urban planning was as much a capricious art as a pedestrian science – was comprised of a series of streets laid out in rigid vertical and horizontal lines (in keeping with the Roman grid system in which he had been trained),<sup>14</sup> with a serpentine waterway curving along part of its periphery being the only significant concession to the landscape. This was not the layout of an existing city, though, but one that officials of the Dutch East India Company hoped in the 1630s would sprout from the trading post they had planted in Batavia in 1619. The imagined form of the settlement fleshed out in Gerritsz's map was comprised of a fort, numerous commercial buildings, houses, a moat, city walls, canals, agricultural land and, of course, for this fiercely Protestant imperial power, churches.<sup>15</sup> This minor work of commercial, colonial and cultural ambition is as useful a point as any from which a chain of cartographical events can be traced, leading eventually to the creation of the first map of New Zealand.

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12. G. Schilder, 'New Cartographical Contributions to the Coastal Exploration of Australia in the Course of the Seventeenth Century', *Imago Mundi* 26, no. 1 (1972), p. 41; K. Zandvliet, 'Mapping the Dutch World Overseas in the Seventeenth Century', in D. Woodward (ed.), *The History of Cartography: Volume 3 (Part 2): Cartography in the European Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 1437.
  13. J.C. van Cuyck, *Batavia in 1629 tijdens de Mataramse belegering*, General State Archives of The Hague, Maps and Drawings Department, collection VEL, inv.nr. 1179 A.
  14. M.L. Kehoe, 'Dutch Batavia: Exposing the Hierarchy of the Dutch Colonial City', *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 7, no. 1 (2015), 1-35.
  15. H. Gerritsz, *Plattegrond van Batavia en omstreken*, National Archives of the Netherlands, NL-HaNA\_4.VEL\_1179B; Kehoe, 'Dutch Batavia', p. 6.