The Tasman Map

One of the Library’s most valued possessions, the Tasman Map, displays the results of Dutch explorer Abel Tasman’s two voyages to the southern ocean between 1642 and 1644.

The Tasman Map shows remarkably accurate sections of the Australia’s western and northern coastlines, and forms the basis of most charts produced over the next 100 years until Captain James Cook’s Endeavour voyage charted the east coast of Australia in 1770.

The Tasman Map measures 73 x 95 cms and is hand-drawn on Japanese paper. As there is no date or cartographer written on the map, it is not certain when the map was drawn. It may have been drawn by Isaac Gilsemans, a merchant on Tasman’s second voyage in 1644 or under the supervision of Franz Jacobszoon Visscher, Tasman’s chief pilot. Maps were often copied and circulated amongst members of the East India Company making it difficult to confirm the exact date of creation. The detailed wind compasses, sea monsters and decorative features indicate that it was used for display or publication rather than for practical navigation.
Bonaparte Tasman Map 1644

The location of the map between the time it was drawn and 1859 is unknown. In 1859 Hulst van Keulen, a mapmaker in Amsterdam, was in possession of the map. The map was acquired by Frederick Muller when the Van Keulen company went out of business.

In 1891 Frederick Muller then sold the map to Prince Roland Bonaparte, President of the Geographical Society of France and grand nephew of Napoleon. Prince Roland had every intention of giving the map to an Australian collection after he died, but it took some luck and a major effort from the Principal Librarian for the donation to go ahead.

What was Tasman doing in the Southern ocean?

Explorer Abel Tasman (1603-1659) was commissioned by Anthony van Diemen, head of the Dutch East-India Company in Batavia, to search for new trading markets for the company and explore the landmass south of the Dutch East Indies. In doing so, he is credited with the earliest charting of the west and northern coastlines of Australia, the first European discovery of Tasmania (which he named Van Diemen’s Land). It was during his first voyage on the vessels *Heemskerck* and *Zeehaen* in 1642-43, that he charted the south coast of Tasmania, the west coast of New Zealand, and parts of Tonga and Fiji for the first time. Tasman also charted the North coast of New Guinea.
On his second voyage, in 1644, he charted the south west coast of New Guinea and much of Australia's previously unknown northern coastline. Despite charting large areas of the Australian coastline for the first time, Tasman failed to find a sailing route to the East and his voyage was considered a failure by the VOC authorities. The Dutch lost interest in Australia soon after this and turned their attention to America, leaving the way clear for other European nations to explore the area.

The Tasman Map has been recently scanned through the Google Cultural Institute Art Camera Project. You can view the incredible detail through the Cultural Institute Site. [5]

Where does Daisy Bates fit in with the story of the Tasman map?

How the State Library acquired the Tasman Map starts on the Nullarbor Plain in 1926. Anthropologist and welfare worker, Daisy Bates, described later by the Principal Librarian of the time as 'the most isolated white woman in the world', had been reading Round the World, a 1904 travel memoir by geographer James Park Thomson. In the book, he mentions visiting the President of the Geographical Society of France, Prince Roland Bonaparte in his mansion in Paris. Here Thomson sighted Abel Tasman’s map of Australia displayed prominently and protected behind a curtain. The Prince explained to Thomson that after his death, the map would be given to the Australian people. Apparently Prince Roland would have liked to have come to Australia himself however he was terrified of snakes. Thomson unsuccessfully tried to reassure him that it was highly unlikely he’d ever see a snake if he made the trip.

‘the most isolated white woman in the world’

By the time Daisy Bates read Thomson’s memoir, Prince Roland Bonaparte had been dead for two years, and there was no sign in Australia of the map.

From her bush camp in South Australia, Bates wrote to the Chief Librarian, William Herbert Ifould, and urged him to investigate the location of the map. Ifould found out that the map was with Bonaparte’s only child, Princess Marie Bonaparte, wife of Prince George of Greece.

Princess Marie knew of her father’s intentions but her husband wanted to come out to Australia and present the map himself. This was not going to happen for a few years, and Ifould was concerned that, by the time the planned trip occurred, Prince George may hand it to the Commonwealth authorities by mistake. In 1929, Ifould asked Lord Chelmsford to warn him of any imminent visit. By 1932, the prince’s visit was still some years away, and the Princess agreed to give the Library the map. The Tasman Map eventually arrived in Sydney in 1933.

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The vestibule version of the Tasman map

When Library extensions were opened in 1943, the first thing visitors saw was the vestibule floor – a marble version of the Tasman Map with inlays of brass and coloured marble granules commissioned by the Principal Librarian William Ifould.

The Melocco Brothers of Annandale, the city’s leading marble and mosaic workers, had created the stunning...
mosaic based on the original details in the map. The brothers came out to Sydney from northern Italy in the early part of the century. They also worked on the interstate booking office at Central Railway and the crypt at St Mary’s Cathedral.

What to look for on the Tasman map

Above the map on the floor of the Mitchell vestibule are cherubs holding early navigation instruments, including celestial spheres, a cross staff and compass. The cherubs at each corner of the floor map replicate the four winds, traditional features in 17th century cartography. The wavy blue lines on the terrazzo floor surrounding the map represents the sea.

The coat of arms below the map is of the House of Nassau, the ruling Dutch family during Tasman’s time; the motto *Concordia re parvae crescent* translates as “Small things increased by concord”.

Below the Tropic of Capricorn, you can see the tracks of Abel Tasman’s two voyages.

The *Heemskerck* and the *Zeehaen*, the two ships used in Tasman’s 1642-43 voyage can be seen in the Great Australian Bight, in the centre of the base of the map. The coat of arms of the city of Amsterdam, with the date 1644, appears just below the Tropic of Capricorn. The inscription in the top right hand corner, just above the equator (Lingne Esquinocsiallis) translates as:

“Map these lands were discovered by the Company’s explorers, except for the Northern part of New Guinea and the west end of Java. This work thus put together from different writings as well as from personal observation by Abel Jansen Tasman, A.D. 1644, by order of His Excellency the Governor-General Antonio van Diemen”.

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