

A General Map of the Arctic Regions showing parts of North America  
Size: 24 x 19 in. / 61 x 71 cm

**Description:** Dr. John Dee's map of 1582, though not a public document, shows that Englishmen interested in western voyages had gathered together all the available information about the possible routes for the passage to the Orient. In the case of some of the possibilities that Dee depicted, such as that of a connection between the River Jordan, shown at the Point of Santa Elena, and *Verrazzano's Sea*, one can discover the probable original in the *Harlien mappemonde* (#382.1), a manuscript map of the 1540s. In the case of other possibilities, such as that of the Saint Lawrence route, the ideas come from Jacques Cartier's voyages. In the case of still other possibilities, his source is unknown. The inclusion in Dee's map, as in Michael Lok's (#419), of the southern route shows that information about the lower part of North America was available in England by 1582, even if some of the key books containing it had not yet been reprinted or translated there, as they were later to be under the direction of Hakluyt the Younger.

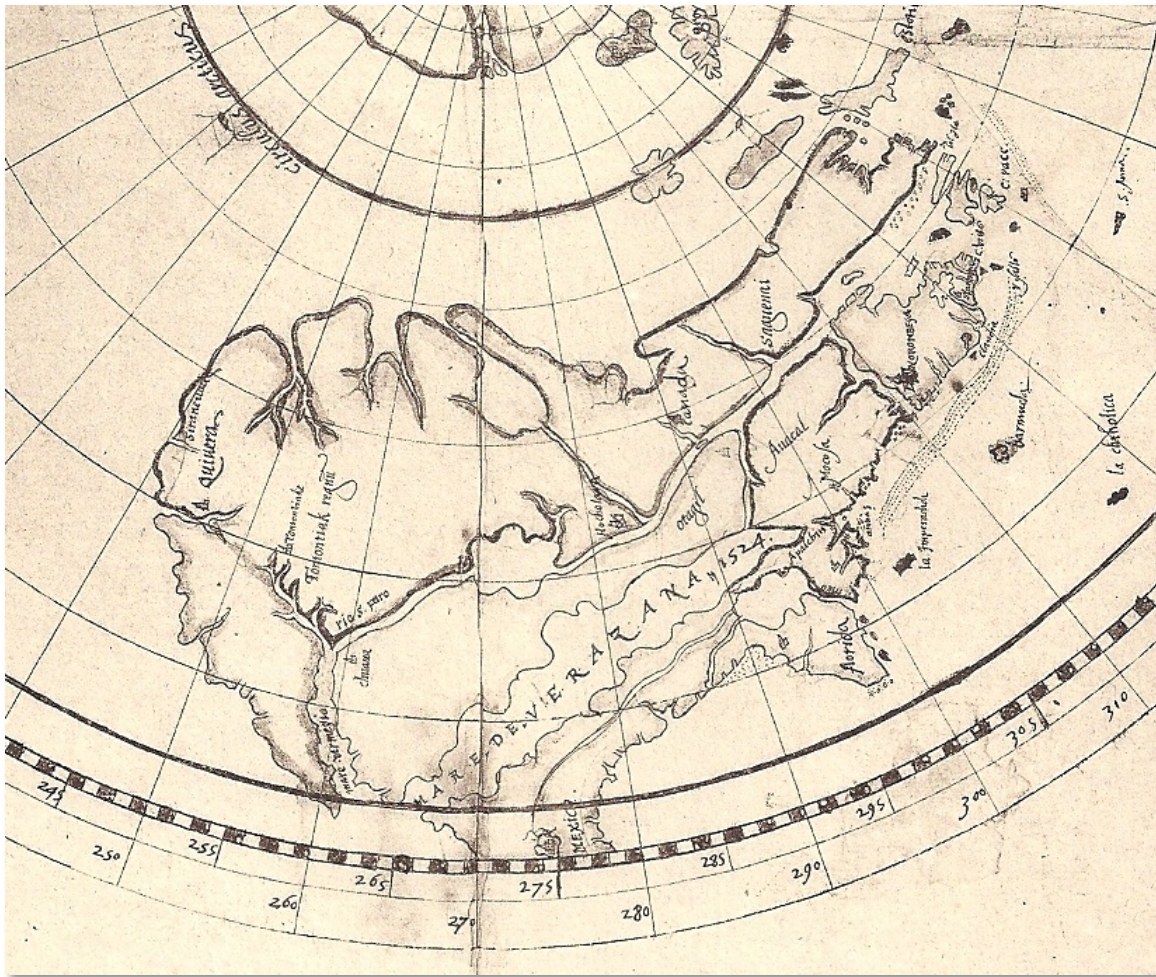
Historians have examined in some detail John Dee's efforts on behalf of the British Empire. From the mid-1550s he was recognized as an expert in geography and when seeking advice and instruction for trade expeditions it was to Dee that many explorers turned. Dee prepared maps and instructions for several explorers, including John Davis, Francis Drake, Martin Frobisher, Humphrey Gilbert, and Walter Raleigh, in their well-known attempts to search out trade routes and settle newfound lands. With

respect to Dee's efforts regarding Queen Elizabeth's sovereign title to newfound lands, however, historians have been more hesitant to assign him an important role. Most writers accept that Dee created the phrase "British Empire," but otherwise argue that his imperial vision was simply propaganda and antiquarianism, without much practical value and of limited interest to the English crown and state. More recently, literary scholar William Sherman offered a detailed examination of Dee's imperial writings, including a brief discussion of his most important collection of manuscripts on empire, the *Brytanici Imperii Limites*, which was only discovered in 1976. Like earlier writers, Sherman concluded that Dee's imperial writings, though demonstrating his exceptional erudition, were passively received by a small audience. Drawing upon Sherman, John C. Appleby has had the final word on the subject to date in the *Oxford History of the British Empire* (1998): "the impact of [Dee's] ideas ... was limited."

As Dora Polk puts it "Water, water, everywhere, is the way John Dee, the Elizabethan Welsh scholar, conceived of the New World in this map which surfaced in 1583." No bottlenecks occur across the north or into the South Sea. His *Atlantis*, as he called North America, is carved into many islands by transcontinental waterways. A strait runs from the mouth of the St. Lawrence to the head of the Gulf of California. An extraordinary *Verrazzano Sea* runs from Virginia to outlet in Mexico. California is well on the way to becoming conceptualized as one of *Atlantis'* many islands.

Polk describes the map as visionary. It is a collection of possibilities, of conjectures rather than a representation of established fact. It is based on Dee's own theory of, and on numerous scraps of information of "might be-so's" garnered from his wide reading. The polar projection shows a wide seaway north of *Atlantis* giving into the South Sea. *Atlantis* is carved into islands by several waterways. First the St. Lawrence "river" slashes the continent to emerge at the nook of the Gulf of California where sixty or so years before, Cortes had expected a river-that-might-turn-out-to-be-a-strait. Still another continent-spanning waterway is an unusual *Verrazzano Sea* running all the way from Virginia to the mouth of the Gulf of California. It joins the South Sea on the coast of New Spain opposite *La Punta de California* or Cabo San Lucas. There are additional links of water between these waterways. One strait connects the St. Lawrence-to-Gulf of California waterway with the *Verrazzano Sea*. Another with the Atlantic Ocean about where the Penobscot River flows, making New England an island. And yet another auxiliary strait connects with the great ocean to the north. Florida and other bits are made to look like islands, too. Altogether, a partly inundated *Atlantis* is presented here.





When Dee's writings on this subject are examined and reconciled with the nature of overseas enterprises at the time of their preparation, it becomes clear that his ideas were of more value than scholars have admitted. His imperial writings came at a vital period, corresponding directly with the most intense English overseas enterprises to date, when Frobisher, Drake, and Gilbert undertook their adventures in new found lands. It is within the context of specific voyages that Dee prepared his early imperial works. The first, the *General and Rare Memorials Pertayning to the Perfecte Arte of Navigation* was written in 1576 to promote Frobisher's voyage and the trading goals of the Muscovy Company. It was published at a key time in 1577, with copies being furnished to important crown officials. The second, "Of Famous and Rich Discoveries," was written in 1577 to promote Frobisher's second voyage and Francis Drake's circumnavigation, which departed in November of that year. Although neither of these works were especially influential at court, Dee established himself as an expert with these writings and was shortly afterward commissioned by the crown to prepare and present a series of works that were far more valuable. Copies of these works are extant in the *Brytanici Imperii Limites* [The Limits of the British Empire]. The four manuscripts in the collection were prepared in 1577-78, and presented when Dee met with Elizabeth, Secretary of State Sir Francis Walsingham, and the Lord Treasurer, William Cecil, Lord Burghley. These crown officials were then involved in considering, and ultimately authorizing, the establishment of the first English colonies in the New World, Frobisher's settlement in the North Atlantic and Gilbert's in North America. In his most



important audience with the queen and Burghley in October 1580, Dee informed the crown of its rights literally days after the Spanish ambassador lodged an official complaint upon Francis Drake's return from his famous circumnavigation. As these commissions and meetings at such propitious times attest, the crown placed some value on Dee's ideas about empire.

Especially noteworthy are the maturation, complexity, and longevity of Dee's ideas. As plans for the expansion of the British Empire became more elaborate, shifting quickly from exploratory trading voyages into the unknown in 1576 to settlement of territory by 1578, and as Dee's ideas became increasingly sought and respected at court, his arguments became more focused and better grounded in evidence.

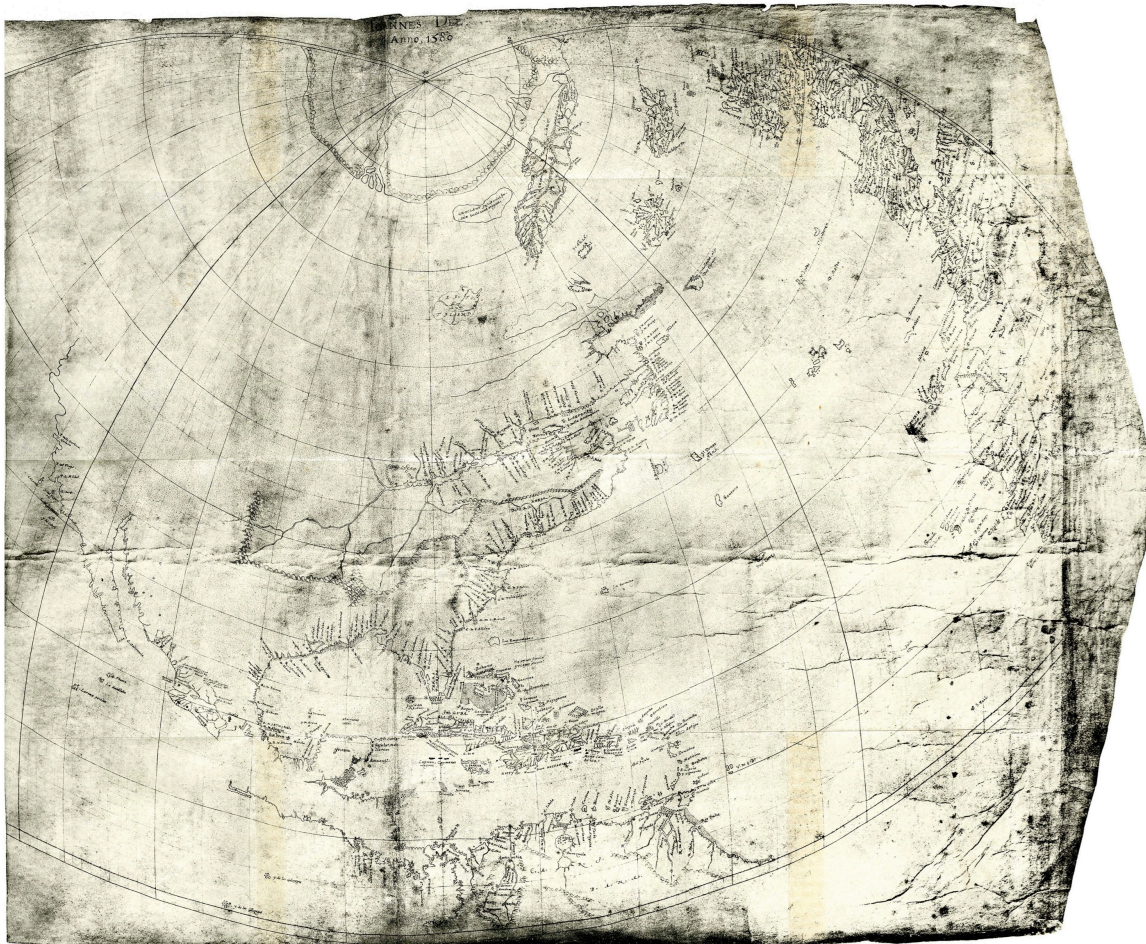
The original, or the only surviving copy, is now a treasure of the Philadelphia Free Library, titled "Sir Humfray Gilbert his chart," it bears Dee's personal symbol, as well as the unique, unmistakable, stamp of Dee's strange ideas.

**Reference:**

Brown, L.A., *The World Encompassed*, #78, Plate XXI.

Cumming, W.P., *The Southeast in Early Maps*, Plate 8.

Polk, Dora Beale, *The Island of California, A history of the Myth*, p. 204



*A totally different look at North America by Dee in 1580*