

▲ ATLAS MAIOR Peter van der Krogt (Taschen, £100)

Joan Blaeu's *Atlas Maior* of 1665 is the latest in Taschen's series of large-scale reproductions of significant illustrated historic books (it measures a whopping 45 x 30 centimetres). Blaeu was a Dutch cartographer with a high opinion of the importance of geography: 'Geography has paved the way not only for the happiness and comfort of humanity but for its glory.' He learnt map-making from his father, who inspired him to embark on a comprehensive 'cosmography' that would include not only charting the countries of the world, but earth's creation, the disposition of the planets and constellations, and maps of the earth's seas. *Atlas Maior*, originally published in 11 volumes, encompasses only the first part of this incomplete undertaking. Its maps are highly wrought and richly coloured. Those of the counties of England and Wales are ornamented with the coats of arms of the principal families of each county, and intermittently accompanied by such elliptical commentary as 'Portsmouth, that is "the mouth of the port". It is much frequented in war but less so in peacetime and more given to the exercises of Mars and Neptune than to those of Mercury.' More far-flung regions show images of natives and tribesmen. With a number of gatefold pages, this is an enormous reproduction of an exhilaratingly beautiful work, and amply merits its high price. *H&G readers can buy a copy postage free by calling 020-7845 8585 and quoting this offer.*