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Undecima Asiae Tabula

Stock#: 22262
Map Maker: Sylvanus
Date: 1511
Place: Venice
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG-
Size: 18.5 x 16 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

First Two-Color Printed Map of Southeast Asia and Surrounding Areas From a Groundbreaking Edition of Ptolemy's Geographia

Fine example of Bernardus Sylvanus' map of Southeast Asia, China, India, and adjoining regions, from his *Geographia* published in Venice in 1511. This is the first map of the region printed in two colors, red and black.

The present map shows the entire region of southeast Asia, with the Indian subcontinent, highlighting the Ganges River Delta, in the west and *Sinae* (China) in the east. The map is bounded in the north by *Scythia* and *Serica* (parts of northern China and central Asia). The peninsula at the center of the map corresponds to present-day Myanmar (Burma), Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia. At the top of the peninsula is the *Aurea Regio*, a supposed kingdom of gold. South of that is the *Aurea Argentea*, or kingdom of silver.

As stated above, this edition of the *Geographia* was the first to be printed in two colors, rather than in one color with a second hand-drawn in afterward. To achieve this, the woodblock would be passed through the press twice, one for each color. This would require careful collation of the block with the already printed sheet, and careful inking of the text-blocks set in the woodblock.

The present map is printed in a legible serif font with important names in red text. The map also has several decorative elements. The title at the top is enclosed in a decorative panel with tigers [\[MOU1\]](#) on



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either side. Each corner of the map frame is ornamented with a flower or shield symbol.

Sylvanus' 1511 edition of Ptolemy's *Geographia* was actually his second, the first being a 1490 Naples edition. But it is the 1511 edition, printed by Jacobus Pentius de Leucho in Venice, that is truly groundbreaking. In addition to being the first edition to use two-color printing and the first Italian edition to use woodblock rather than copper-engraved maps, it is the only edition of this era to have maps on both sides of the page.

Most importantly, Sylvanus was the first to update Ptolemy's texts and maps with contemporary geographical knowledge, and was the only editor to attempt to modernize the maps themselves, rather than adding separate, new maps. Using portolan charts and other sources, Sylvanus attempted to analyze each map in light of contemporary knowledge and make corrections accordingly, resolving inconsistencies in prior editions of the *Geographia*. While Sylvanus' 1511 edition was only partially commercially successful at the time, it seems to have circulated widely in following centuries, and was cited by Abraham Ortelius in his 1570 edition of *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*.

Ptolemy's *Geographia* in Renaissance Europe

The translation of Claudius Ptolemy's *Geographia* from Greek into Latin for the first time in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century spurred a wave of renewed interest and updated editions of his work. Ptolemy's ideas had been absent from western European intellectual history for roughly a thousand years, although Arab scholars interacted with his ideas from the ninth century onward. In 1295, a Greek monk found a copy of Ptolemy in Constantinople; the emperor ordered a copy made and the Greek text began to circulate in eastern Europe. In 1393, a Byzantine diplomat brought a copy of the *Geographia* to Italy, where it was translated into Latin by 1406 and called the *Cosmographia*. The manuscript maps were first recorded in 1415. These manuscripts, of which there are over eighty extant today, are the descendants of Ptolemy's work and a now-lost atlas consisting of a world map and 26 regional maps.

When Ptolemy's work was re-introduced to Western scholarship, it proved radically influential for the understanding and appearance of maps. Ptolemy's use of mathematics and astronomy to depict the world appealed to the intellectual climate of the Renaissance. Ptolemy employs the concept of a graticule, uses latitude and longitude, and orients his maps to the north—concepts we take for granted today.

The *Geographia*'s text is concerned with three main issues with regard to geography: the size and shape of the earth; map projection, i.e. how to represent the world's curve proportionally on a plane surface; and the corruption of spatial data as it transfers from source to source. The text also contains instructions as to how to map the world on a globe or a plane surface, complete with the only set of geographic coordinates (8000 toponyms, 6400 with coordinates) to survive from the classical world.



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Early printed editions of Ptolemy's *Geographia*

Some of the most important, and the most numerous, early printed maps were in editions of Ptolemy's *Geographia* (*Cosmographia*). From 1475 to 1650, there were more than forty new editions of the *Geographia*, which increasingly featured updates based on current knowledge, including recent voyages of discovery.

The text was first published in 1475 in Venice without the maps. An edition with the maps followed in 1477, printed in Bologna. These maps were another first—they were the first copperplate maps, in which an engraver scores copper, which is then inked and pressed. The Bologna edition included 25 of the original 26 regional maps (map XV was missing), as well as the world map.

A second edition with maps appeared in Rome in 1478. The third edition with maps was printed in Florence in 1482, the first to be printed in a vernacular language, Italian. It included 31 copperplate engraved maps, making it the first to augment the traditional 27 Ptolemaic maps with *tabulae novellae*, or modern maps. The modern maps included maps of Italy, Spain, and France.

The next edition to include the maps was the 1482 Ulm edition, which was the first atlas to be printed north of the Alps, as well as the first to use woodcut, not copperplate, printing. Copperplate engraving is an intaglio method; it cuts into the surface of the printing plane in order to create an impression when the engraved lines are inked. Woodcut engraving is a relief method; the surfaces to be inked are left standing, while the blank spaces are cut away.

Sylvanus' 1511 edition is described above, the first Italian edition with woodblock maps and the first edition anywhere to be printed in color and to update the actual Ptolemaic maps. Martin Waldseemüller separated his 1513 edition into two sections—one with the original maps and text, and the second with updates based on current knowledge of the world, including twenty modern maps. Fries' followed this trend in his 1522 and 1525 editions, separating Ptolemy's respected work from new knowledge and updated maps. He also added three more modern maps than Waldseemüller, but based on the other mapmaker's work, for a total of 23.

Rarity

Sylvanus printed each of his maps using two woodblocks, with each of the map sheets in the work printed on both sides, meaning that there are halves of two different maps on the back side of this example of the map. Additionally, relatively few copies of the 1511 edition were printed and were never reprinted.

As a result, Sylvanus' maps are very rare on the market and certain maps virtually never appear, as they



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featured on the verso of maps which were more heavily sought after by collectors. This map is quite rare; we have featured it only three times in the past three decades.

Detailed Condition:

Skillfully restored with facsimile along the side margins and in the centerfold area, but still quite presentable.