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Tabula orbis de fratris joannis baptista nero de porta de Genua ann. dñe 1520

Stock#: 94039
Map Maker: Anonymous
Date: 1520 dated (but 19th or early
20th Century)
Place: n.p.
Color: (See Description)
Condition: VG
Size: 16 x 10.5 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

The Known World in 1520 Through the Eyes of a Forger: Deciphering (a fake) 1520 Portolan Chart By Giovanni Battista Nero

The following description was done as if the portolan chart offered here was real. However, all evidence suggests that the chart is a 19th or early 20th Century object, created by a skilled forger.

The "Tabula Orbis de Fratrīs Joannis Baptista Nero de Porta de Genua Ann. Dñe 1520," a hand-drawn portolan chart on vellum, is a fascinating testament to the dawn of the Age of Discovery. Crafted by Genovese cartographer Giovanni Battista Nero, it captures the world as understood in 1520, a year before the discovery of the Straits of Magellan.

Extending from the Eastern coast of America to the China Sea and the Indian Ocean, the chart is a window into the nexus of the known and unknown world of that era.

One of the most striking aspects of the chart is what it excludes. It omits the Pacific Ocean, Western parts of America, northeastern parts of Asia, and any Arctic or Antarctic details, epitomizing the incomplete understanding of the world's geographical limits in the early 16th century. However, the inclusion of the Caspian Sea reveals the advanced knowledge of Eurasian geography that navigators and cartographers had developed by this time.

The artistic merit of the chart is also considerable, with the main illustration complemented by four miniature illuminations at its corners, each adding layers of meaning and context.



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The first illumination depicts a saintly Jesus, donned in golden crown and robes, comforting Mary, with a naked body resting to their right, likely symbolizing death, resurrection, and divine comfort. The second miniature presents an anthropomorphized moon and sun on either side of the earth, which is illuminated on one side and dark on the other. This likely signifies the pre-Copernican, Judeo-Christian-centric view of the universe, with the earth at its center. The third miniature features four fish swimming in the sea, which may be an homage to the maritime orientation of the map and the era's exploratory zeal. Finally, the fourth illumination portrays an idyllic garden scene, with a lion, deer, and a small rabbit lying peacefully in front of three blooming trees. This image, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, may symbolize a paradisiacal view of the newly discovered territories or an idealized vision of the natural world.

In Southern Africa, a 16-point compass rose dominates, with a windhead blowing northward from the southern Atlantic toward Europe. This compass rose reflects the directionality and navigational focus of the map. The depiction of four ships in the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean further cements the map's connection with the era's maritime exploration.

In terms of labeling, the North Atlantic Ocean is named "Mare Cogelatu," a term of uncertain origin. South America bears the labels "Mundus Novus" and "Brasil," reflecting the continent's recent "discovery" by Europeans and the Portuguese claim on the territory that is now Brazil.

Within the neatlines of the oval-shaped world, the names of the 12 winds are shown in Latin, reinforcing the navigational function of the chart.

In conclusion, Nero's "Tabula Orbis" is a remarkable artifact from the dawn of the Age of Discovery. It weaves together geographical knowledge, navigational tools, religious iconography, and naturalistic illustrations into a unique depiction of the world in 1520. Its intricate details and omissions eloquently testify to the interplay between exploration and understanding, highlighting the ever-evolving nature of human knowledge.

Conclusion

Overall, the piece stands as a thoroughly compelling contrafactum, an imitation or reproduction of another work. Its quality barely falls short when compared to the texture, style, and calligraphy characteristic of the late medieval / early renaissance period.

Rarity

Portolan forgeries appear occasionally on the market and are typically not difficult to detect.



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Typically, the content, decorative images and structure of the rhumb lines are sufficient to demonstrate a forgery, but on occasion, when the forgery is a direct copy of an original portolan, other factors, such as transcription errors, typically exist.

Detailed Condition:

The vellum is slightly wavy (as usual) with minor edge damage, some of which has been repaired in the past. There's a roughly 5 cm long cut, also previously repaired, along with a few isolated wormholes, minor stains, and occasional color abrasions. Occasional smudging to the lettering and slight abrasion of the surface, more evident on the four clay miniatures.