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[India and the Silk Road]

Stock#: 36264sh
Map Maker: Camocio
Date: 1574
Place: Venice
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 39.5 x 17.5 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

A uniquely important depiction of India and the Silk Road, three sheets from a 12-sheet Lafreri School wall map of Asia, by the great master Giovanni Francesco Camocio.

We believe that the 3 sheets are drawn from a 12-sheet map of Asia by Camocio, which quite possibly was never completed. A discussion of the map source appears at the bottom of this description. While only a fragment of the full map, the 3 sheets are highly detailed and of a large scale, and are thus highly



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important records of 16th-century European knowledge of South and Central Asia.

The depiction of India is a truly fascinating overview of the European conception of the subcontinent from the mid 16th-century. During the period, the Portuguese were the only European power to have meaningful contact with India. While Lisbon maintained a policy of cartographic secrecy and banned the dissemination of their maps, Venetian publishers were able to gain access to important Portuguese manuscripts that were either captured from vessels or stolen and sold on the Italian market. While his specific sources will likely never be known, Camocio was evidently able to gain access to some especially fine Portuguese sources. Camocio's mapping naturally maintains a strong Portuguese bias, with all of the advantages and limitations thereof. Notably, while the Portuguese had a reasonably sophisticated understanding of coastal India, their knowledge of the interior regions was often second-hand, for they rarely ventured inland, beyond the protection of their coastal forts and their armed carracks.

The present map sheets embrace the western two-thirds of the Indian subcontinent, extending about as far east as modern Orissa and Bihar. The overall shape of the Indian Peninsula is an improvement on contemporary maps (notably Giacomo Gastaldi's 1565 map of Asia), as it maintains a narrower form in contrast the bulbous shape otherwise favored. Camocio's depiction contains a wealth of information, including the labeling of the main ports which were the focus of Portuguese activities. On the west coast (the 'Malabar' Coast) can be found Calicut (where Vasco da Gama first landed in 1498), Cochin (the main center of commerce in Kerala), Goa (the capital of Portuguese India, captured in 1510), and the important trading posts of Surat and Diu. On the opposite coast is 'Puduchiera' (Puducherry), the port that would later become a French colony. The names of important Indian principalities occupy the interior. Most notably, the great Kingdom of Bisnagar, which from 1520, controlled much of the Deccan. While by no means precise, the geography of these coastal regions is quite impressive for the time.

Conversely, the geography of the interior is less precise, and in many places speculative. Curiously, the Indus River is shown to be too far to the east, running from the northeast into the Ghats. This means that Lahore is shown to be deep inside central India, and not in the northwest, as is the case.

Next to the depiction of India, the map's most historically important attribute is its depiction of the lands along the Silk Road, the ancient caravan routes connecting China with the Mediterranean. Since the expedition of Marco Polo in the 13th-century, the Venetians had maintained an acquaintance with this vital trade corridor, which was the source of a large percentage of the Serene Republic's wealth.

In the upper left corner of the map one can see the eastern part of the Caspian Sea, named here as the 'Mare Coruzu'. The various routes of the Silk Road tended to pass to the south of the sea, into Persia. Considerably due east of the Caspian is Samarkand, the most celebrated city in Central Asia and home to a great bazaar featuring products from across the Islamic world and the Far East. To the south, in modern



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Afghanistan, are the cities of Kabul and Kandahar, shown as being the capitals of their respective kingdoms.

The Straits of Hormuz (connecting the Persian Gulf with the Arabian Sea) appear in the southwest. Hormuz was then an important Portuguese base, while Muscat, located in the northeastern Arabian Peninsula, was the center of a great maritime empire that extended down the coasts of Africa as far as Mozambique.

Giovanni Francesco Camocio (fl. 1560-1575) was one of the leading figures of the Lafreri School of Cartography. Camocio, who often worked in association with Paolo Forlani, produced a number of important large-format maps, as well as an *Isolario* (1570), a series of maps of islands. The Lafreri School, while not a formally organized society, consisted of several cartographers working in Venice and Rome from the late 1540s to 1580s. The school was responsible for producing, in sum, the first series of maps to depict the entire world as it was known by Europeans. Operating not long after the first great era of European exploration, the Lafreri cartographers were the first to bring groundbreaking Portuguese, Spanish and French manuscript maps to print. Today, Lafreri maps are prized for their progressive geographical depictions and the unrivalled artistic quality of their design and engraving.

Turing to the map sheets' magnificent Venetian mannerist cartouche, adorned by a pair of hippocamuses (sea horses), its notes that the map was dedicated to Gottardo Murari, a key patron of Camocio. Murari was a Venetian nobleman, born in Verona, who held a succession of prestigious offices, including being the Governatore del S. Monte di Pietà and the Console dell'Arte della Seta (the silk guild). Camocio's depiction of Asia must have been of great interest to Murari, as Indian textiles and the Chinese silk were of immense value in Venice.

The present depiction of India and the center of the Silk Road are of great historical importance, being amongst the most detailed mappings of these regions from the 16th-century.

The history of Camocio's map is somewhat unclear, in part because the map may never have been completed. The dedication cartouche for the present map notes that the map was being made following completion of Camocio's wall map maps of Europe and Africa. Bagrow and several other sources describe a 9-sheet map of Asia published in 1574 or 1575, but none lists a title for the map. There exists at least 1 example of a Lafreri atlas at the James Ford Bell Library entitled *Quattro Parte Del Mondo*, which is described in David Woodward's *The Four Parts of the World: Giovanni Francesco Camocio's wall maps* (p 14), which includes an apparently unique 12-sheet map dated 1579. The date of the map is given as MDCCDXXV4, matching the dating in the dedication cartouche in the present map. Woodward notes that the V and 4 seem to have been added, perhaps but not necessarily over previously engraved Roman numerals. If Asia first came out in 1570, however, the maps of Africa and Europe to which he refers must



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have been versions that are no longer extant, for the examples in the James Ford Bell copy have later dates.

This brings us to an apparently unique 12-sheet map of Asia in the James Ford Bell Library. In *An Old Unknown Map of America . . .* (*Washington Historical Quarterly* Vol. 22, No. 2 (April 1931) p.112-13), Edward W. Allen translates an article originally written in French by Henri Vignaud, describing an example of the Camocio's *Quattro Parte Del Mondo* in the collection of M. Chadenat in France. In describing the map of Asia, Allen notes:

This atlas, which does not appear in any catalog of collections either public or private, is a small folio having five general maps, a planisphere and four large scale maps on several sheets each, representing the four parts of the world. These last four maps [Asia, Africa, America and Europe] are evidently proofs, for the engraver has not finished certain parts. Thus the cartouches which were intended to receive the titles, dates and names of the authors, are blank. . . .

In describing the map of Asia, Allen states:

Asia in nine sheets. . . It is without title but bears evidence that it is from the shop of Camocio in Venice, and a long dedication signed by him in 1575 states that it is by Gastaldi. . . .

Based upon the foregoing, we believe that the 9-sheet maps described by Bagrow and Allen are likely fragments of the the 12-sheet map in the James Ford Bell Library.

There is no record of Camocio's map appearing on the market in the past 100 years.

Detailed Condition:

Minor dampstaining and some small repairs. 3 sheets, 2 of which are joined.