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[Sofala, East Africa]

Stock#: 40350
Map Maker: De Belleforest
Date: 1575
Place: Paris
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 8.5 x 6 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Scarce map of the port of Sofala, which appeared in Francois de Belleforest's *Cosmographie Universelle De Tout le Monde*.

Sofala is one of the oldest harbors documented in Southeastern Africa. Medieval Sofala was erected on the edge of a wide estuary formed by the Buzi River (called Rio de Sofala in older maps). Sofala was founded about the year 700. The Arabs had frequented the coast since 915, followed by traders from Persia. The Buzi River connected Sofala to the internal market town of Manica, and from there to the goldfields of Great Zimbabwe. Sometime in the 10th century, Sofala emerged as a small trading post erected by Somali merchants and seafarers from Mogadishu (modern capital of Somalia), to trade cotton cloth for gold and



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ivory. In the 1180s, Sultan Suleiman Hassan of Kilwa (in present-day Tanzania) seized control of Sofala, and brought Sofala into the Kilwa Sultanate and the Swahili cultural sphere. The Swahili strengthened its trading capacity by having, among other things, river-going shows by the Buzi and Save rivers to ferry the gold extracted in the hinterlands to the coast.

Sofala's subsequent position as the principal entry point of the Monomatapa gold trade prompted Portuguese chronicler Thomé Lopes to identify Sofala with the biblical Ophir and its ancient rulers with the dynasty of the Queen of Sheba. Although the notion was mentioned by Milton in *Paradise Lost*, among many other works of literature and science, it has since been discarded. The name Sofala is most probably derived from the Arabic for 'lowlands', a reference to the flat coastlands and low-lying islands and sandbanks that characterize the region.

Portuguese explorer and spy Pêro da Covilhã, travelling overland disguised as an Arab merchant, was the first European known to have visited Sofala in 1489. His secret report to Lisbon identified Sofala's role as a gold emporium. In 1501 Sofala was scouted from the sea and its location determined by captain Sancho de Tovar. In 1502, Pedro Afonso de Aguiar (others say Vasco da Gama himself) led the first Portuguese ships into Sofala harbor.

The 1505 expedition of Pêro de Anaia to Sofala led to the establishment of Fort São Caetano, the first permanent Portuguese colony in East Africa. The Capitaincy of Sofala would eventually evolve into the colonial government of Portuguese Mozambique.

Detailed Condition: