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Chart of the Sources of the Mobile and of the River Yazoo Including a part of the Course of the Mississippi From the River Margot the the Natches.

Stock#: 40728ct
Map Maker: Collot
Date: 1826
Place: Paris
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size:
Price: SOLD



Description:

Detailed map of a portion of Mississippi, Mobile and Yazoo Rivers, extending from just south of Memphis, Tennessee to just north of Mobile Bay, from the explorations of General Georges Collot.

Collot's map of the the Sources of the Mobile and Yazoo Rivers was compiled from his observations during his clandestine reconnaissance of the West on behalf of the French Government in 1796.

Rumsey describes the map as "A wonderful map and one of the first maps to show specifically the area of Mississippi and Alabama." It is in fact the first large-scale depiction of the Deep South and an extraordinary record of the region shortly before the beginning of American settlement. The map includes virtually all of the present State of Mississippi and all of Alabama north and west of the Alabama and Coosa rivers.

Acting under instructions from Citizen Adet, French Minister to the United States, General George Henri Victor Collot undertook a secret reconnaissance in 1796 of what was then the western American frontier. Collot traveled from Pittsburgh down the Ohio to the Mississippi, up the Mississippi to the Missouri and Illinois Rivers, and then back down the Mississippi to New Orleans. During his journey, he constructed a large number of exceptionally fine manuscript maps and views of the region that he traversed. Many of these were groundbreaking, containing never before recorded information about a wilderness that was just beginning to undergo settlement.

Collot's maps were engraved in Paris in 1804, but publication was suppressed due to Napoleon's sale of Louisiana to the United States the previous year. The sale ended any possibility that the region could be acquired by France. As a result, the plates were not printed until 1826, when they were issued in a limited



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number as *Voyage dans l'Amerique Septentrionale*.

A nineteenth-century bookseller called this work "one of the most famous, most important, and rarest of all books of Mid-Western Explorations." Eberstadt pronounced it "extraordianrily rare." Its rarity is due to the deliberate destruction of all but three hundred French and one hundred English copies by the publisher, who had purchased the edition from Collot's estate, hoping to increase its value.

This map is without doubt one of the most interesting of all the Collot maps. With the exception of the Pearl, the river system is well-understood, if a bit distorted. Very little settlement has taken place, except for the Spanish establishments at Natchez and Nogales (Vicksburg) on the east bank of the Mississippi, and northwest Alabama is labelled "Country Quite Uninhabited." There are a few scattered establishments in northwest Mississippi, along the upper Tombigbee (Gollaters, Johnson, and Colbert), as well as several Native American villages ("Great Village of the Chickasaws," "Half-Breed Settlement," etc.). An old French Settlement" is identified on the south bank of the Tennessee near the present town of Florence, Alabama.

Established by the French in 1716, Natchez was one of the most important settlements in the lower Mississippi Valley. The town had been occupied by the Spanish in 1763, who were still in control when Collet visited in 1796. The town and nearby Fort Rosalie are shown in some detail. Fort Nogales, founded by the Spanish in 1791, was known as "the Gibraltar of Louisiana." It was located approximately one mile north of the present city of Vickburg, at a spot still known as Fort Hill. The fort was evacuated in 1798, when the Spanish turned over the east bank of the river to the United States.

In 1763, the territory west of the Mississippi River was ceded to Spain by France, while the lands east of the river were ceded to Britain. In 1783, the lands east of the Mississippi formally became territory of the United States, although American possession of the region was tenuous at best. The mainly Francophone inhabitants of the Mississippi Valley had little affinity for Anglo-American rule, and their frontier lifestyle made them virtually impossible to control.

It was in this context that the government of post-Revolutionary France, the 'Directoire', schemed to reacquire France's lost American territories. The Dircetoire had an acrimonious relationship with both America and Spain, and the possibility of supporting an insurrection by the region's Francophone inhabitants was considered by many to be a viable means for France to regain Louisiana and the Illinois Country.

In 1796, the Directoire charged General George Henri Victor Collot (1750-1805) with undertaking a reconnaissance mission to the Mississippi frontier, in order to assess whether the region could be retaken by France. Collot seemed like the perfect man for such an assignment. A former governor of Guadeloupe,



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he was an accomplished veteran of colonial service and an extraordinarily gifted mapmaker.

While Collot's intellectual achievements were impressive, his mission was a political disaster. Collot was arrested at Fort Massac on the Ohio River by the American officer Zebulon Pike (himself soon to become a legendary explorer). Pike told Collot that "you have been indefatigable in surveying the Ohio, by taking the courses, distances, heights, etc., as well as reconnoitering the adjacent area for which you exhibit no authority". While he was well aware that Collot was a French agent-provocateur, the officious Pike set him free, as he could not find any legal means of detaining him. Collot was, however, later shadowed by Spanish agents and arrested and deported as soon as he arrived in New Orleans. Fortunately, the Spanish governor allowed Collot to retain his maps and papers.

Louisiana and the lands west of the Mississippi were returned to France by Spain in 1800, and Collot hoped that this would only increase interest in his work, however this was not to be. Unfortunately for Collot, in 1803, the new French dictator, Napoleon Bonaparte, decided to sell Louisiana to America, bringing a practical end to Collot's work on behalf of the French Government.

The map is very rare, as is the book in which it was published. It has been noted that "A nineteenth-century bookseller called this work 'one of the most famous, most important, and rarest of all books of Mid-Western Explorations.' "

An essential map for regional collectors.

Detailed Condition:

Minor foxing.