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Sexta Asiae Tabula (Arabia)

Stock#: 47818
Map Maker: Sylvanus
Date: 1511
Place: Venice
Color: Color
Condition: VG
Size: 22 x 15 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

The First Map of the Arabian Peninsula Printed in Two Colors

Fine, wide-margined example of Sylvanus' map of the Arabian Peninsula. This is one of the earliest obtainable maps of the region and was the first to be printed in two colors.

The map appeared in Sylvanus' *Claudii Ptholemaei Alexandrini liber Geographicae . . .*, published in Venice in 1511. This Sylvanus edition of Ptolemy is one of the earliest to include maps with modern geographical updates. It was also the earliest map of Arabia printed in Venice.

This map shows the Arabian Peninsula (*Arabia Felix*) and Persia. While the landforms are somewhat distorted and very out-of-scale to the modern eye—for example, Persia should be shaped differently, and the Persian Gulf (*Sinus Persicus*) is much too rounded due to the exaggerated peninsula's L-shaped coast—they are certainly recognizable.

One aspect of the map to note is that Sylvanus seems to have combined the general geography of India with locations from modern-day Iran. The eastern landform tapers to a point in the south and has a small island off of the southeastern coast, geographically similar to India and Sri Lanka. However, its name, *Carmania*, as well as that of the next land to the east, *Gedrosiae Pars*, clearly correspond to the ancient Iranian regions of Carmania and Gedrosia. This makes it at times difficult to understand the eastern half of the map, but a comparison with Sylvanus' world maps ([here](#) and [here](#)) show that he gave a peninsular shape to Persia, while truncating India and making Sri Lanka (*Taprobana*) a huge island.

Though a few rivers wind through the landscape, much of the detail on the landforms comes from hills and mountains. Notable ranges include the *persici mon.* on the eastern landform and an unlabeled range that



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seems to cross the base of the Arabian Peninsula from the Red Sea (*Arabicus Sinus*) to the Persian Gulf (*Sinus Persicus*), separating the peninsula from the rest of the Middle East. Northeast of these mountains is the Arabian desert (*Arabiae Desertae Pars*), while the northwest is labeled *Arabiae Petraeae Pars*.

Romans in Arabia

The Roman Empire had a history of interest in Arabia, mostly for its favorable position in controlling the trade of spices such as myrrh and frankincense. One of Rome's first attempts to enter Arabia was through the Gallus Expedition, led by Gaius Aelius Gallus. He brought his army with the intention of taking control of the kingdom of Saba in southern *Arabia Felix* (here labeled *Sabaei* in red). However, Gallus' expedition was a total failure, as his army was ravaged by disease, unprepared for desert warfare, and unable to hold the city they invaded.

Later expeditions were more successful for the Romans. They never controlled the entirety of the peninsula, but northern *Arabia Felix* was annexed by the Roman Emperor Trajan in AD 105, becoming *Arabia Petraea* (here *Arabiae Petraeae Pars*). This province eventually extended south to *Egra*, which can be found on this map about a quarter of the way down the peninsula.

Arabia Petraea was prosperous and fairly peaceful for its centuries as a Roman province. Though this map does not contain trade routes, they would have crossed through the deserts from oasis to oasis controlled by Arabs and, for a time, by the Romans. This allowed for taxation on incoming goods, and undoubtedly contributed to the Roman Empire's wealth and power.

A Modern Printing of Ptolemy

This map has several unusual features that highlight its uniqueness among its contemporaries. First, having the names printed in red, it is one of the first examples of two-color printing. This is achieved by printing the sheet twice, the first time in black ink and the second adding the red lettering by setting the type in the woodblocks. This is also interesting, as many maps at the time were printed from copper engravings, while this one and indeed all of the maps from this atlas were woodcut prints.

Another unusual feature is that the map is a hybrid. It combines Ptolemy's work from his *Geographia* with modern details. Sylvanus used updated information from explorers to improve the accuracy of the map, which he felt was appropriate since Ptolemy himself had used information from travelers to create the original map. It is also what Shirley calls "an isolated example of Venetian cartographic enterprise", being published forty years before Gastaldi's version of Ptolemy.

Unique at the time of its printing, this red and black map is a fascinating blend of the ancient and the



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modern. As a Venetian cartographer, Sylvanus was innovative and ahead of his time. It would make a valuable addition to collections of Sylvanus maps, Ptolemaic maps, or maps of Arabia.

Detailed Condition:

Two sheets joined, as issued.