



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
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(Manuscript Game Board) Regle Du Jeu De L'Oie. Renouvele Des Grecs.

Stock#: 49167
Map Maker: Anonymous
Date: 1865 circa
Place: Paris ?
Color: Pen & Ink with Wash Color
Condition: Good
Size: 56 x 33 inches
Price: \$ 2,200.00



Description:

Large manuscript game board, executed in ink and watercolor on paper, mounted on original linen.

The game board is a curious historical montage, inspired by the French Opera, *La belle Hélène*, by Jacques Offenbach and the traditional Game of the Goose. The game is a story board in 63 squares; players race to the end and follow the story, a parody of the fatal love of Paris and Helen that triggered the Trojan War. The illustrations are a charming and funny mix of supposedly ancient, medieval, and modern costumes and ships.

The Game of the Goose, a race game wherein players advance their pieces numerically to the end of the squares, has a long history in Europe. Of Italian origin, James Wolfe registered a version of the game at the Stationers Hall, London in 1597 and the Graz Museum has a stone-engraved edition dated 1589. Derivatives were popular in the French court by the beginning of the seventeenth century. By the nineteenth century, the Game of Goose was no longer an elite pastime for adults, but a more popular game targeted at children (Parlett, 97-8).

Board games such as these were common in the nineteenth century. Thanks to the Industrial Revolution and the globalization of trade, more workers could afford leisure time and activities, including table top games like this. While this is a manuscript board game, manufactured games, first engraved and then later lithographed, were also coming on to the market.

La belle Hélène (Beautiful Helen), is an *opéra bouffe* in three acts derived from a French libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy. The operetta parodies the story of Helen's elopement with Paris, which sets off the Trojan War. The work was first performed in December 1864. We date the game board at circa 1865, based upon the date of the opening of *La belle Hélène*.



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Jacques Offenbach (1819 - 1880) was a German-born French composer, cellist, and impresario of the Romantic Period. He is remembered for his nearly 100 operettas during the 1850s to 1870s and his uncompleted opera, *The Tales of Hoffmann*. He was a powerful influence on later composers of the operetta genre, particularly Johann Strauss Jr. and Arthur Sullivan.

A summary of the operetta from <http://chatelet-theatre.com/> is below:

Act 1: Paris, son of Priam, arrives with a missive from the goddess Venus to the high priest Calchas, commanding him to procure for Paris the love of Helen, promised him by Venus when he awarded the prize of beauty to her and refused it to Juno and Minerva.

Paris disguises himself as a shepherd and wins three prizes at a contest of outrageously silly word games with the Greek kings under the direction of the 'barbu, bu, bu' (bearded and drunk) Agamemnon as schoolmaster, whereupon he reveals his identity. All the world knows that he has awarded the apple by Venus, and Helen realizes that it is 'la fatalité' (fatality) that has sent her 'l'homme à la pomme' (the man with the apple). The Trojan prince is crowned victor by Helen, to the disgust of the lout Achilles and the two bumbling Ajaxes. Paris is invited to a banquet by Menelaus, 'l'époux de la reine, poux de la reine, poux de la reine' (Helen's spouse and louse). Paris has bribed Calchas to have Philocomus strike the thunder gong and to prophesy that Menelaus must at once proceed to Crete, at which point the chorus breaks into a joyful song, repeating over and over again 'Va, suis, Ménélas / La voix du destin / Qui te mène, hélas! / Au pays crétain!', which ends the act.

Act 2: After parodies on the life of the Greek court, in which the honest Calchas appears as a gambling cheat, Paris comes to Helen at night. Although she knows her fate, she seemingly resists him, and he uses strategy. He departs but returns when she has fallen asleep. He tells Helen that what will now occur is only a dream, and she is content to risk all with this understanding at this moment. Menelaus unexpectedly returns and finds the two in each other's arms. Helen, exclaiming 'la fatalité, la fatalité', tells him that it is all his fault: A good husband knows when to come and when to stay away. Paris tries to dissuade him from kicking up a row, but to no avail. When all the kings join the party, berating him and telling him to go back where he came from, Paris departs, vowing to return and finish the job.

Act 3: The kings and their entourage have moved to Nauplia for the summer season. A high priest of Venus arrives on a boat, explaining that he has to take Helen to Cythera where she is to sacrifice 100 heifers for her offenses. Menelaus pleads with her to go with the priest, but she refuses, saying that it is he, and not she, who has offended the goddess. But when she realizes that the priest is Paris in disguise, she goes on board with him, and they sail away together.



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Detailed Condition:

Hand drawn and painted game board. Paper on linen, silk edges. A number of smaller tears and some loss. Soiled and dampstained along the edges, overall good condition.