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Islandia

Stock#: 51931
Map Maker: Ortelius
Date: 1595
Place: Antwerp
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG+
Size: 19.5 x 13.5 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Ortelius's Sea Monster Map of Iceland

Decorative example of Ortelius' classic map of Iceland, one of the most decorative atlas maps of all time and the first relatively accurate map of Iceland from indigenous sources.

The map depicts Iceland in remarkable detail, including its mountains, fjords, glaciers and a graphic depiction of Mount Hekla erupting in a fiery explosion of flames and volcanic material. Along part of the coastline, Polar Bears can be seen floating on icebergs. The map includes over 200 place names, primarily Danish in origin and many of which are likely misread from the original map, owing to the different writing style employed in Iceland during the period. While the map is far from accurate, it depicts first time a meaningful depiction of all known settlements in Iceland and many other points of interest, including a number of glaciers.

The map illustrates a remarkable array of the legendary and mythical sea monsters and creatures of the 15th and 16th Century, along with early depictions of the sea horse, manta ray, walrus and whale. Some of the more purely fanciful images may derive from tales of St. Brendan, a sixth century Irish missionary who, according to legend, journeyed to Iceland and whose name is associated with a mythical island of the same name. Others are traceable to Olaus Magnus's Carta Marina of 1539, although they were probably derived directly from Munster's Cosmographia of 1545 and most notably Munster's chart of the Sea and Land Creatures. See link for example: <http://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/17670> .

The dedication in the lower right corner notes that the map is drawn up and dedicated by Andreas Velleius to the Illustrious and powerful Frederic the Second, King of the Danes, Norwegians, Slavs, Goths etc., his



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most merciful Majesty. Andreas Sorensen Vedel (1542-1616) was an important Danish historian of the period who prepared, but apparently never published a treatise on history of Denmarke, which he had intended to illustrate with maps. However, it is almost certain that Vedel was not the maker of the map and simply transmitted the map to Ortelius, without mentioning its source.

The map is a vast improvement over all prior maps of Iceland and it is believed therefore that it could only have been drawn by an Icelandic, most likely Gudbrandur Thorlaksson, Bishop of Holar, who studied mathematics and astronomy in Copenhagen. It is known that Thorlaksson made a map of the region in 1606. While no map of Iceland by Thorlaksson survives, there is other circumstantial evidence, including a list of churches and fjords which was available and perhaps prepared by Thorlakson, which were almost certainly used in preparing the map. While a privilege for the map was granted in 1585, the map first appeared in the 1587 French edition of Ortelius' Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, the first modern Atlas of the World, first issued in 1570 and expanded thereafter until 1612.

The sea monsters are identified with letters, which are keyed to the explanation on the verso, which provides as follows (translated to English):

A. is a fish, commonly called NAHVAL. If anyone eats of this fish, he will die immediately. It has a tooth in the front part of its head standing out seven cubites <= fore-arms>. Divers have sold it as the Unicorn's horn. It is thought to be a good antidote and powerful medicine against poison. This monster is forty ells <= fore-arms> in length.

B. the Roider is a fish of one hundred and thirty ells in length, which has no teeth. The flesh of it is very good meat, wholesome and tasty. Its fat is good against many diseases.

C. The BURCHVALUR has a head bigger than its entire body. It has many very strong teeth, of which they make chess pieces. It is 60 cubites long.

D. The Hyena or sea hog is a monstrous kind of fish about which you may read in the 21st book of Olaus Magnus.

E. Ziphius {1606E, not in 1609S{(maybe he means Xiphius, the sword fish)}1606E, not in 1609S}, a horrible sea monster that swallows a black seal in one bite.

F. The English whale, thirty ells long. It has no teeth, but its tongue is seven ells in length.

G. HROSHUALUR, that is to say as much as Sea horse, with manes hanging down from its neck like a horse. It often causes great hurt and scare to fishermen.



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H. The largest kind of Whale, which seldom shows itself. It is more like a small island than like a fish. It cannot follow or chase smaller fish because of its huge size and the weight of its body, yet it preys on many, which it catches by natural cunning and subtlety which it applies to get its food.

I. SKAUTUHVALUR. This fish is fully covered with bristles or bones. It is somewhat like a shark or skite, but infinitely bigger. When it appears, it is like an island, and with its fins it overturns boats and ships.

K. SEENAUT, sea cow of grey colour. They sometimes come out of the sea and feed on the land in groups. They have a small bag hanging by their nose with the help of which they live in the water. If it is broken, they live altogether on the land, accompanied by other cows.

L. STEIPEREIDUR, a most gentle and tame kind of whale, which for the defence of fishermen fights against other kinds of whales. It is forbidden by Proclamation that any man should kill or hurt this kind of Whale. It has a length of at least 100 cubites.

M. STAUKUL. The Dutch call it Springual. It has been observed to stand for a whole day long upright on its tail. It derives its name from its leaping or skipping. It is a very dangerous enemy of seamen and fishermen, and greedily goes after human flesh.

N. ROSTUNGER (also called Rosmar) is somewhat like a sea calf. It goes to the bottom of the sea on all four of its feet, which are very short. Its skin can hardly be penetrated by any weapon. It sleeps for twelve hours on end, hanging on some rock or cliff by its two long teeth. Each of its teeth are at least one ell long and the length of its whole body is fourteen ells.

O. Spermaceti parmacitty or a simple kind of amber, commonly called HUALAMBUR.

P. Blocks and trunks of trees, by force of winds and violent tempests torn off by their roots from the cliffs of Norway, tossed to and fro, and surviving many storms, finally cast upon and coming to rest at this shore.

Q. Huge and marvellously big heaps of ice, brought here by the tide from the frozen sea, making loud and terrible noises. Some pieces are often as big as forty cubits. On some of these, white bears sit together, watching the innocent fish play about in exercise.

Detailed Condition: