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[Celestial Chart of Southern Hemisphere] Verso picture

Stock#: 53808_1
Map Maker: De Fer
Date: 1651 circa
Place: Paris
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG+
Size:
Price: SOLD



Description:

Unrecorded Southern Hemisphere Celestial Chart in Mirror Image -- Including Astrological Models and a Horoscope Model

Fine, unrecorded map of the constellations of the Southern Hemisphere, published in Paris by Antoine De Fer. The map includes astrological data, including references to horoscopes. Significantly, and mysteriously, this extraordinary celestial chart is printed in mirror image—it would appear that it was engraved so as to print the content in reverse. This could indicate that the chart was intended as a way to study astrology in secret, and to confuse those who would suppress the subject.

We offer the following images to illustrate the verso and a digitally reversed image of the map:

Verso image: `{{ inventory_enlarge_link('53808_1') }}`

Digitally Reversed (mirror) Image: `{{ inventory_detail_link('53808_2') }}`

The hemispheric projection is filled with illustrations of constellations, including Scorpio and Orion. In the upper left is a table of the signs of the Zodiac in their respective houses. To the upper right is a horoscope table, along with two further figures in the bottom left and right which explain how to discern one's signs, particularly at the time of birth. Together with the information arrayed in a rim around the celestial hemisphere, this chart would have helped someone to create astrological charts for other people.

Astrology—a controversial intellectual and political subject

It would seem that the historical significance of this map is that it represents the descent of astrology into



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underground, or secretive, practice. In ancient times and in the Medieval period, astrology was a respected branch of learning and was considered similar to and part of astronomy. From the late sixteenth and especially from the mid-seventeenth-century, however, astrology was denounced as a discipline unworthy of study by the likes of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, chief minister to King Louis XIV, and the man who founded the *Académie des Sciences* in 1666.

In France, and across Europe, certain leaders had long distrusted astrology, particularly because dire predictions, like the announcement of a pope's imminent death, could cause significant social, religious, and political upheaval. The Church especially feared that astrology interfered with free will. Several papal bulls and treatises were dedicated to discrediting astrology as superstition from the 1580s onward, although they still allowed for natural astrology, i.e. predication of weather for almanacs. In 1560, 1579, and 1628, the French Crown too issued declarations that limited astrologers to predicting the weather, not events.

Whereas astronomy was still valued as a legitimate field of study, astrology had become associated with the occult and considered mystical and mysterious; it was ejected from formal studies and lumped instead with other suspect areas of study, such as alchemy and divination. It was often cited as proof of witchcraft, its practice seen as a form of high magic performed by the educated who could read Medieval and ancient texts.

The Fronde

As indicated by the papal bulls meant to quell possible disorder, astrology also had a political dimension. This map was published in 1651, in the middle of the Fronde, a series of French civil wars that lasted from 1648 to 1653. Initially, fighting broke out after the Peace of Westphalia (1648) over the protection of feudal liberties from the power of the French monarchy, especially in light of increased taxation by the Crown. By 1650, the original constitutional grievances were subsumed by factional struggles. Eventually, Louis XIV, King of France since 1643, won out and established a much more absolutist form of government centered on his power as King and the suppression of the nobles as political figures.

During the Fronde, astrology played a role as a form of commentary and comfort. As with the concurrent English Revolution, there was an upswing in astrological publications and in the demand for predictions in such unstable times. Some astrological texts published at this time focused on optimism, on the regeneration of a country ravaged by fighting. Others focused on the tense political situation and its possible outcomes. Still others reflected on the changing social situation that seemed a revolution in and of itself.

Where then, does this context leave this fascinating and odd print? Several possibilities arise. First, this



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could be a method of sharing secret knowledge, of passing on astrological information that could be read only with a mirror. However, the print was released by a prominent print-seller, Antoine de Fer (active 1644-1672), father of the mapmaker Nicolas de Fer, who was not likely to sign works intended for clandestine practices. Perhaps the chart is a political message, intended to aid in trying to predict the outcome of the Fronde. Perhaps it was intended as an elaborate critique of astrology as a study, one that doesn't make sense forwards or backwards.

This is the first time we have ever seen a completely reversed map image. We find no record of this map and date it based upon the June 1651 dating on the map. Whatever its intended purpose, it is an intriguing and rare piece of print history that deserves more study.

Detailed Condition: