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Carte D'Amerique...1774

Stock#: 55896
Map Maker: Covens & Mortier & J. Covens & Zoon
Date: 1774
Place: Amsterdam
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG+
Size: 23.5 x 19 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Rare Late State of De L'Isle's Map of America, Showing the Sea of the West and Recent Russian Discoveries

A Covens & Mortier state of De L'Isle's map of the Americas, with revisions to 1774. The map borrows from many contemporary sources, some fantastic, and not just from the work of Guillaume Delisle, who had died in 1726.

The continents of North and South America are centered on the map, with Africa and Europe peeking out of the eastern border and the northernmost tip of Asia out of the western border. The vastness of the Pacific is emphasized to the west, dotted with a few islands with Spanish and Dutch toponyms—nods to the Manila-Acapulco galleon trade and the Dutch voyages of exploration, including that of Willem Schouten and Jacob Le Maire (1615-1617).

A cartouche in the lower left corner explains that this map was based on the work of Guillaume De L'Isle (1675-1726) and Jean Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville (1697-1782). The map is based on an earlier work of De L'Isle's published in 1722 and republished by Covens & Mortier from 1739. This 1774 state extends the northern latitudes included so as to show the latest discoveries and hypotheses in the Pacific Northwest of North America.

A second cartouche is in the lower right, topped by the head of an indigenous person. It explains that the projection of this map prevents the use of a general scale, but distance can be calculated using some



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general ratios.

The map is dotted with important dates of exploration, including the discovery of the Strait of Le Maire in 1615, which provided European ships another route to the Pacific other than the Strait of Magellan, a monopoly of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Nearby, the Malvinas, or Falklands, are written as discovered in 1706, a reference to the French Indies Company ships *Maurepas* and *St. Louis* who encountered the archipelago in that year. This of course disregards earlier Spanish and British claims to a discovery of the islands, an example of the politics of cartography at work.

New Zealand

Most interesting considering the date of publication—1774—is the inclusion of a relatively complete New Zealand. The archipelago is shown here as two large islands, divided into I. Mahai-nomai [Te Ika a Maui or North Island] and Tavou-poenamoo I [Te Wai Pounamu or South Island]. While the existence of New Zealand was known to Europeans since the voyages of Tasman in the 1640s, this outline of New Zealand is thanks to the more recent first Pacific voyage of James Cook.

Cook carried Tasman's charts and journal with him as he sailed to the South Seas in 1768. After observing the Transit of Venus from Tahiti, Cook and the *Endeavour* sailed south to find Tasman's islands. They landed on the east side of the North Island, at a place Cook called Poverty Bay. Over the next five months—October 1769 to March 1770—Cook and his crew circumnavigated and surveyed the islands.

They produced a remarkable chart which was still in use over a century later, "Chart of New Zealand, explored in 1769 and 1770, by Liet: I Cook, Commander of His Majesty's Bark *Endeavour*." Cook's chart appeared in the official account of his and the other British voyages of the 1760s, edited by John Hawkesworth and published by Strahan and Cadell in 1773. Covens and Mortier, ever attuned to new geographic information, quickly assimilated the islands outline, however distorted and partially obscured by the cartouche it appears here.

Sea of the West

Whereas the depiction of New Zealand is very up to date, other inclusions on the map were less accepted by the 1770s. For example, to the east of South America is tiny Pepys Island, which Byron had decided was nonexistent, a decision Cook confirmed in 1768.

The most evident changes to the map between this and its previous state are in the Pacific Northwest of North America. This area was previously blank north of the "*entrée decouverte par Martin d'Aguilar*" at 44° N latitude. On this example, the area is populated with numerous geographic features.



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The feature that most attracts the attention of the modern viewer is the *Mer de l'Ouest* in the interior of North America. The Sea of the West, which had first appeared on charts published by Johann Baptiste Nolin in ca. 1700, had quickly disappeared thereafter. However, in 1752, Philippe Buache and Joseph Nicholas De L'Isle, Guillaume's son-in-law and brother respectively, included the sea on their [controversial map](#) highlighting the recent discoveries by the Russians in the far northern Pacific. While a few other mapmakers adopted and modified the feature, it was not overly common on maps of the 1770s.

The re-introduction of the sea was the result of Buache's review of his father-in-law's papers. Although Guillaume De L'Isle never published a map showing the sea, he had postulated that it could exist, and that it might connect to a Northwest Passage through New France, not through English territory farther north. Nolin had plagiarized the idea from Guillaume, as the latter testified when suing the former for plagiarism. He said, the Sea of the West "was one of my discoveries. But since it is not always appropriate to publish what one knows or what one thinks one knows, I have not had this sea engraved on the works that I made public, not wanting foreigners to profit from this discovery" (as quoted in Pedley, 109).

The Russian discoveries in the Pacific Northwest and the odd case of Stitchan Nitada

The Sea of the West is not the only new feature on this state of the map. The sea between North America and Russia is now filled with islands and labels. These originate from, as the map states, "*Découvertes faites par les Russes depuis environ 20 ans,*" or discoveries made by the Russian 20 years ago.

Two expeditions led by Vitus Behring (1728-30, 1733-43) explored Kamchatka and what is now Alaska, charting the strait between them. The first maps of the discoveries appeared in France in the early 1750s, followed by a German map by Gerhard Müller, a member of the second Kamchatka Expedition, first published in 1754 and distributed more widely in a 1758 edition. These maps, though they differed in many respects, show the strait between the continents and the westward thrust of the Alaskan mainland/archipelago.

In the 1760s, Russian fur traders discovered more and more of the Aleutian Islands, some of which are shown here. In 1764, another Second Kamchatka Expedition veteran, Lieutenant Ivan Synd, led a new voyage to the Bering Sea. He was in search of the Northwest Passage, but also hoped to clarify to what extent western Alaska was a peninsula or an archipelago. He produced several maps, all but one of which have been lost. The map that does survive shows a series of islands nearly touching Kamchatka, not a peninsula.

As a result of Synd's findings, a modified 1773 Russian edition of Müller's chart converts Müller's large peninsula to a string of islands. In the same year Jacob von Stählin, secretary to the Russian Academy of Sciences, created his own map based on Synd's discoveries entitled, "A Map of the New Northern



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Archipelago discover'd by the Russians." This map, published in a book with a similar title, was a source for this 1774 edition of Covens & Mortier's map of the Americas. Although it does not copy Stählin's map exactly—it does not include a large Alaschka Island, for example—the Covens & Mortier map does adopt several toponyms from the Stählin map, including Stachtan Nitada on the North American mainland, near the Arctic Circle.

Written as Satchan Nitada on the Covens & Mortier example, this toponym seems to have been included for the first time by Stählin. It is supposedly a place Synd landed at and is near the sighting of the Alaskan mainland by the Russians in 1730, an event also marked on this map. The book excited members of the Royal Society of London, who ensured that the German language publication was translated into English by the end of 1774.

However, Stachtan Nitada's precise location and importance remained unclear to explorers, none more so than James Cook. Cook carried the English translation of Stählin's map with him on this third voyage, which was focused on finding the Northwest Passage. What interested Cook was the strait between Stachtan Nitada and the nearest island to the west, a feature repeated, in reduced form, on this map. It seemed to Cook and others planning his third voyage that this could be an entrance to a Northwest Passage.

When Cook arrived in search of the islands and passage in 1778, he found no such place. As J.C. Beaglehole, Cook's twentieth-century editor, explains:

...no one could be too hard on Stählin. He had thrown the name Alaska on to an arbitrary island in the north; the other name Stachtan Nitada was unknown to either Russian or Aleut...As a cartographer he was naïve, even infantile; and he was unwise enough to speak slightly of seamen. (*Journals of Captain Cook*, cxxxvii-cxxxviii)

Cook himself had choice words about Stählin and Stachtan Nitada. In his journal of October 1778, he wrote:

Stachtan Nitada as it is called in the Modern maps, is a name quite unknown to these people, Indians as well as Russians, but both know it by the name of America. (251)

Of Stählin's map, Cook wrote later in October 1778:

If Mr Stehlin was not greatly imposed upon what could induce him to publish so erroneous a Map? in which many of these islands are jumbled in in [sic] regular confusion, without the least regard to truth and yet he is pleased to call it a very accurate little Map? A Map that the most illiterate



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Seafaring men would have been ashamed to put his name to. (456)

Of course, Covens & Mortier could not have known of the inaccuracy of the map in 1774, as Cook would not test Stählin's hypotheses until later in the decade. For that reason, Stachtan Nitada appears here and on several other contemporary maps and is an enduring example of the conjectural nature of mapmaking.

This map is a rare state and is brimming with exciting cartographic details that would make it an important part of any collection of Pacific, Alaskan, or exploration mapping.

Detailed Condition:

Minor soiling.