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[World Map of Pomponius Mela]

Stock#: 56674
Map Maker: Anonymous / Mela
Date: 1520 circa
Place: n.p.
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 22 x 19 inches
Price: Reference



Description:

"Let No One Frown If This Map Is Different From All The Other World Maps That Circulate . . ."

A Unique Early World Map - The Earliest Surviving Map of the World Based on the Geographical Ideas of Pomponius Mela (with a research essay by Chet Van Duzer)

This remarkable map provides a fascinating look at the world prior to Columbus. With its open Indian Ocean, circumnavigable Africa, lack of a Southern *Terra Australis* and no dragontail image of India after Martellus, the initial appearance of the map suggests that it is influenced by a combination of fifteenth-century mappamundi.

However, the text below the map reveals an even earlier primary source. It explains that the map is drawn directly from the work of the Roman geographer Pomponius Mela, who flourished around 43 A.D.

Mela is without question one of the most influential writers on geography of ancient times. Along with the work of the Greek geographers Strabo and Ptolemy, Mela's work was actively taught and published in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe. However, curiously, while the writings of Ptolemy and Strabo were faithfully mapped in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in both manuscript and printed editions, the maps which invoked Mela's name did not tend to incorporate his geographical teachings. For example, the first printed edition of Mela's work to include a map (1482) depicts the world according to Ptolemy, with a closed Indian Ocean, rather than follow Mela's geography. Similarly, the 1414 manuscript map of Pirrus de Noah largely ignores Mela's geographical text.



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While the maker of the present map is not known, our initial research suggests that the most likely source is the Nuremberg-based German humanist scholar Johann Cochlaeus. In the introduction to his 1512 edition of Mela's *Cosmographia*, Cochlaeus described his use of printed and manuscript maps which he had created in order to teach Mela's geography. These maps were based directly on Mela and illustrate his ideas, rather than being Ptolemeic adaptations. The only exception to Mela's geography on this map is the omission of a large southern continent, which Mela hypothesized. Historically, there has been a general consensus that the first faithful reconstruction of Mela's geography was the 1628 Petrus Bertius World Map, making the present map significant and worthy of thorough study.

In the interest of obtaining independent research on the topic, we retained Chet Van Duzer, scholar in residence at the John Carter Brown Library, to research and provide us with his written observations. His essay follows in its entirety, modified by us only in placing emphasis on two short parts of his text.

The Research of Chet Van Duzer

The following description of the map was provided to us by Chet Van Duzer in early September, 2018.

Untitled, undated, anonymous printed map of the eastern hemisphere, that is, the part of the world known to the ancients, surrounded by eight wind-heads, each with its Latin name, and at the left and right edges, the place names of Europe, Africa, and Asia, numbered in three separate sequences, with the locations of those names indicated by corresponding numbers on the map. The Latin text at the bottom of the map indicates that it shows the world according to Roman geographer Pomponius Mela, who wrote around the year 43.

*A date for the map in the 1520s is suggested by the watermark, which is similar to Briquet 12194, which appears on paper used in Vicenza in 1521; and Briquet 12196, which appears on paper used in Reggio-Emilia in 1529. This date is confirmed by the distinctive pattern used to depict the water of the oceans on the map, dense hatch-marks that are applied uniformly to all of the oceans and seas. A survey of printed world maps from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century shows that this style was most popular between 1507 and 1531, and was used on a world map from this period that does not appear in Shirley's *The Mapping of the World*, namely that in Francesco Maurolico's *Grammaticorum rudimentorum libelli sex* (Messina, 1528).*

The Latin text at the bottom of the map translates thus:

Let no one frown if this map is different from all the other world maps that circulate. Let



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everyone know that the printer has followed Pomponius Mela well and as carefully as possible, and if you compare this map with that author's work, perhaps you will approve his [i.e. the printer's] labors. Good-bye.

This text confirms that the map was intended for a scholarly audience, people who might go to the trouble of comparing the map with Mela's text, but unfortunately does not provide other good clues about the map's intended audience. It seems likely that the text was composed by the printer rather than the cartographer, as there is no mention of the cartographer, and the writer seems to credit the map's creation to the printer.

One of the map's distinctive features is its use of numbers to indicate the locations of place names, with the names themselves listed in the margins—those pertaining to Europe and Africa on the left, and those to Asia on the right. It is not the first map to use this system, which was also used in the so-called "German Ptolemy" of c. 1486-93. In fact it was the correspondence of numbers on the unique surviving map, which had been separated from its source, with numbers in the text of the German Ptolemy, that allowed Joseph Fischer to conclude that the map belonged with the printed text of the German Ptolemy (Campbell, p. 139).

Despite the confidence expressed in the text at the bottom of the map in the fidelity of the cartography to Mela, the map signally omits one geographical feature in which Mela seemed to believe, namely a large southern continent. Mela mentions this continent three times in his work: in section 1.4 he states that such a continent exists; in section 1.54 he entertains some doubt about its existence; and in section 3.70 he again expresses confidence in it. Mela's antipodal continent is even mentioned by Mathias Paulinus Pludentinus in his poem to the reader in the 1522 Basel edition of Mela. So it is surprising that this continent does not appear on the map.

The confidence in the printer of the map expressed in the text at the bottom is again betrayed by the numerous errors in the numbering of the place names on the map and in the lists of place names at the sides. These are those errors:

In Europe:

- *the number 5 is missing both from the map and from the list*
- *the number 13 and "Sardinia insula" was missing from the list, but has been added by hand*
- *the number 17 appears in the list twice—the second of these, "Septentrionalis oceanus"*



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qui & Britanicus & gallicus," should be numbered 18

- *the number 18 appears on the map but not on the list*
- *the number 22 was missing from the map but has been added by hand*
- *what should be the number 30 on the map is 03*

In Africa:

- *the number 1 is missing from the map and the list*
- *the number 3 is missing from the map and the list*
- *the number 6 appears on the map but is missing from the list*
- *the number 12 is missing from the map and the list*
- *the number 23 is missing from the list*
- *the number 29 appears twice on the list and twice on the map*

In Asia:

- *the number 7 and its corresponding name are missing from the list, but were added by hand*
- *there are two number 11s on the map; one of the names was added to the list by hand*
- *number 29 is missing from the map and the list*
- *number 13 in the list was corrected by hand to 31*
- *number 14 in the list was corrected by hand to 34*
- *number 38 is missing from the map and the list*
- *number 39 appears twice on the map and on the list, for Ogyris Insula and Parthia*
- *number 51 is not on the map or the list*
- *number 69 is missing from the list*

There is a later version of this map printed c. 1550 that also apparently survives in just one copy (Maritiem Museum Rotterdam, WAE 850, see Shirley no. 90). On this map all of the corrections entered by hand on the c. 1525 map are made in print, which indicates that the workshop that made the c. 1550 map was working from this copy of the c. 1525 map. Some of the other errors on the c. 1525 map, particularly those in Europe, are corrected on the c. 1550 map, but more than half are not corrected.

The c. 1525 map is of great interest as it is apparently the earliest surviving attempt to map the world according to the geographical ideas of Pomponius Mela. Some early maps that appear as illustrations in Mela's work do survive, but they are adaptations of Ptolemaic maps rather than efforts to render Mela's conceptions cartographically. This is the



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case with a manuscript world map made by Pirrus de Noah for a manuscript of Mela in about 1414 (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Archivio di San Pietro, H. 31, f. 8r); it is also true of the maps in early printed editions of Mela, such as the 1482 Venice edition. So the question of who might be responsible for the creation of the map becomes of particular interest. A good place to look for evidence is the editorial matter in the various editions of Pomponius Mela.

The famous Swiss humanist Joachim Vadian (1484-1551) published an important and very heavily annotated edition of Mela in 1518, and he has a whole chapter in his introduction about the importance of maps in the study of geography. That chapter begins:

When the mind is seized with the desire to see the earth, it should first enter into a map of the whole world, for unless one sees from a world map how the various individual regions are juxtaposed, and by what limits they are separated, the flow and ebb of the sea, and the form of the shores both within and without, he will never make progress seeing [the world] in parts, now this region and now that one, separately and apart from the others.

But immediately following this passage Vadianus mentions Ptolemaic maps, and it is those maps that are the focus of his discourse, so it does not seem that he contemplated making a world map according to Mela.

The German humanist Johann Cochlaeus (1479-1552) published an edition of Mela in Nuremberg in 1512, and his dedicatory letter to Willibald Pirckheimer in that edition places great emphasis not only on the importance of maps in education, but specifically on the importance of maps in teaching the geography of Mela. In that letter he writes:

To Willibald Pirckheimer, the distinguished Senator of Nuremberg and scholar of Greek and Latin, who is his master, Johannes Cochlaeus of Nuremberg gives many greetings.

*Some time ago I persuaded the excellent master Pirckheimer to teach Pomponius Mela's Geography to our adolescents, because of its many, substantial, and self-evident benefits. But for a long time my wishes to obtain editions [of Mela] printed elsewhere have been unfulfilled, **and therefore I undertook that they should be printed here anew.** In fact, any man will be unable to understand clearly either poets or historians without an understanding of cosmography, and he will not even read it fruitfully and with pleasure unless he is first well versed in at least the rudiments of this art. Indeed, he would seem to plow the seashore or roll the boulder of Sisyphus who would study any work of poetry or history without cosmography—it would be the same as if a blind man*



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*should try to discuss the nature and variety of the colors. For to the former the places would be unknown where the things described occurred and were transacted, just as to the latter the light from which colors arise is unknown. But if anyone objects that youngsters who have only learned the first rudiments cannot understand this lesson, I would urge them to remember that all of the subject matter of this art is visual, and that therefore he can easily help the understanding of his students with his own trustworthy instruction and by an image of the places. **In fact I myself keep three maps for this purpose, two manuscript and one printed, and moreover I added a brief summary by which I can promote the understanding of Pomponius Mela.***

The next year, in a later dedicatory letter in the 1513 edition of his Quadrivium grammatices, Cochlaeus says that some of his students have learned to draw maps: "From cosmography, in addition to the locations of regions, some of them have learned to make world maps with compasses, and to draw them in the correct proportion."

The fact that Cochlaeus used maps to teach Mela's geography, and was teaching his students to make maps, make him seem like someone who would have an interest in creating a map of the world according to Mela: certainly this would be a great tool for teaching.

The question arises, though, of whether a scholar and educator like Cochlaeus would have allowed a map with so many errors to be printed. There is a temptation to think that the map might be a proof sheet, and that it was later corrected and printed in copies that do not survive, but many of the same errors appear on a later version of the map printed c. 1550 that also survives in just one copy (Maritiem Museum Rotterdam, WAE 850, see Shirley, p. 102, no. 90, with plate 77). All but one of the errors are errors of omission that would likely have been made by the printer, rather than errors of geography. So we seem to have a case in which an able geographer and cartographer was betrayed by his printer. Giovanni Vespucci on his printed world map of 1524 warns readers about possible errors by the printer—and there are many on that map (see Gil, p. 24).

*Regardless of whether Cochlaeus was involved in its creation, the map represents an opportunity to own a unique early printed world map, and also a particularly early historical map—that is, a map designed to illustrate the world at a particular point in its history. This genre became popular later in the sixteenth century, particularly with Abraham Ortelius's *Parergon*, a supplement of historical maps first printed with his *Theatrum orbis terrarum* in 1579 (see Meurer).*



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Our Observations and Discussion

The present map is of great historical importance, both because it is apparently the earliest surviving map to depict Mela's geography and because it would appear to almost certainly have been prepared as a teaching tool by a prominent German humanist.

A tantalizing amount of circumstantial evidence suggests that the map is the work of the Nuremberg-based Cochlaeus. The prospect of Cochlaeus creating the map as an educational aid is quite compelling, as he was unsatisfied with the printed editions of Mela's book, wrote his own commentary on its cartography (see below) and specifically mentions using "**three maps for this purpose, two manuscript and one printed,**" in 1512. As noted by Goldschmidt, "Clearly Cochlaeus possessed and used maps, knew how to construct them and how to employ them in teaching," and was "a practical geographical teacher who did employ printed maps in his lessons" (p. 348).

If indeed the map is attributable to Cochlaeus, this could tie the map to the work of the Nuremberg compass maker and physician Erhard Etzlaub or even possibly Albrecht Durer. As noted by Schenlbogl (p.13) with our own emphasis added:

*Cochlaeus' commendation of Etzlaub carries all the more weight as he considers only five Nuremberg artists and craftsmen worthy of mention in his praise of the town. These are: **Albrecht Diirer for his engravings**, Johann Neuschel the maker of trumpets, Peter Vischer the metal-founder, our **Etzlaub** and the clock-designer Peter Henlein. Did Cochlaeus, by this citation, intend a service of friendship to Etzlaub, **with whom he had apparently collaborated?** Cochlaeus' text reads:*

Who does not praise the ingenious Erhard Etzlaub, whose sundials are sought after even in Rome? An industrious craftsman indeed, admirably learned in the principles of geography and astronomy, who made a very beautiful map of Germany in the German language, in which can be discerned the distances between towns and the courses of rivers more exactly than in Ptolemy's maps.

Bolstering the theory of Cochlaeus as a likely source is Goldschmidt's concluding inference that Cochleus was creating maps for educational purposes. In arguing that Cochleus was the source of a unique modern World map created sometime shortly after 1513, Goldschmidt states:



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The "obvious first inference" that the Nurnberg map is a close copy of the Strassburg map can be upheld as the correct theory, and what divergences there are all point to a humanist schoolmaster, who wished to present his boys with a map corresponding to their text-books: that schoolmaster was Johannes Cochlaeus (p. 350).

One of the observations made by Van Duzer is that the Mela map includes numerous omissions and errors. Goldschmidt notes the same problem with the Nuremberg world map referenced above, "Of the eight omissions of names appearing on the Strassburg map but not on the Nuremberg map little can be made" (p. 349). In addition, the Nuremberg World map converts five names from modern names to classical names, a change which Goldschmidt attributes to the work of a humanist such as Cochlaeus.

The omission of any attempt to illustrate the New World in our Mela map makes some sense if Cochlaeus was involved in its creation. Cochlaeus had suggested that the discoveries in the New World were of little import. In the general introduction section to his 1512 edition of Mela's work, Cochlaeus wrote the following passage, titled *Zona incognita*, on leaf f, verso, for which we have provided a translation from a 1928 Anderson Galleries description of the book:

De reliqua autem zona (Antipodum inquam) ad nostra usque tempora nihil compertum est ab antiquis. Verum Americus Vesputius iam nostro seculo, nouum illum mundum inuenisse fertur
...

*[About the last of these zones (I refer to the Antipodes), nothing has been discovered from the days of antiquity to our times. It is true that Amerigo Vespucci, in our century, is said to have found that New World, in ships of the kings of Spain and Portugal, and to have gone not only beyond the torrid zone, but even a long way beyond the tropic of Capricorn, and to have asserted that Africa extends as far as that, and that this New World is quite distinct from it, and larger than our Europe. Whether this be true or not is of little or no concern to Cosmography or the knowledge of History. For the peoples and places of that land are so far unknown and unnamed to us, nor are sailings made thither, except under many dangers, **therefore they are of no interest to geographers.**]*

The Anderson Galleries cataloguer concluded that, "this passage shows that to the orthodox humanist scholar, any knowledge of geography, beyond what was needed for the proper understanding of the classical authors, seemed quite superfluous and uninteresting." This conclusion was echoed by Christine Johnson in *The German Discovery of the World* (p.86), noting that Cochlaeus described the New World



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discoveries as "contributing nothing or altogether little to cosmographical or historical knowledge."

We surmise that as of the time of Cochlaeus' comment regarding his maps (1512), his teaching tools would have most likely been:

1. Printed map: This would seem to be Erhard Etzlaub's map of the area around Nuremberg, engraved by Georg Glockendon. Cochlaeus is highly complimentary of this map in his *Brevis Germaniae Descriptio* of 1512.
2. Manuscript Map 1: A world map based upon Pomponius Mela
3. Manuscript Map 2: A modern world map

The present map, perhaps the fruit of Cochlaeus' teachings, would have printed sometime after the publication of his 1512 edition of Mela and quite possibly is not the first iteration of Cochlaeus's Mela map. The survival of the circa 1550 Rotterdam variant suggests that the map had a long useful life and in fact Cochlaeus died in Basel in 1552.

Typography

In evaluating the date and place of publication of the map, we have examined numerous incunable and post-incunable fonts, as well as catalogs of fonts, such as GfT, to find a match.

The closest match to the blackletter Gothic type on the present map is a blackletter font used by the Venetian printer LucAntonio Giunta in his 1520 edition of the *Pontificale secundum Ritus sacrosancte Romane ecclesie*. Across the spectrum of letters included in both the map and the Pontificale, all are close matches for form. There are exceptions, for instance, the capital E in the *Giunta Pontificale* has a central horizontal stroke that does not match that on the Mela.

The range of possibilities seems to be either Southern Germany or northern Italy. The typography referenced above suggests publication in the Venice region, but it by no means conclusive.

Notably, this does not contradict the possibility that the mapmaker was Johann Cochlaeus. During the years 1515-19, Cochlaeus traveled in Italy as tutor to three nephews of Willibald Pirckheimer. In 1515 he was at Bologna. He received his doctor's degree at Ferrara (1517), and spent some time in Rome, where he was ordained as a priest, before returning to Frankfurt in 1520. He spent an additional year in Rome between 1523 and 1524.

Rarity



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This is the only known example of the map.

As Van Duzer explains and Shirley notes, there is a similar map at the Rotterdam Maritime Museum. This is also known in only a single example and appears to be a later edition of this map. The watermark on the Rotterdam map suggests a date of approximately 1550. It can be seen [here](#).

Detailed Condition:

Restoration along centerfold.