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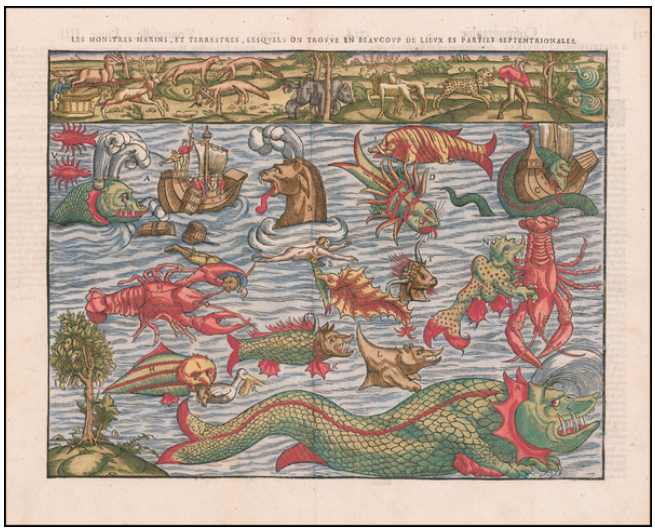
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Les Marins Monstres, Et Terrestres ... [Munster's Famous Chart of Sea Monsters]

Stock#: 59305
Map Maker: Munster / De Belleforest

Date: 1575
Place: Paris
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG+
Size: 13.5 x 11.5 inches

Price: SOLD



Description:

Münster's Monster Menagerie—Rare French Variant on Separate Woodblock!

Fine example of Münster's sought-after chart of terrestrial and sea monsters. The imagery is based in large part on Olaus Magnus' famed, and unobtainable, *Carta Marina* of 1539. A rare French variant, this example is printed from a completely different woodblock, published in Paris.

The chart was published as part of Münster's popular *Cosmographia*, the earliest printed description of the world in German. The work was later translated to other languages. This plate specifically details animals from the north of Europe, again showing Magnus' influence.

Münster features a strip of terrestrial animals at the top of the image. These include reindeer, bears, leopards, and snakes. A man faces off with the snakes to the right of the strip, leaving his back exposed to the leopard whose tongue is lapping with anticipation.

The majority of the image shows a seascape populated by a motley, monstrous crew. To the left is a whale. Based on Magnus, it is identifiable as the marine mammal thanks to the two spouts on the top of its body, which are the same as the double blowholes of baleen whales. Another spouted creature, but with the head of a cat, is to the right. Between these menaces is a ship desperately trying to escape by jettisoning its cargo.

Below this scene is a giant lobster with a man in its claw. While the lobster is identifiable to modern eyes, this most likely was meant to be an octopus. In Magnus' accompanying description of the animal in his

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1539 work, he states that it has eight legs and another image shows a more octopus-like creature. However, the portrayal on the 1539 map, and this diagram, show a lobster, which suggests that Magnus had not seen the animal he was describing and instead approximated an animal with eight legs that he had seen, the lobster.

In the upper right, a sea serpent is attacking a ship while below it a sea cow (letter T) is surveying the scene. To the right, a sea horse battles a lobster (or is it supposed to be an octopus?). While sea horses and sea cows (manatees) do exist, the resemblance of many of these creatures to land animals—there are many animals with the tusks of a boar and the head of a pig (letter L)—derive from a Classical antecedent that still held sway in the sixteenth century. Pliny the Elder posited that all land animals had a marine equivalent. Thus, it is common for Medieval and Renaissance sea monsters to appear similar to terrestrial creatures.

Sea monsters and Renaissance maps

The relationship between maps and sea monsters stretches back to the Classical period and reflects humanity's preoccupation, and concern, with the sea and what is contains. Medieval maps, principally *mappaemundi* and portolan charts, also contained monsters in their waters, although the frequency of and relationship between these images is hard to trace due to the low survival rate of Medieval documents.

As manuscript maps gave way to woodblock and copperplate engraving, the motives for including monsters on maps also changed. In medieval manuscripts, the person commissioning the work could decide if they wanted monsters or not. The cartographer could advertise their aptitude for drawing monsters, but ultimately the choice rested with the patron. With printed maps, where a purchasing public and not a patron was the intended audience, cartographers would include monsters as a way to attract customers. As Chet van Duzer explains, monsters shifted from pre-arranged features to anticipated elements of a map.

Why might a cartographer include monsters in the first place? For one thing, the monsters could signal the approximate location of an event, an encounter of man and beast, but they could also serve as more general warnings of possible dangers for sailors and travelers. They also represented the vitality of the oceanic sphere, a realm on which many in Europe were dependent. They also showed off a cartographer's skill and artistic flare, whether drawn or engraved. For the Renaissance period in particular, they also represented an increasing interest in the marvelous which was also represented by curiosity cabinets in the homes of the wealthy.

During the Renaissance, which coincided with the shift to print technology, Münster, the maker of this chart, was a pioneer in shifting the style of sea monsters. Previously, monsters were drawn in flat profile

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with little movement indicated. During the sixteenth century, monsters began to be shown as three dimensional, thanks to shading, with implied movement and dynamism. Cartographers also harkened back to Classical sources for zoological imagery, rather than Medieval antecedents. Münster's world map, engraved by Hans Holbein the Younger, in Simon Gyrnaeus and Johann Huttich's travel collection, *Novus orbis regionum ac insularum veteribus incognitarum*, shows this emerging Renaissance style.

The most influential work to contain sea monsters, both for Münster in particular and for cartography in general, was Olaus Magnus' *Carta marina et descriptio septemtrionalium terrarium ac mirabilium* (Venice, 1539). Although only two known examples are extant today, the spread of Magnus' sea monsters was considerable. For example, he directly affected the work of Gerard Mercator, as seen on his globe of 1541.

Münster too, was influenced by Magnus' imagery and his descriptions of the monsters, which were described in Olaus' *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*. Both Magnus, and Münster in turn, influenced Abraham Ortelius, as seen on his famous map of Iceland first included in the 1590 edition of his important atlas, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*.

Ortelius' Iceland map is not always available, while Mercator's and Magnus' monster works are unobtainable. This Münster chart of sea monsters is from the golden period of depicting such grotesque beings and it is a captivating compendium of representations of man's fascination with, and fear of, the unknown on land and sea. A rare variant in French, like this, published on a separate woodblock, is seldom seen on the market.

Detailed Condition: