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Charta öfver Öen St Barthélémy

Stock#: 59440
Map Maker: Anonymous / Wilmans
Date: 1785 circa
Place: Le Carenage (Gustavia) ?
Color: Pen & Ink with Wash Color
Condition: VG+
Size: 23.2 x 18.7 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

The Earliest Surviving Map of the Island of St. Bartholomew (St. Barths)

Finely executed manuscript map of the island of St. Bartholomew (St. Barths), quite possibly the earliest surviving extant map to focus on the island alone. It dates to just after the Swedish takeover of the island in 1784.

Although drafted after the Swedish took control of the island from the French in 1784, the place names are in French. The map shows settlements, roads and sandbanks marked in brown ink. The map is detailed and colorful, showing the main settlement (*Le Carenage*), shortly before its name was changed to Gustavia. The town is shown in plan form, with buildings and streets included. The name for the settlement derives from the practice of careening, whereby crews haul their tall ships ashore to clean their hulls of the barnacles that can build up during cruises. If a ship is not careened, it can list to one side or not sail correctly and or quickly. Many sites were identified around the Caribbean for careening and St. Bartholomew's *Le Carenage* was one of those.

Above the main settlement is a single tower with battlements and a waving flag accented with blue. This is the "*Castellet*". Various small islands, including Sugarloaf Island, so named for its shape as seen from sea, are labeled around the larger island, as are soundings and dangerous rocks. A decorative compass rose is also included. Various ponds dot the island, but these are all labeled as "*saline*", or salty. Finally, the roads and buildings already established by the 1780s are also included, showing a bustling if still small society.

In the lower left corner, the map includes its title, in Swedish. A final line of text reads "*Joh: Nu: Dampi.*"



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While unattributed, the map bears remarkable similarities to two hand drawn maps of St. Barths in the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, both of which are entitled *L'Isle de St. Barthelemi*. One of the two is a finely embellished hand colored map. The second is a meticulous working copy, created with a grid pattern to allow the creation of other copies and is joined with a thin tracing paper example from which further copies could be made. Each of the maps bear the signature "*George Auguste Wilmans Enseigne au service de la Republique de Breme, 1786.*"

The two similar maps suggest two scenarios. One, the present example was the base map from which the two copies in Paris are derived. Alternatively, it is possible that all three were derived from the same absent original map. Slight discrepancies between this example and the Paris examples with regard to the soundings near *Le Carenage* suggest that this map might have predated the others, as does the sketchiness of this example as compared to the precision of the Paris examples, which appear to be meticulous professional copies, rather than original maps drawn in the field.

St. Bartholomew

This map was drawn shortly after the island was taken over by Sweden in 1784, but the island was first known to Europeans when Christopher Columbus named it after the saint. The island first appears on a European map in 1523, but this is the first map known that features the island independently and in such detail. Prior to European interference, the Arawak peoples lived on the island and called it Ouanalao.

At first, the island remained unsettled and was used mainly as a site for careening ships. In 1648, Philippe de Lonvilliers de Poincy colonized the island, but then sold it to the Maltese Order of the Knight of St. John two years later. Disputes with Arawak peoples made permanent settlement hard. In 1665, the French West India Company bought the island from the Knights; their claim passed to the French crown when the company dissolved in 1674. Throughout the eighteenth century, the main agricultural output of the island was subsistence-based crops. Slaves were brought in to work the fields.

Under Gustav II, who became King of Sweden in 1772, Sweden actively sought colonies in the Caribbean. Sweden asked France to open their ports to French trade and looked into the acquisition of Puerto Rico. These negotiations came to nothing and instead they managed to trade French trading rights in Gothenburg for St. Barths in 1784.

The island was too small for intensive sugar production, so the Swedish instead decided to make the island a free port, an important asset in the Caribbean. The Swedish West India Company had reduced toll fees in the port but, unlike the other trade companies, they did not have a monopoly over trade on the island.

This map dates from the transition period from French to Swedish administration. Indeed, the Wilmans



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identified with the two examples in the Bibliotheque Nationale is likely related to Henrich Wilmans, a merchant from Bremen who became integrally involved with the administration of St. Bartholomew during the early Swedish colonial period. Henrich submitted a detailed proposal to the Swedish government proposing that the island be administered using the Dutch free port system, which would be one of the most influential voices in determining its future governance.

Dating the Map and Identifying Its Maker

The use of the original French name of *Le Carenage* helps to date the map. After control of the island was given to the Sweden, the name was changed to Gustavia (in honor of King Gustav III of Sweden) sometime between December 28, 1786 and February 9, 1787. Thus, this map dates from just before this period, ca. 1785.

It is the earliest known stand-alone map of the island and is the most detailed map of the island from the late-eighteenth century. It was drawn at a momentous point in the island's and Sweden's history and would make an intriguing and rare addition to any collection of Caribbean or colonial maps.

What appears to be a name, "Joh: Nu: Dampi", appears in the bottom left corner. The name was identified as "Johan Nu Dam" by Christies at the time of sale, but we find nothing to support this name. As noted above, a set of maps of St. Barthelemy exists in the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, signed by "George Auguste Wilmans, Ensign in the Service of the Republic of Bremen." We find no evidence of this person, but the name suggests a relationship with the Bremen merchant Henrich Wilmans, described below, who was a prominent Brement merchant with ties to St. Barth at this time period.

We suspect that the maps in the BnF is a later copy, drawn from a map made by or for Wilmans in about 1785, at the time Wilmans was actively corresponding with the King of Sweden in an attempt to influence its administration of St. Barth, during which time Wilmans was known to have also sought to build a house (likely a trading house) at La Carenage.

Henrich Wilmans

Heinrich Wilmans (also Henry Willmans or Heinrich Wilmans) was a prominent Bremen merchant and agent for the King of Denmark, with interests in America and throughout the Caribbean. Correspondence, for instance, indicates that Wilmans visited George Washington in Mount Vernon in November 1788 and later received at least 1 letter from Washington in 1789.

In 1784, Wimans was operating a large trading house in St. Thomas and commercial interests in St. Eustatius. Wilmans submitted to the King of Sweden a detailed plan for the administration of its new



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colony at St. Barths, urging lower customs rates than those set by the Danish at St. Thomas and S. Eutatius in order to compete for trade. Much of Wilmans ideas on a free trading port and religious tolerance were in fact adopted in 1786, most notably a mixed governing council of Swedish and local representatives. Wilmans received a gold medal from the King of Sweden as a token of appreciation, but was ultimately not allowed to construct a trading house at La Carenage.

Provenance: Edmondo di Robilant -- Purchased in December 2018 at Christies, London.

Detailed Condition: