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Tabula Geogra: Regni Congo

Stock#: 60041
Map Maker: De Bry / Pigafetta
Date: 1597 circa
Place: Frankfurt
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 15 x 12 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

The Most Important Maps of West Africa Published in the Sixteenth Century

Fine example of Pigafetta's map of West Africa, from De Bry's *Petit Voyages*.

Pigafetta's map of Africa based on the explorations of Duarte Lopes, a Portuguese whose voyages to the Congo Basin added to the speculation about the source of the Nile.

The map depicts the portion of the Congo region visited by Duarte Lopes between 1578 and 1584, during his travels in Africa.

The reader is struck by the accuracy of the coastal outline, as well as by the density of place names and geographic features filling the interior. While not all have a basis in strict fact, this was the most detailed and certainly, for the Congo, the most precise map of Africa ever published to that time. The geography is dominated by large mountain ranges and long rivers.

The seas are where even more decorative elements are added. Ships and sea monsters ride the waves. A beautiful detail is that the large interior lakes are dotted with serpentine heads; sea snakes haunting the waters.

The map includes an elaborate cartouche.

Significance of the Pigafetta map



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Pigafetta published his two sheet map of Africa in 1591, with this map, issued by De Bry, created seven years later to illustrate his account of the expedition to Africa. The Pigafetta map's significance lies in its revolutionary rejection of the Ptolemaic depiction of the interior Africa, one that was then still followed by cartographers, including the famous-atlas maker Ortelius. Pigafetta disputed the traditional Ptolemaic geography of twin lakes on the same latitude near the Mountains of the Moon as the source of the Nile River. Rather, Pigafetta shows two lakes in central Africa, one above the other. The southern one feeds the Zambezi and the Limpopo. The northern lake feeds the Nile and the Zaire. The northern lake is at and north of the equator, as opposed to farther south as Ptolemy placed his lakes. Following Waldseemuller, Pigafetta places a third, smaller lake to the west which is the source of the Congo River.

Pigafetta incorporated a number of other features in the interior of Africa which appear to derive from authentic indigenous sources. It is without question the most important modern map of Africa published in the 16th Century.

Although not all mapmakers adopted his non-Ptolemaic hydrography, others used him as an influential source for place names and geography of the Congo region. However, the Lopes-Pigafetta lake system was not widely adopted, making this map all the rarer and more significant for its originality, boldness, and relative accuracy.

The voyages of Duarte Lopes and the publication of Pigafetta's *Relatione*

Duarte Lopes was a Portuguese trader who traveled within central Africa, in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola, starting in 1578. After several successful merchant voyages, Lopes was appointed as ambassador for Congo's king, Alvaro II, to Spain (which was then unified with Portugal). Lopes replaced Sebastian da Costa, who had died on his return trip to report to Philip II of Spain.

While ambassador, Lopes sought out mineral specimens to share with his European contacts in the hope they would yield gold, silver, or another precious metal. He also opened the region to trade with Portugal and Spain, a major advantage for the vast Spanish Empire. Finally, Lopes vowed to lobby the Pope to send missionaries to Central Africa.

On his return trip from Congo, Lopes was shipwrecked on the coast of Venezuela. After a year marooned there, he returned to Europe to continue to fight for his causes, although the calls went unheeded. He returned to Congo in 1589 and was never heard from again.

Before he disappeared, however, Lopes told Filippo Pigafetta (ca. 1533-1604) the story of his travels and gave him a single manuscript map. Pigafetta was a historian who traveled extensively. He also served as a Chamberlain to Pope Sextus, a position that would give him access to information and a certain measure



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of power in Roman society.

Pigafetta published the narrative of Lopes' adventures, *Relatione del realme di Congo et delle circonvicine contrade*, in 1591. The book also included this map as a copperplate engraving, the best of Africa to date, and another, larger scale map of the Congo. It appeared first in Italian (Rome, Bartolomeo Grassi, 1591).

This map was engraved by Natale Bonifacio (ca. 1537-1592). Bonifacio was born and died in Sibenik, a sea town on the Dalmatian Coast. He first started engraving maps in Venice, before moving to Rome in 1575. There, he became a well-known engraver who was close to the Pope; like Pigafetta, he was a Chamberlain. In 1590, he engraved the plates for a book by papal architect Domenico Fontana, celebrating the erection of a series of obelisks, one of Sixtus V's many architectural projects. The map is dedicated to Antonio Miglioni Vescovo di San Marco, a high-ranking clergyman who was bishop of the diocese of San Marco from 1586 to 1591.

The work was quickly translated into other European languages: Dutch (trans. Martin Everart, Bruges, Amsterdam, 1596), German (trans. Augustine Cassiadore Reinius, published by De Bry, Frankfurt 1597), and Latin (De Bry, Frankfurt, 1598). The translations often included the maps. For example, the German edition, part of the De Bry brothers' *Petit Voyages*, includes versions of the two maps which are similar to the originals, although not as ornate.

Abraham Hartwell, at the request of travel compiler Richard Hakluyt, translated the work into English, and it was published in London in 1597, with maps included. Samuel Purchas included the tale in his *Pilgrimes* (London, 1625) and it is widely accepted that Daniel Defoe used the narrative while writing *The adventures of Captain Singleton* (London, 1720).

Detailed Condition: