



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

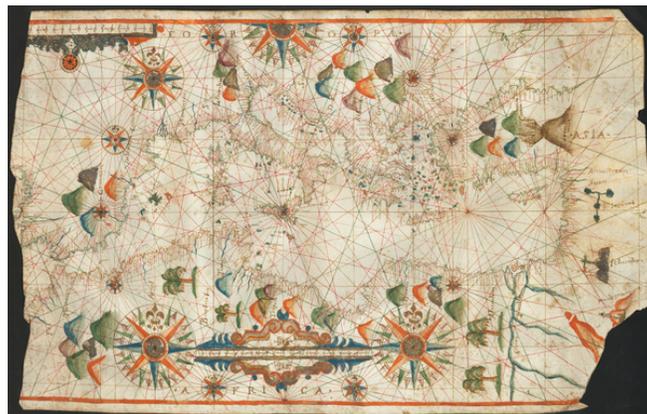
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[Portolan Chart of the Mediterranean]

Stock#: 61770
Map Maker: Caloiro e Oliva
Date: 1621 - 1665
Place: Messina
Color: Pen & Ink with Wash Color
Condition: Good
Size: 28.5 x 17.8 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Finely-Executed Portolan Chart of the Mediterranean Showing Noah's Ark atop Mount Ararat

Striking seventeenth-century portolan chart, hand-drawn on vellum and heightened with gold leaf. It shows the environs of the Mediterranean basin, extending east to the Black Sea and the Nile River.

Portolan charts are the earliest form of sea chart and examples like this, in vibrant original color, are rare on the market. The chart is attributed to the important Oliva family of chartmakers, based in Sicily.

The chart is drawn on a vellum (calf skin) sheet, the traditional medium for portolans. The durable material was more water and climate resistant than paper. This portolan is richly embellished, including two large compass roses, a half-rose, and thirteen smaller roses. Additionally, a beautifully-decorated scale appears in North Africa, flanked by more compass roses.

The decorative elements and the archipelagos are colored in blue, green and red. The names of the coastal towns are in red ink or olive brown, with certain larger regions and states in dark ink. The rivers are marked in blue. Numerous mountains adorn the map as well as some palm trees in North Africa. The Red Sea, painted red as was the convention, is in the lower right corner.

In the east, three specific places are represented: St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Calvary with three crosses, and the Jordan River. St. Catherine's Monastery lies at the foot Mt. Sinai and was built in the sixth century CE. Today, it operates the oldest continuously-operating library in the world and is one of the oldest working monasteries extant. Mount Cavalry, outside Jerusalem, is where Jesus was crucified. The Jordan River is the river in which Jesus was baptized and over which the Israelites entered the Promised Land.



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The most unusual representation is located in Anatolia, in the eastern part of Asia Minor. Atop a sharp brown peak is a precariously-balanced vessel. It is Noah's Ark at the top of Mount Ararat. The famed ship is shown here with rigging and masts.

The distinctive ark is not the only detail that makes this particular example interesting for the scholar and collector. For centuries prior to the production of this chart, most nautical charts showed a rotation of about 9° counter-clockwise relative to the magnetic declination in the Mediterranean. Although in the mid-seventeenth century some cartographers identified the shift and indicated the true geographical route, the author of this chart chose to follow the traditional pattern of rotation.

This map may have been ordered by a captain whose trade was limited to the Mediterranean Sea and adjacent waterways, or to a collector eager to have a visualization of the Mediterranean that differed from the printed charts that were proliferating in this period.

Portolan charts

Cartographically, this portolan is typical of mid-seventeenth century production, both in terms of the extent of the area represented and the lack of definite detail in the interior. The charts were meant to illustrate sailing routes and ports and usually centered on a body of water, like the Mediterranean Sea. They typically contained little information about the countries beyond the shoreline, as they were meant as sailing aids.

The word portolan derives from the Italian *portolano* or *portulano*, meaning pilot book. Navigators would have used these charts in conjunction with such books of written sailing directions, or rutters, as well as instruments, the weather, and the stars in order to find their way.

In their detail and technical construction, portolan charts mark a revolutionary moment in the history of cartography. Although their initial creation and development is unknown—they are assumed to be a mixture of Medieval sailors' knowledge, emerging ideas about geography and mathematics, and perhaps contributions from Arab or Byzantine sources—their importance to navigation and Western civilization are undeniable.

Portolan charts are the first maps to show the Mediterranean and Black Sea in a recognizable form. Previous Medieval maps, like the *mappaemundi*, showed a symbolic and deeply religious world that was more concerned with spiritual hierarchy and space than with geographical precision. Portolans, while containing religious imagery, were different. They strove to show proportionate and accurate spatial relationships. They were based on the first-hand knowledge of sailors and underline the growing importance of long-distance, overseas trade for Mediterranean and European peoples.



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Portolan charts were used from the late Medieval period until the late-seventeenth century, with the first known portolan, the *Carte Pisane*, dating to ca. 1290. This type of distinctive and decorative manuscript chart was by and large overtaken in the late-sixteenth century by printed charts and nautical atlases, the first of which was Lucas Jansz Waghenaer's *Spieghel der zeevaerdt* in ca. 1580. However, several families continued to craft the hand-drawn works, including the Olivas, who made this example.

The Oliva Family of Chartmakers

The system of 32 rhumb lines are centered on Sicily. This coincides with the homeland of Placido Caloiro et Oliva, to whom the chart has been attributed. Placido Caloiro et Oliva (fl. 1617-1665) is known to have made several charts which date roughly to the middle decades of the seventeenth century and are held in various institutional collections.

The Oliva family, of Catalan origin, was active in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They relocated from Majorca to Messina, in Sicily. At least thirteen members of the family are known to have made portolan charts between 1538 and 1673. Thanks to its location between Naples and Malta, Messina was an important trading city, which made it ideal for chartmakers seeking commissions. Placido Caloiro was one of the last of this Oliva line to make charts.

This portolan is a vibrant example of an important genre within the history of cartography and navigation. Portolan charts are of utmost interest to scholars and are the most sought after of nautical charts. The present item is the product of one of the most prominent dynasties of portolan makers and represents an important moment at the end of the production of this type of chart. It would make a dynamic and stunning addition to any collection of portolans or charts of the Mediterranean.

Detailed Condition:

Hand drawn map on vellum and heightened with gold. Loss of about 30 cm of vellum at the western part of portolan and missing a few millimeters to the right of the eastern part with a greater loss in the lower corner. Apart from these defects, the portolan is in good condition; the colors have remained lively and the lines are clear.