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Sumatra / Taprobana

Stock#: 65385
Map Maker: Ramusio
Date: 1556 (1606)
Place: Venice
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 15 x 11 inches
Price: Not Available



Description:

Fine Map of Sumatra, the First to be Based on Actual Observations

Nice example of Giovanni Battista Ramusio's important early map of Sumatra, from his famed *Navigazioni et Viaggi*. This is the first map focused solely on an Indonesian island to be based on actual empirical data. This is a second state of the map, from the 1606 edition of volume III.

The south-oriented map centers upon the island; there is no sign of Java or the Malay Peninsula. European ships are in full sail in the sea around Sumatra. They have to navigate carefully, as there are also many sea monsters and creatures surfacing.

Within the island are several scenes of quotidian life. These include a man leading camels, people conversing in a raised wooden hut, turbaned men on horseback, a shepherd with his flock, a man sitting in a corral outside a hut, and the harvesting of coconuts or other fruit from a tree.

Ramusio consulted many sources for his works, but at least part of his information on Sumatra came from the voyage of the French Parmentier brothers. Jean (1494-1529) and Raoul Parmentier sailed to the Americas, West Africa, and the East Indies during their careers. In 1529, Jean led two ships to Sumatra to break the Portuguese spice monopoly. The brothers were not successful in gaining the desired cargo and both died during their time onshore. The surviving crew left Sumatra in early 1530 for France, along with papers and poems from Jean.

Taprobana and Sumatra



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Interestingly, the island is labelled as both Sumatra and Taprobana. Taprobana was what the Greeks called Sri Lanka, but late-medieval and early modern geographers also applied the toponym to Sumatra and various phantom islands that wandered the Indian Ocean. Some of the confusion stemmed from the caginess of merchants with the location of many islands. Sri Lanka and Sumatra, for example, were both rich in resources, especially spices, and those who had access to these resources were loath to share the bounty.

There were also many rumors about the island in Europe. The author of *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* said that Taprobana was part of the kingdom of Prester John, as well as that the island had mountains of gold guarded by man-eating ants. He went on to explain that the island was the home of the Sciapodes, or men with only one large foot, a detail he borrowed from Greek sources.

By the mid-sixteenth century, however, when this map was published, Sumatra was in frequent contact with European traders. The Portuguese were the first to arrive, in 1512, followed by the Dutch and the English at the turn of the century. The Dutch managed to convince the English to give up their claims in treaties in 1824 and 1871. While resistance was a constant, especially in Aceh, the Dutch only left the island after WWII.

Ramusio's *Navigazioni et Viaggi*

Ramusio, a Venetian civil servant, spent decades gathering images, accounts, and sources for a massive collection of travels and voyages. He wanted to update the geographic knowledge of antiquity, which was being challenged by European interactions with the Americas and Asia. He especially wanted his work to be useful to mapmakers in updating their representations of the known world.

One of the larger printing projects of the sixteenth century, the collection eventually appeared in three volumes. They were published by Tommaso Giunti in Venice and only in a later edition, in 1563, was the author revealed to be Ramusio. The first volume was published in 1550 and held information about Africa, India, and the East Indies. The second was published in 1559 and discussed Russia, the Middle East, and Central Asia. The third volume, published before the second in 1556, held information about the Americas.

The second volume was delayed because of a large fire in Ramusio's workshop in 1557; the flames ruined the volume's woodblocks, forcing the second edition to be published two years later with no maps. The maps that were included in the other volumes were most likely the work of Giacomo Gastaldi, who tutored Ramusio's son in geography. While the first volume had three maps and plans, and the second none due to the fire, the third volume had nine maps of the Americas, Africa, and the East Indies, including this map

The work was an important milestone in publishing and each edition was reprinted several times: volume I



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in 1550, 1554 (with additions), 1563 (with an additional leaf mentioning Ramusio as author), 1588, 1606, and 1613; volume II in 1559, 1574 (with additions), 1583 (further additions), and 1606; and volume III in 1556, 1565 and 1606 (with additions). Only once, in 1606, were all three volumes reprinted in the same year.

States of this map

This map would have appeared in the third volume, first printed in 1556. However, there are several known and recently discovered states of this map:

1. The inclusion of folio numbers in the upper corners, 430 and 434, belong to a first state, which was included in the 1556 and 1565 ([see this example from the John Carter Brown Library](#)) and some 1606 editions of volume III.
2. Another state has the folio number 371 in the corners and, according to the British Library, was part of the 1606 editions. This is an example of this state. It would seem that some of the first state maps (with the 430 and 434 folio number) were inserted in some 1606 editions ([see this example from the Getty Research Institute](#)), while others were reprinted with the updated folio number (371) for the first time. This state is in reality a renumbered version of the first state, using the same block. You can see the degradation of the block when comparing [this example \(first state\)](#) and the present example.
3. The third state, [seen here](#), has not been studied extensively. Based on the degradation of the woodblock noted in the second state, it seems a new block was prepared, and it may have appeared in some examples of the 1606 reissue of all three volumes. This is a re-engraved, most likely on copperplate, version, based on the finer and fewer lines (see especially the sea monster to the left of the island, just above the equator). It has the folio numbers 430 and 434 in the corners. In each example of this state that we have seen, an antique hand has corrected these folio numbers to 433 and 434.

Ramusio's map of Sumatra, most likely drawn by Gastaldi, was the first map focused on an individual Indonesian island to be based on recent observations. It was included in one of the most important travel collections in history and is a significant map in the history of the cartography of Southeast Asia.

Detailed Condition: