



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

[Early Facsimile of the Disputed Christopher Columbus Portolan Chart]

Stock#: 66514
Map Maker: Columbus
Date: 1492 (circa 1924)
Place: n.p.
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 22 x 13.5 inches
Price: \$ 1,500.00



Description:

Early Photographic Facsimile of a 15th Century Portolan Chart Attributed By One Scholar To Christopher Columbus. From the Collection of Famous Map Scholar Edward Luther Stevenson.

An impressive early facsimile of the "Columbus Mappa Mundi", which includes both a detailed map of the Mediterranean, a smaller map, and a cosmographic depiction of the earth. This setup is unusual: the juxtaposition of a practical navigator's map with a stylistic Mappa Mundi does not appear often.

While it is known that Bartolomeo (and possibly Christopher) Columbus was a mapmaker, scholars have debated the authorship of the original of this chart since its acquisition by the French National Library in 1848. Some have argued that one or the other Columbus created this map, while others suggest that Christopher merely annotated it, and yet others say that certain attribution is impossible.

The provenance of this map prior to acquisition by the BNF is unknown, but the work was first attributed to Columbus in 1924 by the French cartographic historian de la Roncière based on the annotations present on the chart, which followed texts Columbus was known to have used for his voyages. This hypothesis was strengthened by the lengthy annotation regarding Genoa present on the map, which some even argue was written in a Genoese dialect. Further, de la Roncière believed that annotations made by Columbus in other works refer to this map: in a treatise by d'Ailly, Columbus notes "our maps on paper where there is a sphere," supposedly based on this Portolan.

More contemporary scholars, such as Monique Pelletier, have further suggested similarities between the map, its annotations, and ideas known to be held by Columbus. Even later, supporting materials produced for a 1995 facsimile include the following description of the map:

in 1924, Charles de la Roncière, a French historian and cartography expert, attributed to



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Christopher Columbus a portolan navigation chart which has since been the subject of debate and discussion.

The navigation chart shows the classical design of the Mediterranean area with the addition of the Atlantic coastlines stretching from the south of Scandinavia to the mouth of the river Congo. It features a particularly comprehensive nomenclature of the entire African coast - an area where Columbus is believed to have undertaken at least one voyage with the Portuguese. To the East it encompasses the Black Sea and the Red Sea, and to the West, a series of islands, some real and some imaginary, stretching from the Arctic to the Gulf of Guinea.

The elongated part of the parchment shows a small, circular mappa mundi with Jerusalem in the middle surrounded by heavenly rings symbolising the geocentric concept of the universe. Practical navigation charts are not often found alongside cosmographic maps. One of the accompanying notes in Latin says that despite being plotted on a flat surface, the mappa mundi must be thought of as spherical. The portrayal of the earth in this manner confirms the evolution of maps between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

The Spanish flag painted over Granada reveals that the map was completed after January 1492, following the conquest of the Muslim city by the Catholic monarchs. Unlike Juan de la Cosa's planisphere dated 1500 and subsequent maps, no attempt is made in this map to show the new discoveries that were made from 1493 onwards, an indication that it was made in early 1492.

Despite these pieces of evidence, little can be confirmed regarding the map. It is unknown whether Columbus had the technical skills to make such a map, or if all the annotations are simply red herrings. Yet, the importance of this map in stimulating cartographic study is without a doubt.

Detailed Condition:

Photograph on two sheets mounted on original linen. With early ink manuscript annotations (possibly by Edward Luther Stevenson).