



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman  
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard  
La Jolla, CA 92037

[www.raremaps.com](http://www.raremaps.com)

(858) 551-8500  
[blr@raremaps.com](mailto:blr@raremaps.com)

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**[French Composite Sea Atlas Focusing on Colonization in Southeast Asia]**

**Stock#:** 68228  
**Map Maker:** Various Makers  
**Date:** 1843 (with additions to 1855)  
**Place:** Paris  
**Color:** Uncolored  
**Condition:** VG+  
**Size:** 20 x 26 inches Book Size  
**Price:** SOLD



**Description:**

***Composite Atlas of French Sea Charts Chronicling Jean-Baptiste Cecille's Attempts to Extend the French Empire in Asia.***

35 engraved or lithographed charts mounted on tabs, all but one double-page.

Large folio (26x20 inches). Contemporary straight-grain red roan over speckled black-and-pink boards (lightly worn).

A fine collection of charts issued by the Depot de la Marine with manuscript additions showing three



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voyage routes, including that of the *Cléopâtre*, a frigate which served in the French Asian squadron. Several of the charts show some of the first detailed surveys of parts of the Philippines and the Ryukyu Islands.

This pioneering hydrography was overseen by Admiral Jean-Baptiste Cecille, commander of the Indian and China Sea squadron in the early 1840s, and Cecille is mentioned on several of the charts in the atlas. It was most likely a reference atlas compiled over several decades by Cecille or someone close to him. The first maps were likely working charts, while that final charts, all commissioned by Cecille and conducted by his officers, were added as a retrospective portrayal of the Asian theater. The charts and the annotations tell the little-known story of a concerted effort by the French Navy to establish a colonial stronghold in Asian waters.

The atlas includes 35 charts which range in date of initial publication from 1802 to 1855. The order of the charts shows a geographical progression from the Atlantic to the Indian to the Pacific Oceans, with large general charts followed by more specific charts of islands and archipelagoes. The final two charts are of the Pacific Ocean, and the atlas includes several charts of the French coast, the Black Sea, and one each of the Caribbean and a star chart. All 35 were published by the Depot de la Marine, the hydrographic publishing and regulating institution of the French Navy, with the exception of two; one of these was a Spanish chart, the other a commercial publication. Five of the 35 include manuscript additions.

The manuscript additions are on general charts showing larger maritime areas. Two of the five charts with manuscripts focus on the South China Sea and contain detailed additions to the rocks, shoals, and sandbars in the area. Three of the charts offer a detailed record of the voyages of three ships, which are color coded by route as follows: *Isère* (solid red line), *Voltigeur* (dashed red line), and *Cléopâtre* (blue line).

The *Isère* was a *corvette de charge* in service from 1832 to 1865. On the voyage shown on these charts, the ship sailed from Lorient to Brest and from there to the Atlantic in late February 1839. After a stop at Tenerife, it crossed to Brazil, entered the Rio de la Plate, then re-crossed the Atlantic east to round the Cape of Good Hope. The ship put in at the Île Bourbon, now known as Réunion, then touched at Madagascar before returning around the Cape and north to Brest in late 1839.

The *Voltigeur* was a 20-gun brig in service from 1827 to 1865. It also set out from Brest, but in early 1840. The ship sighted Cape St. Vincent before entering the Strait of Gibraltar, and the ship cruised in the waters between Gibraltar and the Canaries for two months.

The final ship, *Cléopâtre*, made a much longer voyage. The 50-gun frigate set out from Brest in the new year of 1843 and sailed south via the Canaries. After a respite in Rio de Janeiro, the ship sailed east across



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the Atlantic and rounded the Cape of Good Hope, putting in at Île Bourbon. Then, the *Cléopâtre* continued east through the Strait of Malacca to Java, then north to the South China Sea. There, the frigate made several circuits to the Philippines, Macao, and the Lou-Tchou Islands (the Ryukyus) before returning to the Atlantic via the Cape of Good Hope. These voyages were undertaken at the behest of Admiral Cecille, who was in command of the French naval forces in Asian waters, and who also commanded the *Cléopâtre* for at least part of its service shown here.

Cecille is deeply implicated in the atlas. Eight of the charts, which were added at the end of the atlas, were created on his orders and are based on surveys he and his officers made while in the South China Sea and the Philippines. These eight charts focus especially on the island of Basilan in the Philippines and the Lou-Tchou Archipelago, both places where the French, under Cecille, tried to establish colonial claims and trade centers in the early 1840s (see below). These charts are the most lasting results of those efforts and were published soon after the colonization attempts, in 1848 and 1849.

The range of dates from the charts (1802-1855) and the fact that the eight charts resulted from Cecille's command, which included the *Cléopâtre* (published 1848-9) show that this atlas was compiled over time, most likely gathered over the course of a naval career which included service in Asian waters. A trained and careful eye would have been necessary to add the manuscript routes, which include dates, sounding depths, and navigational observations. Someone close to Cecille and his service in Asia, therefore, likely collected and annotated the atlas—perhaps even Cecille himself.

### **Jean-Baptiste Cecille and the French in Southeast Asia**

The inclusion of so many references to Cecille underlines his importance to French hydrography and to the French colonial empire in the nineteenth century, especially in Asia. The French East India Company was formed in 1604, two and four years after its English and Dutch counterparts, respectively. The Europeans were eager to gain access to the lucrative spices of the East Indies, and to the markets of China. In 1611, the first French ships sailed to Asia for trade and the first permanent French trade houses were established by the mid-seventeenth century. By 1663, French missionaries had ensconced themselves, however precariously, in Burma, Siam, and Cambodia, giving the French a stronger presence in mainland Indochina than any other European empire.

Jean-Baptiste Cecille was born in Rouen in 1787. He joined the French Navy as a young man and showed an aptitude for surveying. In 1837, he was given command of an exploratory expedition which was to circumnavigate the world. En route, he also assisted in a survey of New Zealand. By 1843, Cecille was in command of the French squadron in Southeast Asia, where he sometimes sailed in the *Cléopâtre*. Under orders from the French Foreign Minister François Guizot, Cecille was to enact a new Asia strategy aimed at arresting the progress of the British and breaking open trade to Japan. He was also to improve



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hydrographic knowledge of the area—a goal he accomplished, as evidenced by the charts in this atlas.

#### **Lou-Tchou Islands (the Ryukyus)**

The French saw Okinawa, in the Ryukyu archipelago, as a stepping stone to trade with Japan. However, the French officials little understood the rogue status of the Ryukus in their relation to Japanese islands and they underestimated the complexity of the political situation. In March 1844, the French ship *Alcmene* arrived at the capital of the Ryukyus, Naha, and demanded privileged trade with Okinawa. The Okinawans refused, but they did allow a French missionary, Forcade, to stay behind to acquire proficiency in the local language. Between 1844 and 1862 eight priests from the Paris Foreign Missions Society lived on Okinawa, but they made little progress. Meanwhile, the French turned their sights to another island.

#### **Basilan**

Basilan was first introduced to Europeans by the survivors of the Magellan circumnavigation. In 1636, it was colonized by the Spanish. In 1726, the island was officially ceded to the Spanish by the Sulu Sultanate. The Dutch attempted to take the strategic island in 1747, but they were deterred by the local peoples and the Spanish, much as occurred when the French tried in 1844.

In October of that year, the French attempted to take the island of Basilan in the Philippines. Admiral Cecille sent Captain Guerin in the *Sabine* on a quiet reconnaissance mission to the island just southwest of Mindanao. Guerin was discovered and he fought with the local people, who were supported by the Spanish. Despite this setback, Guerin was able to carry out an extensive survey of the island, as reflected in charts in this atlas.

The French attempted to gain access via diplomacy throughout late 1844 and early 1845; they also tried to encourage a nascent independence movement to rise up against the Spanish. These efforts paid off for, on February 20, 1845, the Sultan of Sulu ceded Basilan to the French for 100,000 piastres (500,000 French francs). On June 30, 1845, the French Parliament ratified Basilan's annexation; Cecille was there to witness the vote. Surprisingly, and undoubtedly disappointingly for Cecille, King Louis Philippe overturned the ratification on July 26, 1845.

#### **Return to the Ryukyus**

Disappointed in Basilan, the French focused anew on Okinawa. On March 2, 1846, Captain Guerin and the *Sabine* returned to Naha, where he deposited Leterdu, another priest. He also continued to survey and gather geographic knowledge. Guerin explained to the chief magistrate of Shuri that Guerin was going to rendezvous with Cecille, who was in command of the *Cléopâtre* and the *Victorieuse*. They met up on June



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7 and, the next day, Cecille met with the local magistrate for Hokuzan district on board the *Cléopâtre* in Unten Harbor.

Ten days later, Cecille went ashore to open negotiations; these negotiations proved unsuccessful in yielding a trade treaty. However, the Lord of Satsuma made an indirect agreement with the Shogun, the leader of Japan, to trade with Europeans via Naha. Cecille was unaware of these behind the scenes machinations and his squadron sailed from Unten Harbor for Japan on July 17, 1846. Nothing came of the encounter, but Cecille's men did survey the islands in more detail than any previous European group, as shown on the charts included in this atlas.

In April of 1847, Cecille was in Vietnam, trying to negotiate for the release of two French missionaries. The negotiations failed and Cecille's squadron sunk three Vietnamese vessels. The French continued to try to leverage access to trade in the region, benefiting from Cecille's surveying results, but Cecille himself returned to France in 1858. He became a representative to the Constitutional Assembly in that year. By 1852, Cecille was appointed Senator. He died in 1873.

**Cecille's legacy**

The surveys which Cecille ordered were the most successful aspect of the French attempts to colonize Basilan and Okinawa. Of the eight charts gathered here which include Cecille's name, seven were based on surveys by Guerin in the *Sabine*. The eighth was of Canton and drafted by the officers of the *Victorieuse*. All of these charts, especially those of Basilan and the Lou-Tchou archipelago, continued to be used long after Cecille's death.

This composite atlas captures an important, yet often overlooked, chapter in France's imperial history. Whereas their involvement in Indochina, and especially Vietnam, is well known, their attempts to establish a trade center to rival Hong Kong has been largely forgotten. Additionally, the charts, covering several decades, reveal much about the operations of the French Navy in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

Cecille was an important hydrographer and commander in the French navy. This atlas includes examples of his hydrographic influence and also captures one of his many commands. It was perhaps made by him or someone close to him and is a testament to the complex developments that characterize colonial history in the nineteenth century. It would be a triumphant addition to any collection of nineteenth-century hydrography, French charts, or of Southeast Asia.

**Detailed Condition:**

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