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## [Africa] Tabula IIII. Aphricae. Hae Sunt E Cognitis Totius Orbis . . . (title on verso)

**Stock#:** 73201  
**Map Maker:** Fries  
**Date:** 1525  
**Place:** Strassbourg  
**Color:** Hand Colored  
**Condition:** VG+  
**Size:** 18 x 12 inches  
**Price:** SOLD



### Description:

#### *Rare, Early Map of North Africa, From an Early Edition of Ptolemy's Geographia*

Fine map of Northern Africa, one of the earliest obtainable printed maps of the area, from Lorenz Fries' influential 1525 edition of Ptolemy's *Geographia*.

The present map is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea in the north, and to the south by *Agisymba*, the central African area referred to by Ptolemy as the southern limit of the inhabited world. To the west are the Atlantic Ocean and several islands, including *Canaria*, referring to the Canary Islands. To the east is the Arabian peninsula, the Red Sea (*Mare Rubrum*), the Horn of Africa, and the Indian Ocean (*Sinus Barbaricus*).

The map is populated by numerous place names, both along the coast and in the interior. The vast area of *Libia Interior* (the Sahara) is depicted between the Tropic of Cancer and the Equator, which is situated farther north than in actuality. A diagonal line intersecting the Equator divides the inhabited areas of Africa from the lesser-known southern regions, which are apparently filled with white elephants, rhinoceroses, and tigers, according to a note near the line.

While information about the African coast was available to sixteenth-century mapmakers like Fries thanks to Portuguese exploration, little was known about the actual geography of the continent's interior. Indeed, few Europeans would travel beyond the coastal regions until the mid-nineteenth century. Fries retains Ptolemy's account of the area, sourced from Roman military expeditions in the first and second centuries AD, as well as from the Phoenician geographer Marinus of Tyre and, likely, from traders and merchants. He also includes important geographic hypotheses and fables of the time, like the Mountains of the Moon



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and the kingdom of Prester John.

Fries' *Geographia* was first printed by Johann Grüniger in 1522, but that edition of the work is very rare. In 1525, an improved edition, from which the present map originates, was issued. This edition featured a re-edit of the text by Willibald Pirckheimer, from the notes of Regiomontanus (Johannes Müller von Königsberg). Fries based his work on Martin Waldseemüller's edition of 1513 of the *Geographia Opus Novissima*, printed by Johann Schott, redrawing and re-engraving the maps at a reduced scale. Fries also prepared three new maps for his *Geographia*, of Southeast Asia and the East Indies, China, and the world, but the geography of these derives from Waldseemüller's world map of 1507.

**The Mountains of the Moon**

The present map contains several elements that would appear odd to the modern eye. The Mountains of the Moon (*Mons Lune Agu*), depicted in the southeast, were believed for centuries to be the source of the Nile River. Ptolemy's *Geographia* tells the story Diogenes, a Greek trader and merchant traveling in East Africa around 110 AD. Diogenes supposedly discovered the Mountains of the Moon, whose snowmelt fed two great lakes, which in turn fed the Nile. While this map shows a second century world, the legend was still a viable geographic theory in the sixteenth century.

**Prester John**

The map also depicts the figure of Prester John on his throne, near the mouth of the Nile. The legend of a Christian Kingdom lost among Muslim lands was popular from the twelfth century and continued long into the seventeenth. Prester John was supposedly descended from one of the three magi. Over time, the utopian kingdom of Prester John came to house a bevy of other fantastical objects, including the Fountain of Youth.

The idea for Prester John seems to have stemmed from a mysterious letter sent to the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I. The letter, supposedly written by John, describes his power, faith, and lands. The letter circulated ca. 1165 and survives in nearly 100 medieval manuscript copies. Initially, Europeans thought Prester John's kingdom was in India, and later in Central Asia. Finally, the search shifted to Africa, when Portuguese navigators came upon Christian Ethiopia.

Fries' map shows the ubiquity and strength of the Prester John story in sixteenth-century Europe. The story was a one of the durability of the Christian faith during a time when Christian Europe was often in conflict with Muslims in Barbary and throughout the Ottoman Empire.

**Ptolemy's *Geographia* in Renaissance Europe**



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The translation of Claudius Ptolemy's *Geographia* from Greek into Latin for the first time in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century spurred a wave of renewed interest and updated editions.

Ptolemy's ideas had been absent from western European intellectual history for roughly a thousand years, although Arab scholars interacted with his ideas from the ninth century onward. In 1295, a Greek monk found a copy of Ptolemy in Constantinople; the emperor ordered a copy made and the Greek text began to circulate in eastern Europe. In 1393, a Byzantine diplomat brought a copy of the *Geographia* to Italy, where it was translated into Latin in 1406 and called the *Cosmographia*. The manuscript maps were first recorded in 1415. These manuscripts, of which there are over eighty extant today, are the descendants of Ptolemy's work and a now-lost atlas consisting of a world map and 26 regional maps.

When Ptolemy's work was re-introduced to Western scholarship, it proved radically influential for the understanding and appearance of maps. Ptolemy's use of mathematics and astronomy to depict the world appealed to the intellectual climate of the Renaissance. Ptolemy employs the concept of a graticule, uses latitude and longitude, and orients his maps to the north—concepts we take for granted today. The *Geographia's* text is concerned with three main issues with regard to geography: the size and shape of the earth; map projection, i.e. how to represent the world's curve proportionally on a plane surface; and the corruption of spatial data as it transfers from source to source. The text also contains instructions as to how to map the world on a globe or a plane surface, complete with the only set of geographic coordinates (8000 toponyms, 6400 with coordinates) to survive from the classical world.

**Early printed editions of Ptolemy's *Geographia***

Some of the most important, and the most numerous, early printed maps were in editions of Ptolemy's *Geographia* (*Cosmographia*). From 1475 to 1650, there were more than forty new editions of the *Geographia*, which increasingly featured updates based on current knowledge, including recent voyages of discovery.

The text was first published in 1475 in Venice without the maps. An edition with the maps followed in 1477, printed in Bologna. These maps were another first—they were the first copperplate maps, in which an engraver scores copper, which is then inked and pressed. The Bologna edition included 25 of the original 26 regional maps (map XV was missing), as well as the world map.

A second edition with maps appeared in Rome in 1478. The third edition with maps was printed in Florence in 1482, the first to be printed in a vernacular language, Italian. It included 31 copperplate engraved maps, making it the first to augment the traditional 27 Ptolemaic maps with *tabulae novellae*, or modern maps. The modern maps included maps of Italy, Spain, and France.



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The next edition to include the maps was the 1482 Ulm edition, which was the first atlas to be printed north of the Alps, as well as the first to use woodcut, not copperplate, printing. Copperplate engraving is an intaglio method; it cuts into the surface of the printing plane in order to create an impression when the engraved lines are inked. Woodcut engraving is a relief method; the surfaces to be inked are left standing, while the blank spaces are cut away.

Martin Waldseemüller separated his 1513 edition into two sections—one with the original maps and text, and the second with updates based on current knowledge of the world, including twenty modern maps. Fries' followed this trend in his 1522 and 1525 editions, separating Ptolemy's respected work from new knowledge and updated maps. He also added three more modern maps than Waldseemüller, but based on the other mapmaker's work, for a total of 23.

**Detailed Condition:**