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Africa. To the Committee Members of the British Association, for Discovering the Interior parts of Africa This Map Is with their Permission, most respectfully Inscribed, By their most obedient and humble Servant. A. Arrowsmith . . . 1802.

Stock#: 81156
Map Maker: Arrowsmith
Date: 1802 (1810)
Place: London
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: Good
Size: 69 x 53 inches (including rods)
Price: SOLD



Description:

"...One of the Greatest Maps ever Published." - Ashley Baynton-Williams, Mapforum Magazine

Fourth state of Aaron Arrowsmith's monumental four-sheet map of Africa, one of the most important maps of Africa published in the nineteenth century.

Arrowsmith's *Africa* is widely regarded as a preeminent example of Enlightenment mapmaking, with cartography based on the latest empirical evidence and with little reliance on older cartographic chimeras. Writing in *Mapforum*, Ashley Baynton-Williams writes that Arrowsmith's map is:

...one of the greatest maps ever published. Arrowsmith simply stripped away centuries of accumulated myth, misconception and unsustainable guesswork, and took the mapping of Africa back to the bare bones of substantiated fact, leaving the interior as a blank canvas, a challenge to a new generation of explorers. As a picture, many of his predecessors of a century earlier would not have thought of publishing it, as a statement of intent it raised the standard for geographical accuracy above that practised by the vast majority of his contemporaries.

The detail that is shown on the coasts, around the major river systems, and from Trans-Saharan caravan



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routes, covers only a very small fraction of the interior. The defining feature is open space. In this respect, Arrowsmith has some predecessors among eighteenth-century French and English mappings of Africa; however, his map is strikingly more stark and absolute in its treatment. That being said, some debatable features remain: the massive transcontinental "Mountains of the Moon" still bisect Africa, a holdover of Ptolemaic mapping.

The map can be seen as laying down the gauntlet for British and European explorers and colonists; Arrowsmith is showing them exactly how much about Africa they do not know.

The British Association for Discovering the Interior Parts of Africa

As with many large format maps published in London at beginning of the nineteenth century, this map includes a lengthy dedication to an important group of men, in this case, the British Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa. Commonly known as the African Association, the group was founded on June 9, 1788. The members were dedicated to the exploration of West Africa, hoping to uncover the origin and course of the Niger River. They also wanted to plot the location of the famed city of Timbuktu, which was thought of a fantastical city full of riches. With the formation of this group, the eye of European exploration widened from the oceans to include the interior of the African continent.

The dedication of this map, so spare in its detail, to an organization committed to exploring the interior of the continent, frames the project in an interesting light. The exacting empirical qualities of Arrowsmith's cartography and the launching of a group that began the age of exploration of the interior of Africa says much about the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century British relationship to the continent.

Am I not a Man and a Brother?

The map also include a subtle hint toward Arrowsmith's politics, tucked away in the lower-left corner; indeed, H. Wilson's title cartouche in the lower-left corner of the map deserves an essay of its own. The layers of symbolism say almost as much as the map itself about the British attitude toward Africa in 1802. However, probably the most noteworthy aspect is the figure of a kneeling African man taken from Josiah Wedgwood's famous abolitionist image, "Am I not a Man and a Brother?" Importantly, the African man here is not manacled, as he is in Wedgwood's image, but is free in Africa. He looks up thankfully at the regal lion (representing the British Empire), which holds his protective paw on the title shield reading "AFRICA." This imagery seems impossible to disentangle from a white savior narrative, in which the British Empire has ended the slave trade (not yet officially) and is the protector of Africa.



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Thomas Jefferson and Arrowsmith's Map of Africa

Among the more noteworthy owners of Arrowsmith's map of Africa was Thomas Jefferson, who prominently displayed the map in his home at Monticello. As noted on the Monticello website:

Jefferson's Entrance Hall map collection was dominated by the wall maps of the London mapmaker Aaron Arrowsmith. In Jefferson's day, Arrowsmith's maps were renowned for their clarity and large scale. He was particularly skilled in producing maps from a wide variety of source material, ranging from visitors' accounts of terrain, to sketch maps and triangulations. His map of the United States was compiled largely from Native American maps and information supplied by the Hudson's Bay Company. Arrowsmith began his career as a surveyor and worked with the prominent map and globe maker John Cary. His success led to an appointment as hydrographer to King George IV.

Jefferson made all of his purchases of Arrowsmith maps while serving as president. The first, in 1803, was "A Map of the United States of North America," published in London in 1802. Apparently satisfied with Arrowsmith's work, in 1805 Jefferson ordered maps of Europe, Asia, and Africa "on linen, with rollers & varnished," from a London agent, William Tunnicliff. These three, along with the map of the United States, were probably among the maps that hung in Jefferson's Cabinet at the President's House.

Jefferson received the Arrowsmith's map only a couple of years before overseeing the end of the United State's Atlantic slave trade in 1807. Britain abolished the trade in the same year.

Detailed Condition:

Wall map with original rollers. Minor split at lower left and some loss of blank margin at top left.