



# Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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## Carte Du Golfe De Suez Dressee au Depot des Cartes et Plans de la Marine d'apres les Observations faites en 1787 sur la Fregate la Venus . . . 1798

**Stock#:** 85192  
**Map Maker:** Depot de la Marine / de Rosily-Mesros  
**Date:** 1798  
**Place:** Paris  
**Color:** Uncolored  
**Condition:** VG  
**Size:** 16.25 x 23 inches  
**Price:** SOLD



### Description:

#### *Mapping the Suez at the End of the Eighteenth-Century*

Highly-detailed map of the Suez Gulf, published by the Depot de la Marine in 1798, in the same year that Napoleon Bonaparte led the French campaign into Egypt and Syria.

This chart was based on the observations of skilled hydrographer and French naval officer, François Étienne de Rosily-Mesros, when he was surveying as commander of the *Vénus* in 1787. Seventy years later, the Suez Canal would terminate in this Gulf, connecting the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

The chart outlines the Suez Gulf as it empties into the Red Sea. To the east is the Arabian Peninsula and to the west, Egypt. The shores on both sides are lined with mountains and high ground. The waters of the



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gulf are peppered with sounding depths, navigational obstructions, and anchorages.

#### **Napoleon in Egypt**

This chart was published in 1798, the same year that Napoleon led an army of soldiers and savants into Egypt and Syria. The Dépôt de la Marine likely released the chart in anticipation of or in conjunction with the expedition, although the surveying had occurred a decade earlier.

During the wars that followed the outbreak of the French Revolution, France sought to disrupt British naval dominance and their trade routes to India. Egypt, strategically located with ports on the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, became a strategic priority.

Bonaparte, fresh off his successful campaigns in Italy, was given command of the offensive against the Mamluks, who controlled the area as part of the Ottoman Empire. Along with squadrons of soldiers, 35,000 in all, Napoleon also brought with him a squadron of scholars, 160 in number. Called the Commission of the Sciences and Arts in Egypt, their work would kick up Egyptomania across Europe.

The French fleet landed in July and quickly took Alexandria. They then won the Battle of the Pyramids (Battle of Embabeh). However, these early victories proved to be the military highlight of the expedition. The French lacked the manpower to supply and hold a sufficient number of garrisons, forcing them to stay in and near Cairo and the Nile Delta. British ships decimated the French fleet in the Battle of the Nile in early August. Soon, local revolts and disease further stretched the French army. Napoleon left in 1799. His successors found no way forward and ultimately surrendered in Alexandria in September 1801.

While the martial goals of the campaign were not achieved, the scholarly effort was much more successful. The savants set up the Institute of Egypt in August 1798, which was to focus on mathematics, literature and fine arts, natural history and physics, and political economics (the Institute burned in 2011). The academics fanned out across the territory, gathering objects and making sketches.

One of them, Dominique-Vivant Denon, specialized in pharaonic monuments. He returned to France with Napoleon and began to write of his adventures and findings. In 1802, Denon published *Travels in Lower and Upper Egypt*, with was one of the most richly illustrated books to that time. The book ignited French popular interest in Egypt and its history, as well as rehabilitated Napoleon's reputation after the failed campaign.

Napoleon might have left in 1799, but he sent even more academics into the region in search of antiquities. The return of many of these objects is now being debated and negotiated. When the French



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surrendered in 1801, these scholars were left stranded and facing British scrutiny. The British seized many objects, including the famous Rosetta Stone. They did eventually make it back to France with their notes, however, and they collectively embarked on an extraordinary project to share their work.

Napoleon ordered the commission to publish their findings in a massive book, the *Description of Egypt*. By 1809, 36 people were writing the text, with up to one hundred engravers creating illustrations, maps, and plans. There would eventually be 900 copper plates with 3,000 figures. The first volume appeared in that year, followed by 21 more: nine books of text and 13 of plates. The map volume was the last to be published, in 1828, as some of them had been considered sensitive information while the war raged. Today, at least twenty of the monuments illustrated in the *Description* are the best extant record of now-lost structures.

**Detailed Condition:**