



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

Erklerung des newen Instruments über den Mon. [Explanation of the new instrument for the moon]

Stock#: 86365
Map Maker: Munster / Holbein
Date: 1529
Place: Worms
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 6 x 7.5 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

First Edition of Münster's Second Cosmographical-Astronomical Work

Münster's Guide to Lunar Motion

With a Fantastic Woodcut, Probably After Hans Holbein the Younger

An extremely rare book, one of Sebastian Münster's earliest astronomical publications. The work is a description of Münster's elaborate New Instrument (*Instrumentum Novum*), a device to measure and calculate astronomical phenomena relating to the moon. The present book is, in some ways, a companion to Münster's 1528 "Instrument of the Sun" (*Erklerung des newen Instruments der Sonnen*).

The present compact treatise, illustrated with several detailed woodcuts, is a kind of instruction manual on how to use Münster's New Instrument. The book advises on how to calculate astronomical information, including the waxing and waning of the moon, lunar eclipses, lunar motion, the use of the pole star, and various applications of astrological information, including in medicine and agriculture.

The fine detailed title page woodcut shows a Münster surrogate leaning off the parapet of a castle-like building wielding an astrolabe or similar device. The facade of the building sports a sundial. A man in the lower right foreground looks toward the person on the building, while a third person crouches to the ground while operating a compass. Three separate moon phase representations - including a lunar eclipse - hover over the evocative scene.

Sebastian Münster, renowned for his *Cosmographia Universalis*, first published in 1544, studied the movement of the planets, translated Ptolemy's *Geographia* into Latin and invented cosmological measuring



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instruments, some of which he details in the present book. Specifically, the present book includes a description of the instrument "to determine the course of the moon, the phases of the moon, the age of the moon and the width of the crescent moon, to calculate in advance the lunar eclipses that will occur, as well as, during the night, to determine the time using the moonlight or the position of two circumpolar stars" - Hantzsch, page 169.

Hans Holbein and the Authorship of the Title Page Illustration

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this work is its exceptionally well-composed and well-executed title page illustration. Indeed, the quality of that woodcut is so far beyond what one normally encounters in these kinds of books that it demands an attribution. The most likely suspect is Hans Holbein the Younger, whose work is frequently associated with Sebastian Munster.

The timing of this publication and comparisons with comparable Holbein-attributed works from Munster's *oeuvre* strongly support this contention.

In 1528, Holbein left England and returned to Basle (a short trip down the Rhine from Worms). Derek Wilson (*Hans Holbein: Portrait of an Unknown Man*, page 165) says of this time:

Holbein went back to the practice of taking on whatever commissions were available, a step that must have been galling to someone whose skills were so much in demand in England. If the pickings were meagre he could at least draw on the capital brought back from London.... He called on old friends in the printshops and obtained orders for title-pages and illustrations. The finest designs made at this time were those for the publisher Heinrich Petri and the author Sebastian Münster....[who] must have heard from Erasmus, Petri and, probably, from Kratzer in England that Holbein was without peer as a draughtsman of great precision and was delighted to have him on hand. Holbein produced a series of magnificent drawings which appeared in Münster's various publications over the ensuing years.

Among these commissions was a design for [the title page of Munster's 1534 *Canones*...](#), as well as for a [1534 Astronomical Chart of the Sun and the Moon](#), which was apparently intended for inclusion in the *Canones*... The visual relationship between these works is unmistakable. We also contend that Veit Rudolph Specklin (German, died in 1550) is a reasonable attribution for the woodcutter for the present book.

It might be the case that the rarity of the present work stood in the way of its previous attribution to Holbein.



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Rarity

This book is very rare in the market, the present example is the only copy recorded to have sold in the last two decades. We note only six copies in institutional confines per Worldcat, of which only a single example is in an American library, that at Harvard University.

Detailed Condition:

Small quarto. Modern antique (mottled) calf. Endpapers renewed. Large woodcut vignette on title page. Several woodcut diagrams in the text. Woodcut printer's device on colophon. Fore-edge margins are closely trimmed, but printed marginalia unscathed. Scattered negligible light soiling. Very early ink juvenilia on verso of Diii (added beard and mustache to the moon's faces). A very nice copy indeed, the leaves crisp. 24 leaves. Signatures: A-F⁴. Complete.