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Aegyptus Antiqua

Stock#: 49496
Map Maker: Ortelius
Date: 1584
Place: Antwerp
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG+
Size: 31 x 20 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Ortelius' Notable and Detailed Two-Sheet Map of Ancient Egypt

Striking example of Ortelius' two sheet map of the Nile River Valley, the most important river in the world to sixteenth century Europeans. Its biblical significance and ancient sites made Egypt of especial interest to geographers and savants.

Ortelius shows the river and its environs in impressive detail, marking settlements and the sites of events and burials. The two sheets show the track of the river from Ethiopia in the south and follows it as it



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meanders north. Then the river splits into the fertile Nile River Delta. An inset to the left focuses on Alexandria, home of Ptolemy. Below the inset is an extensive list of place names.

The map was based on an earlier two-sheet Ortelius map of the region, part of Ortelius' lifelong interest in maps of the Ancient World. In various places on the map, Ortelius cites his sources including Diodor, Herodotus, Strabo, and Plinius.

At top is a decorative title cartouche. The strap work on this cartouche and on the inset and list of place names to the left are typical of Ortelius' style. There is also a strip scale next to the place names. In the Mediterranean Sea, two ships follow the winds. The border, which is an Egyptian design, is interrupted at times by extensions of the map, a charming and unusual feature for an Ortelius map.

In the lower left corner are two pyramids with a seal in front of them. The monument behind them includes a similar seal. Two palm trees stand sentinel behind the vignette. The latin text on the vignette translates to, "A land that of itself is rich enough, needs no foreign aid, love's help it scorns, relying as it does on the bounty of the Nile."

The cartography of Central Africa and the source of the Nile

Here, Ortelius is focused on the geography of the upper Nile. However, in his larger map of the African continent, he showed the source of the Nile as well. Based on a 1563 map of Africa by Giacomo Gastaldi, Ortelius' Nile geography is notable for its divergence from previous models and for its importance as a model for future mapmakers.

Typically, mapmakers thought the Nile River rose from twin lakes south of the equator, which were near the Mountains of the Moon. Streams from the mountains fed the lakes. Ptolemy describes such a lakes-and-mountains layout in his works, although the precise identification of the Mountains of the Moon may have been a fourth century addition to his text.

Most sixteenth century mapmakers, including Martin Waldseemuller, chose to follow the Ptolemaic model. Gastaldi, most likely thanks to sources he read via the travel editor Ramusio, chose to abandon the Mountains of the Moon entirely. Instead, he drew a massive central lake from which flows the Nile, Zaire (Congo), Cuama (Zambezi), and Spirito Sancto (Limpopo) Rivers. To the east is another, smaller lake at roughly the same latitude, which also feeds part of the Nile.

Ortelius, on his own map of the African continent, also included a large central lake, called Cafates. He rejected the name of Zaire-Zembere used by Gastaldi. To the east and just slightly north he put another, smaller lake. Rivers from the north of both lakes wend northward and join to form the Nile. This map



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shows a smaller scale depiction of the river after the two streams have joined. Although focused on ancient geography, this map also alludes to this larger geographic debate about this most famous of African rivers. It also underlines the importance of the Nile and explains the intense interest in learning more about its history and geography.

Theatrum Orbis Terrarum and the states of the "Aegyptus Antiqua"

In 1570, Ortelius published the first modern atlas; that is, a set of uniform maps with supporting text gathered in book form. Previously, there were other bound map collections, specifically, the Italian Lafreri atlases, but these were sets of maps—not necessarily uniform—selected and bound together on demand.

Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Ortelius' atlas, outperformed competing atlases from other cartographic luminaries like the Mercator family. Between 1570 and 1612, 31 editions of the atlas were published in seven languages. At the time of its publication, it was the most expensive book ever produced.

This map first appeared in 1584 and was prepared by Ortelius himself. It was intended as part of the *Parergon*, or the supplement of the atlas containing ancient maps. This two-sheet map first appeared in two 1584 Latin editions of the atlas, as well as a 1592 Latin edition. It also ran in a 1584 Greek edition, and 1585 and 1587 French editions. It was later reduced to a one-sheet version in 1595.

By comparison with the later, one-sheet version, which had roughly 3475 copies printed, this two-sheet version only ran in 1775 copies. This makes the first, two-sheet example considerably rarer than the one-sheet version. It would make a fine addition to any collection focused on Egypt and/or the Nile.

Detailed Condition:

Two sheets, joined.