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**(Death of Cook - Proof Before Letters) [To the Right Honourable the Lords
Commissioners for executing the Office of Lord High Admiral of Great Britain &c. This
Plate representing The Death of Captain Cook is humbly inscribed . . . John Webber]**

Stock#: 100221
Map Maker: Bartolozzi / Byrne
Date: 1784 circa
Place: London
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG
Size: 23 x 18.5 inches
Price: \$ 8,500.00



Description:

The First Engraved View of the Death of Captain James Cook in Hawaii.

A handsome proof-before-letters state of the original large-format separately issued engraved view depicting Cook's death at the hands of the native Hawaiians, based upon a drawing by John Webber. Copies of this engraving were not originally bound into the official account of Cook's Third Voyage and were only available by separate purchase, making the image much rarer than the official account of Cook's final voyage.

Cook's death in Hawaii is one of the iconic images of the 18th Century. Reproduced on numerous occasions, this is the original engraving from which most depictions of his death are taken. James Cook was killed in Hawaii on February 14, 1779. He and his men had spent the two months on the Big Island and been well received. They departed in early February 1779 but returned due to storms and the need for ship repairs. The second reception turned hostile, and tensions between the sailors and the natives increased. When Cook went ashore to investigate, a scuffle occurred and Cook was killed.

Conflicting accounts regarding Cook's death circulated, as there was some confusion over whether Cook was facing the Hawaiians and whether he had ordered his men to shoot at the islanders. Lieutenant James King, who was on the voyage but did not witness the incident, reported that "it was remarked that while he faced the natives, none of them had offered him any violence, but that having turned about, to give his orders to the boats, he was stabbed in the back, and fell with his face into the water."



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In Bartolozzi and Byrnes' engraving, Cook is situated slightly to the right of center and stands out as he is represented in lighter tones than the other sailors and natives. He faces his men and, while armed with a rifle, has his back to the islanders. The Hawaiian directly behind Cook is armed and is about to attack him. The figures were engraved by Bartolozzi and the landscape by Byrne, after a drawing by the official artist of Cook's third voyage, John Webber. It was published in London by Webber and Byrne in 1784.

States

Joppien & Smith, 3.305A, notes:

The Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, own another impression which is dated 1 January 1783. (Schoenherr 1977, 30), and so does the Mitchell Library, dated 1 January, 1782 (Cook-Bibliography 1970, no. [2610 2478](#)). Other versions dated 1 July 1785 and 4 January 1787 also exist.

Whether this means the print was published as early as January 1, 1782, seems unlikely. This frequent re-dating of prints was common among the London publishers at this time.

A proof state at the British Museum has an inscription scratched in the plate, this is not present in this example.

Rarity

Because the engraving was issued separately and was often framed by an earlier owner, it frequently appears with some damage or restoration.

Detailed Condition:

Engraving on laid paper watermarked "FIN DE / TAMIZIER / AUVERGENE". Wide margins with minor soiling. Invisibly closed tear at lower right. Very few small edge tears expertly closed.