



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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Asie

Stock#: 38244
Map Maker: Thevet
Date: 1575
Place: Paris
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG+
Size: 18 x 14 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

A rare and exquisitely designed 16th Century map of Asia, by the fantastically entertaining cosmographer André de Thevet.

This important and beautifully composed woodcut map embraces all of Asia during the great early period of European exploration in South and East Asia. The depiction of these regions is ultimately based on Portuguese sources, who since Vasco da Gama's first voyage to India in 1498, had a virtual monopoly on the maritime knowledge of the Indian Ocean and East Asia. True to Abraham Ortelius's *Asiae Nova Descriptio* (1570), Japan appears as a strange turtle-shaped island and the coasts of China slope diagonally upward in an unsophisticated fashion. However unlike Ortelius, Thevet completely omits the appearance of New Guinea, yet includes a very early depiction of the mythical Strait of Anian, running between Asia and North America, as first depicted by Giacomo Gastaldi in 1562.

Similar to Ortelius's *Indiae Orientalis Insularumque Adiacentium Typus* (1570), India and the Arabian Peninsula are both very well formed, in a fashion familiar to the modern eye. In advance of the Dutch maps which began to appear towards the end of the 16th century, the Philippines and the Indonesian Archipelago is a bit muddled, although Sumatra (incorrectly called 'Taprobana', an archaic name for Ceylon), Borneo and excessively-wide Java are clearly discernable. Indochina is quite well shaped and the Peninsula of Malaya is well placed, yet is wider than its true form. The depiction of Russia and the Ukraine is fairly advanced, showing knowledge of the reports of Anthony Jenkinson.

The style of the printing is unique and arresting, as the seas are alive with waves, numerous ships and sea monsters. The work is artistically one of the finest maps prepared by xylographic printing techniques,



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done not long before the medium was fully supplanted by copper engraving.

The present map is one of a series of the four established continents to appear in Thevet's grand work, *La Cosmographie universelle d'Andre Thevet, cosmographe du roy: illustree de diverses figures des choses plus remarquables veues par l'auteur, & incogneues de noz anciens & modernes* (Paris: Pierre L'Huilier, 1575). The title of the book translates as: 'The Universal Cosmography of Andre Thevet, cosmographer to the king, illustrated with the most remarkable views by the author, not already described by either ancient or modern observers'.

Thevet's cosmography is the most substantial French account of the world published during the 16th Century. The work consisted of two volumes, the first of which includes the present map and describes Africa and Asia, while the second volume covers Europe and the Americas. While some of Thevet's descriptions were somewhat fanciful, based on florid rumors and legends, his work nevertheless supplies novel and accurate information on many aspects of the geography of Asia and the Americas and the cultures of the indigenous peoples.

André de Thevet (1516-90) was a French cosmographer and historian and one of the most fascinating characters of his age. He travelled widely but was also a voracious collector of sources on geography, anthropology, economics, religion and natural sciences from across the globe.

Thevet was ordained as a Franciscan priest but showed little interest in observing religious orthodoxy. He came to be closely associated with Humanists who were not necessarily favored by the Roman Catholic Church and visited Italy, where he came into contact with some of the leading minds in Rome and Florence.

In 1549, thanks to the support of John, Cardinal of Lorraine (1498-1550), he embarked on a lengthy odyssey to Asia Minor, Greece, the Levant and Egypt. He accompanied the French ambassador Gabriel de Luetz to Istanbul. Upon his return to France in 1554, he published an account of this travels, *Cosmographie de Levant* (Paris, 1554).

In 1555, Thevet joined Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon's expedition to Brazil, to found a colony at the present site of Rio de Janeiro. Thevet was the chaplain and vice-admiral of what was essentially a Huguenot (French Protestant) mission, a curious role for someone who was technically a Catholic priest. To make a long story short, the colonial scheme proved unsuccessful and Thevet returned to France. His resulting book, *Les Singularitez de la France Antarctique* (1557), proved to be an important early source on South America, especially with respect to its medicinal plants and fauna.

He was soon appointed as Cosmographer Royal to Henri II and chaplain to Queen Catherine de' Medici (an



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odd choice given the queen's fanatical religiosity). In 1562, he was also made the curator of the royal 'wunderkammer', the Cabinet des Singularitez, said be one of the finest collections of natural and ancient curiosities in the world. His larger that life experiences culminated in the publication of *La Cosmographie universelle* (1575).

Thevet's map of Asia, due to its artistic virtuosity and its intriguing details, is a cornerstone of any fine collection of maps of the continent. It is also rare, as individual examples of the map are seldom available on the market.

Detailed Condition:

Narrow margins.