



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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Chart of the Sources of the Mobile and of the River Yazoo Including a part of the Course of the Mississippi From the River Margot to the Natches.

Stock#: 40729ct
Map Maker: Collot
Date: 1826
Place: Paris
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 24 x 16 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

A Suppressed Espionage Map of the Mobile & Yazoo Rivers -- The Earliest Printed Map Focusing on Mississippi & Alabama

Fine example of this rare and highly important map of a portion of Mississippi, Mobile and Yazoo Rivers, extending from just south of Memphis, Tennessee to just north of Mobile Bay, from the explorations of General Georges Collot.

Collot's map of the Sources of the Mobile and Yazoo Rivers was compiled from his observations during his clandestine reconnaissance of the West on behalf of the French Government in 1796. The suppression of Collot's map following France's sale of the Louisiana Territory to the United States in 1803, provides a fascinating historical footnote and parallel to a work which was suppressed by the US Government at nearly the same time, Nicholas King's *Map of the Red River in Louisiana from the Spanish Camp Where the Exploring Party of the U.S. was met by the Spanish Troops to where it enters the Mississippi*.

Rumsey describes the map as "A wonderful map and one of the first maps to show specifically the area of Mississippi and Alabama." It is in fact the first large-scale depiction of the Deep South and an extraordinary record of the region shortly before the beginning of American settlement. The map includes virtually all of the present State of Mississippi and all of Alabama north and west of the Alabama and Coosa rivers.

Overview of Collot's Spy Mission, Report & Maps

Acting under instructions from Citizen Adet, French Minister to the United States, General George Henri



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Victor Collot undertook a secret reconnaissance in 1796 of what was then the western American frontier. Collot traveled from Pittsburgh down the Ohio to the Mississippi, up the Mississippi to the Missouri and Illinois Rivers, and then back down the Mississippi to New Orleans. During his journey, he constructed a large number of exceptionally fine manuscript maps and views of the region that he traversed. Many of these were groundbreaking, containing never before recorded information about a wilderness that was just beginning to undergo settlement.

Collot's maps were engraved in Paris in 1804, but publication was suppressed due to Napoleon's sale of Louisiana to the United States the previous year. The sale ended any possibility that the region could be acquired by France. As a result, the work did not come to market until 1826, when they were issued in a limited number as *Voyage dans l'Amerique Septentrionale*.

A nineteenth-century bookseller called this work "one of the most famous, most important, and rarest of all books of Mid-Western Explorations." Eberstadt pronounced it "extraordianrily rare." Its rarity is due to the supposed deliberate destruction of all but three hundred French and one hundred English copies by the publisher, who had purchased the edition from Collot's estate, hoping to increase its value.

Collot's Map of The Mobile & Yazoo Rivers

This map is without doubt one of the most interesting of all the Collot maps. With the exception of the Pearl, the river system is well-understood, if a bit distorted. Very little settlement has taken place, except for the Spanish establishments at Natchez and Nogales (Vicksburg) on the east bank of the Mississippi, and northwest Alabama is labelled "Country Quite Uninhabited." There are a few scattered establishments in northwest Mississippi, along the upper Tombigbee (Gollaters, Johnson, and Colbert), as well as several Native American villages ("Great Village of the Chickasaws," "Half-Breed Settlement," etc.). An old French Settlement" is identified on the south bank of the Tennessee near the present town of Florence, Alabama.

Established by the French in 1716, Natchez was one of the most important settlements in the lower Mississippi Valley. The town had been occupied by the Spanish in 1763, who were still in control when Collot visited in 1796. The town and nearby Fort Rosalie are shown in some detail. Fort Nogales, founded by the Spanish in 1791, was known as "the Gibraltar of Louisiana." It was located approximately one mile north of the present city of Vicksburg, at a spot still known as Fort Hill. The fort was evacuated in 1798, when the Spanish turned over the east bank of the river to the United States.

Historical Context of the Map & Collot's Reconnaissance

In 1763, the territory west of the Mississippi River was ceded to Spain by France, while the lands east of



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the river were ceded to Britain. In 1783, the lands east of the Mississippi formally became territory of the United States, although American possession of the region was tenuous at best. The mainly Francophone inhabitants of the Mississippi Valley had little affinity for Anglo-American rule, and their frontier lifestyle made them virtually impossible to control.

It was in this context that the government of post-Revolutionary France, the 'Directoire', schemed to reacquire France's lost American territories. The Directoire had an acrimonious relationship with both America and Spain, and the possibility of supporting an insurrection by the region's Francophone inhabitants was considered by many to be a viable means for France to regain Louisiana and the Illinois Country.

In 1796, the Directoire, acting through French ambassador Pierre August Adet, charged General George Henri Victor Collot (1750-1805) with undertaking a reconnaissance mission to the Mississippi frontier, in order to assess whether the region could be retaken by France. Collot seemed like the perfect man for such an assignment. A former governor of Guadeloupe, he was an accomplished veteran of colonial service and an extraordinarily gifted mapmaker. Unfortunately, Collot was not as secretive about the purpose of his mission as Adet, and even before he commenced his expedition in March 1796, the American Government knew his intentions and appropriated \$500 to retain agents to shadow Collot.

While Collot's intellectual achievements were impressive, his mission was a political disaster. Collot was arrested at Fort Massac on the Ohio River by the American officer Zebulon Pike (himself soon to become a legendary explorer). Pike told Collot that "you have been indefatigable in surveying the Ohio, by taking the courses, distances, heights, etc., as well as reconnoitering the adjacent area for which you exhibit no authority". While he was well aware that Collot was a French agent-provocateur, the officious Pike set him free, as he could not find any legal means of detaining him. Collot was, however, later shadowed by Spanish agents and arrested and deported as soon as he arrived in New Orleans. Fortunately, the Spanish governor allowed Collot to retain his maps and papers.

The Suppression of Collot's Report & Maps

Following his return to France, Collot set out to prepare his report and maps from notes and sketches taken during his journey. In 1800, Napoleon acquired Louisiana from Spain, Collot, and Adet were named two of the commissioners of the new French territory. However, before they could cross the Atlantic to take up their assignments, Napoleon had a change of heart and decided to sell Louisiana to the United States.

Napoleon Bonaparte's decision to sell Louisiana to America brought a practical end to Collot's work on



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behalf of the French Government. As a result, the impetus to publish Collot's work disappeared and, to the contrary, it became expedient to suppress his reconnaissance, rather than publish its results and overtly admit to the Americans the full scope and extent of Collot's espionage work during his visit.

Ironically, the suppression of Collot's maps has a simultaneous parallel during Thomas Jefferson's administration, when 4 expeditions were sent out by Jefferson to explore the Louisiana Purchase and the Transmississippi West (Lewis & Clark, Zebulon Pike, Dunbar-Hunter and Freeman-Custis expeditions). In April 1806, Thomas Freeman, surveyor, and Dr. Peter Custis, naturalist, undertook an expedition at the request of Thomas Jefferson's administration through parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Oklahoma. They were accompanied by a military escort under the command of Capt. Richard Sparks. At the same time that Zebulon Pike was exploring westward into the Louisiana Territory, Freeman and Custis traveled along the Red River to a site in present-day Texas in the vicinity of the old Caddo villages, where they were stopped by a force of Spanish cavalry protecting the Spanish claims to an ill-defined boundary of the Louisiana Purchase. After a brief skirmish, Freeman and Custis withdrew.

While a report of the 1806 Freeman-Custis expedition was published and a map prepared by Nicholas King, the political sensitivity surrounding the expedition was such that the report of this southern expedition into Texas was kept secret, with only a few copies printed. Nicholas King's map of the expedition, which provided physical proof of the US Government's encroachments into Spanish Texas, was suppressed completely, with no known examples of the map surviving until an example was discovered in about 1877 in the Custis papers and a second example was discovered in the past decade, which had been owned by another early American explorer, Washington Hood (1808-1840).

All of Collot's maps are rare on the market, this being only the second example we have offered for sale in over 20 years.

Detailed Condition:

Minor soiling. Flattened and archivally backed.