



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

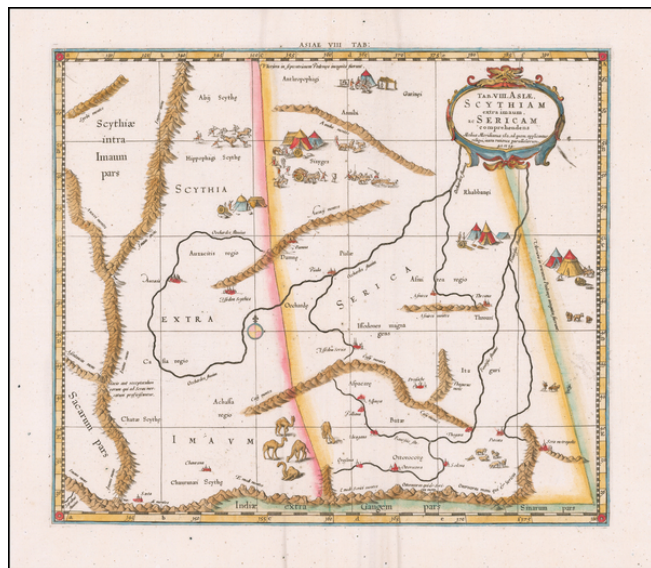
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(Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Western China) Tab. XIII. Asiae Scythiam Extra Imaum ac Sericam

Stock#: 58925
Map Maker: Mercator
Date: 1698 circa
Place: Duisburg
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG
Size: 16 x 13.5 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Fine Ptolemaic Map of Central Asia from Mercator's Geographia

Finely engraved map of Central Asia east of the Caspian Sea, encompassing parts of present-day Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and western China. The map is from Mercator's highly regarded version of Ptolemy's *Geographia*.

The present map focuses on the regions of Scythia and Serica, and is bounded by the Himalayas to the south. To ancient Greek and Roman geographers in the time of Ptolemy, Scythia and Serica represented the northern and eastern limits of the known world. In fact, notes at the top and right sides of the map indicate that lands to the north and east of those depicted are unknown. The two regions are separated by a dotted line running vertically through the map.

To the west is the land of the Scythians, a nomadic people speaking an Iranian language who were active from about the ninth century BC to the second century AD. The region corresponds to parts of present-day Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Scythia features the *Imaum* mountains, corresponding to the Pamir, extending north from the Himalayas before splitting into two separate ranges. The *Auzacii* and *Casii* mountain ranges straddling Scythia and Serica serve as two sources for the *Oechardes* River, which runs northeast along the map.



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To the east is Serica, “the land of silk,” named for the *Seres*, or silk people. As its name suggests, Serica could be reached overland via the Silk Road. While Serica is often thought to be synonymous with China, Ptolemy in fact differentiated between Serica and Sinae (which is indicated in the southeast corner of the map with the area *Sinarum pars*). In the present map, Serica is depicted as corresponding to present-day western or northwestern China, encompassing the Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang.

Serica features several mountain ranges, including the *Annibi* and *Auzacii* to the north, corresponding to the Altai. The *Casii*, to the south, may correspond to mountains in the Gobi Desert, and serve as a source, along with the Himalayas, for the *Bautisus* river running vertically along the eastern border. The *Bautisus* corresponds to the Yellow, or Huang He River, in China.

The present map also features fascinating illustrative content. The map’s two major rivers, the *Oechardes* and *Bautisus*, both end in the north as they reach the title cartouche, which is bordered by an ornamented frame. Throughout the map, illustrated vignettes depict scenes from the lives of the region’s inhabitants. Several vignettes depict nomadic peoples’ daily activities, such as herding or cooking, near their clusters of tents. One scene in the north of Scythia depicts a battle, with figures holding bows and spears. A large vignette in the south of the map at the border of Scythia and Serica depicts a group of one-humped camels. These illustrations add to the map’s depiction of the world in antiquity.

Mercator’s Geographia

The present map was published in Gerard Mercator’s version of Ptolemy’s *Geographia*, first published in 1578, with editions still issued as late as 1730. While perhaps best known for his world atlas, published in various editions beginning in 1595 for nearly a century, Mercator’s *Geographia* is highly respected for the depth of research and fine engraving represented in its maps.

By the early sixteenth century, mapmakers such as Martin Waldseemüller and Lorenz Fries, wishing to reconcile Ptolemy’s worldview with updated geographic information, had issued versions of the *Geographia* divided in two sections—one with the classic Ptolemaic maps and texts, and a second depicting the modern world. In opposition to this trend, Mercator’s twenty-seven newly engraved maps for the *Geographia* contained no updated information.

In order to avoid misinterpretations of Ptolemy’s work by earlier editors, Mercator desired for his *Geographia* to accurately portray Ptolemy’s second-century view of the world. He envisioned this representation of the classical world serving as a companion to his forthcoming atlas of the modern world. To achieve this, he spent thirteen years researching, drawing, and engraving the maps he included. The quality he achieved in his engravings was such that the original printing plates were still in use at the time



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of the last edition of his *Geographia* in 1730.

Ptolemy's Geographia in Renaissance Europe

The translation of Claudius Ptolemy's *Geographia* from Greek into Latin for the first time in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries spurred a wave of renewed interest and updated editions of his work. Ptolemy's ideas had been absent from western European intellectual history for roughly a thousand years, although Arab scholars interacted with his ideas from the ninth century onward.

In 1295, a Greek monk found a manuscript of Ptolemy in Constantinople; the emperor ordered a copy made and the Greek text began to circulate in eastern Europe. In 1393, a Byzantine diplomat brought a copy of the *Geographia* to Italy, where it was translated into Latin by 1406 and called the *Cosmographia*. The manuscript maps were first recorded in 1415. These manuscripts, of which there are over eighty extant today, are the descendants of Ptolemy's work and a now-lost atlas consisting of a world map and 26 regional maps.

When Ptolemy's work was re-introduced to Western scholarship, it proved radically influential for the understanding and appearance of maps. Ptolemy's use of mathematics and astronomy to depict the world appealed to the intellectual climate of the Renaissance. Ptolemy employs the concept of a graticule, uses latitude and longitude, and orients his maps to the north—concepts we take for granted today.

The *Geographia*'s text is concerned with three main issues with regard to geography: the size and shape of the earth; map projection, i.e. how to represent the world's curve proportionally on a plane surface; and the corruption of spatial data as it transfers from source to source. The text also contains instructions as to how to map the world on a globe or a plane surface, complete with the only set of geographic coordinates (8000 toponyms, 6400 with coordinates) to survive from the classical world.

Detailed Condition: