



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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Geographia Universalis, Vetus et Nova, Complectens Claudii Ptolemaei Alexandrini Enarrationis Libros VIII.

Stock#: 86722
Map Maker: Munster
Date: 1540
Place: Basel
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG+
Size: 8 x 12.25 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

The Wagenseil Münster—A True First Edition of Münster's Geographia, One of the Most Important Cartographic Works of the Sixteenth Century

A stunning example, in full original hand-color, of one of the most important and rarest atlases of the sixteenth century: a true first edition of Sebastian Münster's *Geographia* printed in Basel in 1540.

Münster's *Geographia* deserves many plaudits. First, it established the convention that a world atlas should include world and continental maps. To that end, it was the first atlas to include specific maps of the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia. The *Geographia* was the first printed work to render latitude and longitude in their now-standard degree-minute-second form. It was also the book that ushered in a series of "modern"-style world atlases, culminating in Abraham Ortelius' seminal *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570).

The Sources of Münster's *Geographia*

First compiled by Greek polymath Claudius Ptolemaeus in the second century AD, the original *Geographia* was a gazetteer of the geographical and cartographical knowledge of the Roman Empire. It was almost entirely erased from European intellectual thought in the Medieval period. Thankfully, however, it was kept in manuscript form, by Arab scholars. In the thirteenth century it was copied into Greek by the Byzantine monk Maximus Planudes and thus reintroduced to the West.

Münster's text originates in the Latin translation of Ptolemy by Willibald Pirckheimer, who in turn relied on the notes of Johannes Regiomontanus. Pirckheimer's translation was first printed in the 1525 edition of



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Ptolemy by Lorenz Fries. The text for the Fries Ptolemy was substantially corrected by Michael Villanovanus (Servetus) in 1535, and it is that corrected edition from which Münster took much of his text.

Münster's 1540 rendition of Ptolemy's *Geography* continues the tradition of map-illustrated printed Ptolemy atlases that began in Bologna in 1477. In the sixteenth century, that tradition was advanced by the 1507-08 Rome Ptolemy and the woodcut-illustrated atlases of Bernardus Sylvanus (1511), Martin Waldseemüller (1513 and 1520), and the aforementioned Lorenz Fries (1522, 1525, 1535, and 1541), all of whom augmented the ancient cartography of Ptolemy with modern maps. Münster continued this practice and extended it further, publishing for the first time a set of continental maps, including a specific map of the Americas—the first such printed map.

The woodcut borders on the verso text on some of the maps have been attributed to Hans Holbein, while two are signed with Adam Petri's monogram.

The influential legacy of Münster's *Geographia*

Writing in *Imago Mundi* in 1962, Harold L. Ruland had the following to say of Münster:

When the name Sebastian Münster (1489-1552) is mentioned in cartographical writings, it is frequently connected with some superlative, such as:

- 1. The first to introduce a separate map for each of the four then known continents, Europe, Asia, Africa, America,*
- 2. The first separately printed map of England,*
- 3. The earliest map of Africa available,*
- 4. The quaintest map of America of the 16th Century,*
- 5. The oldest woodcut obtainable of Scandinavia,*
- 6. The first to quote his authorities for the "modern" maps,*
- 7. The first cartographer to copy the Carta Marina of Olaus Magnus,*
- 8. Münster, Mercator, and Ortelius, three of the greatest cartographers of a great age*

Leaving aside the redundancy and subjectivity of some of Ruland's statements, the broad thrust is true, and even incomplete.

Münster's 1540 *Geographia* also contains the first appearance of a fundamental cartographical convention in print; namely, the use of minutes and seconds to denote fractional degrees of latitude and longitude. Nordenskiöld (Facsimile Atlas, pg. 24) provides the following commentary on that issue:



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*In his introduction Münster further declares that he changed the old Ptolemaic manner of denoting geographical latitude and longitude, so far as to replace the fractions of degrees by minutes and seconds; as for instance $40^{\circ}\frac{1}{2}$ or $38^{\circ}\frac{1}{2}\frac{1}{3}$, by $40^{\circ} 30'$ and $38^{\circ} 50'$. This very useful reform had already been introduced for astronomical data in manuscripts of the *Almagest*; but so far as I know, it is first employed for the indication of geographical latitudes longitudes in the text to the map of Scandinavia of 1427 by Claudius Clavus.*

Interestingly, Münster did not include latitude and longitude graduations on many of his new modern maps (latitude is rendered on some but not all), an oversight which was briefly and crudely remedied in the 1552 edition of the *Geographia*.

Münster's *Geographia* and, from 1544, his *Cosmographia* dominated the cartographic landscape of Northern Europe into the 1570s. It reshaped how other publishers and mapmakers thought about constructing an atlas. In Italy, the format pioneered by Münster was taken up by Giacomo Gastaldi, in his *La Geografia di Claudio Ptolemeo* (1548) (which acknowledges Münster in the title), and Ruscelli. In the Low Countries, the atlases of Mercator and Ortelius owe much to Münster's *Geographia*.

Mapping the Americas in 1540

The *Geographia* includes three maps depicting the Americas:

1. the modern world map (Shirley 77, first state)
2. "Schonlandia XIII Nova Tabula" (the map of Scandinavia showing "Terra nova sive de Bacalhos" seemingly extending from the top of Norway westwards)
3. "Novae Insulae XVII Nova Tabula" (Burden 12, first state), the earliest known map to show the Americas as a separate continent; on the recto is an account of Columbus' discoveries.

Rarity

An original color first edition Münster is not only a superlative example of the early mapmaker's art, but it is also a rarity of the first order.

While later editions of the *Cosmographia* and *Geographia* appear with some regularity, the 1540 edition is very rare to see. In an uncolored format, no example has passed at auction in eight years.

In full original color, the 1540 edition is stunningly rare. Rare book hub lists no original color examples offered for sale. We are unaware of any being offered for public sale since this book was last sold in 1986.



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Institutional copies are exceedingly uncommon

Provenance

A sixteenth- or seventeenth-century manuscript beginning "Crisstoff..." is mounted on back pastedown, evidently from an earlier binding.

The engraved bookplate of Johann Christoph Wagenseil (1633-1705) is on the front pastedown. Wagenseil (styled Wagenseilius on the ex-libris) was a noted German historian, Orientalist, jurist, and Christian Hebraist. He was a significant scholar in the latter half of the seventeenth century and held numerous positions at German universities during this time. It should be noted that Münster, like Wagenseil, was a Christian Hebraist. In 1681, Wagenseil published the first printed version of a significant Hebrew text that had been rediscovered by Münster and Buxtorf in the sixteenth century.

The blue ink stamp of Hachette & Cie is on the title page.

W. Graham Arader III, his catalog No. 62, from June of 1986, *Atlases A Selection of Fine Atlases*, item 5 (illustrated). "This is an extraordinarily fine example of this classic sixteenth century book, with each of the maps in *full original color of the highest quality*." (original emphasis).

Private American collection.

Detailed Condition:

Quarto. 19th-century blind-tooled calf in 16th-century style, metal clasps possibly from the 16th century. 48 double-page woodcut maps (including 27 ancient maps and 21 modern). aa4, *6, a6, b6, c5, [blank], A-N6, 48 double-page woodcut maps, Aa6, Bb6, Cc8 (i.e., complete). (Two edges tears to leaf a, and one edge tear to leaf a6, in both cases repaired with somewhat stained tape. Split in bookblock between gatherings Bb and Cc, but the gatherings and binding holding.) All maps in rich original hand-color, in some cases with oxidation, but the paper stable throughout.