



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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Geographia Universalis, Vetus et Nova, Complectens Claudii Ptolemaei Alexandrini Enarrationis Libros VIII. [Universal Geography, Ancient and Modern, comprising the eight books of the Commentary by Claudius Ptolemy of Alexandria.]

Stock#: 94373
Map Maker: Munster
Date: 1540
Place: Basel
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG+
Size: 8 x 12.25 inches
Price: \$ 95,000.00



Description:

True First Edition of Munster's Geographia. One of the Most Important Cartographic Works of the 16th Century.

A handsome example of one of the most important and rarest atlases of the 16th century, a true first edition of Sebastian Münster's *Geographia* printed in Basel in 1540.

Münster's 1540 *Geographia* deserves a number of superlatives. 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. This change was in no small part influenced by the first circumnavigation of the globe by Ferdinand Magellan in 1522. The *Geographia* was the first printed work to render latitude and longitude in their now-standard degree-minute-second form. And it was the book that ushered in a series of "modern"-style world atlases culminating in the 1570 *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* of Abraham Ortelius.

The Sources of Münster's Geographia

First compiled by Greek polymath Claudius Ptolemaeus in the 2nd-century, the *Geographia* was a gazetteer of the geographical and cartographical knowledge of the Roman Empire. It passed in manuscript form, almost entirely lost to history, until, in the 13th century it was rediscovered and the maps for it were redrawn by the Byzantine Greek monk Maximus Planudes.

Münster's text has its origins in the Latin-translation of Ptolemy by Willibald Pirckheimer, who in turn



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relied on the notes of Johannes Regiomontanus. Pirckheimer's translation was first printed in the 1525 "Fries" Ptolemy. 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* is a continuation of the tradition of map-illustrated printed Ptolemy atlases that began in Bologna in 1477. In the 16th 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 Lorenz Fries (1522, 1525, 1535, and 1541) all of which augmented the ancient cartography of Ptolemy with modern maps. Münster continued this practice and extended it still 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, two are signed with Adam Petri's monogram.

The Influences 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



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in print; namely, the use of minutes and seconds to denote fractional degrees of latitude and longitude. Nordenskiöld (Facsimile Atlas, page 24) provides the following commentary on that issue:

*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* of 1548 (which acknowledges Münster in the title) and later by Ruscelli. In the Low Countries, the atlases of Mercator and Ortelius owe much Münster's *Geographia*.

Mapping the Americas in 1540

The *Geographia* includes three maps depicting the Americas. Namely the modern world map (Shirley 77, first state), "Schonlandia XIII Nova Tabula" (the map of Scandinavia showing "Terra nova sive de Bacalhos" seemingly extending from the top of Norway westwards), and "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's discoveries.

Rarity

While later editions of the *Geographia* and *Cosmographia* appear on the market with some regularity, the 1540 is a storied rarity. In 2014, an example sold at Sotheby's for the GBP-equivalent of \$78,375.

Detailed Condition:

Quarto. 16th-century $\frac{1}{4}$ blind-tooled pigskin over oak boards (expert remboitage; all leaves re-tabbed,



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clasps lacking). 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). (Few small wormholes especially at the beginning of the book. Small ink stain to the centerfold of the Americas map, otherwise VG+ throughout.) Early ink manuscript on the front and back pastedowns. Ink "A.S." on the title.