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(Arabian Peninsula) *Tabula Sexta de Asia*

Stock#: 94851
Map Maker: Ptolemy / Berlinghieri
Date: 1482
Place: Florence
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG+
Size: 20 x 12 inches
Price: \$ 75,000.00



Description:

The First State of Francesco Berlinghieri's Rare Map of Arabia.

Showing the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina and the first faint depictions of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

This is Francesco Berlinghieri's extraordinary 1482 *Tabula Sexta di Asia*, one of the rarest and most desirable early maps of the Arabian Peninsula.

A collector looking to acquire the earliest cartographic representation of Arabia has three options: copperplate engravings produced in Rome (1478 Buckinck & Sweynheim) and Florence (1482 Berlinghieri) and a woodcut map printed in Ulm (1482 Germanus). All three maps have their merits, and the choice may ultimately come down to personal and visual preferences.

What sets the Berlinghieri map apart is the ambition that defined his ground-breaking atlas, *Septe Giornate della Geographia*. As discussed in more detail below, Berlinghieri was an innovator, employing multiple projections and drawing on unique sources, not just Ptolemy. He was also one of the first cartographers to introduce new, "modern" maps, which would become standard in subsequent atlases. Berlinghieri was cutting-edge, daring to experiment by enhancing the established Ptolemaic model in his maps and text.

Furthermore, Berlinghieri's Arabia map is striking, with a distinct set of underlying artistic principles. Unlike the schematic 1478 Rome or the dense 1482 Ulm Arabia maps, the Berlinghieri Arabia is one of the first printed maps with aesthetic aspirations rather than just representational ones. Its coastlines feel dynamic and alive, its mountains and rivers more fluid.



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The Gulf Coast

Berlinghieri's map depicts the entire Arabian Peninsula in a recognizable shape but with a distinctly Ptolemaic configuration. As noted by Arabia map scholar Gerald Tibbetts (1978), Ptolemy exaggerated Eurasia's length to the east. The distance between the Red Sea and Persia was thus too broad, and Arabia was stretched to fill the gap. Because Ptolemy knew the entrances to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf were very narrow, he had to make all the shapes work together.

The distorted shape and ancient toponyms pose a significant challenge to the modern viewer. However, recent scholarship has identified a number of place names that reveal this map as one of the earliest representations of what today constitutes the United Arab Emirates. In *Enhanced Mathematical Method for Visualizing Ptolemy's Arabia*, the authors attempt to match Ptolemaic place names with modern equivalents. Some relevant examples on Berlinghieri's map include Abu Dhabi (*Chabuata* - placed far west beneath the label 'MALAGIE'), Jazīrat as Sīnīyah (*Casina*), and Sharjah (*Sacoa*).

Looking on the right page of the map, near the center between the 'I' and 'C' in ARABIA FELICE (*Arabia Felix*), we see a large river labeled Alar Fl. It snakes its way from a central massif to the waters of the Gulf. Gibson initially suggested that this watercourse is Dubai Creek (2013). However, in light of the position of its mouth close to the Strait of Hormuz, the more likely attribution is that the Alar River represents Wadi Lamhah, which runs north through the modern United Arab Emirates and empties into the Gulf just north of Sharjah (Abshire et al. 2020).

Qatar is easier to identify, although its cartographic configuration looks nothing like a modern map. Both Berlinghieri, as well as the Rome 1478 and 1482 Ulm, locate the East Arabian toponym of *Catara* (*Cotara* on the Ulm map) slightly inland, at roughly the place where the coastline shifts from a general north-south orientation to a more east-west orientation. In all three maps, most of Arabia's inland centers are directly linked with a port or coastal entrepôt (a phenomenon described in the 2nd-century pilot: *Periplus Maris Erythraei*). In *Catara*'s case, this coastal hub is a site named Gerra. While the pattern of an inland *Catara* associated with a coastal Gerra is consistent in 15th-century maps, Berlinghieri places his version of *Catara* slightly to the north of Gerra, which in turn sits on a shielded bay (created by Berlinghieri's characteristic 'scooped' coastlines).

East-southeast of *Catara* is *Mathala*, which recently has been identified as the town of Muzayri in the UAE (south-southwest of modern Abu Dhabi). As an inland town, *Mathala* is fronted by several toponyms along the coast. Only one of these - *Magidanata* - has been identified with some certainty. Hamad bin Seray (1997) argues that this is the Saudi coastal town of al-Qatif, which, in reality, is located much further north, beyond the island of Bahrain. If correct, Berlinghieri's placement of al-Qatif in what we might tentatively define as the United Arab Emirates reflects how unpredictable Ptolemaic maps and coordinates



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could be.

The Red Sea Coast

Moving west to the Red Sea, as one would expect, Berlinghieri includes the two most famous cities of the Arabian Peninsula: Mecca and Madina.

A sizeable western river, *Betio Fl.*, flows into the Red Sea from a central mountain range. The Betio River figures prominently in Ptolemy and has thus been transposed onto most 15th-century maps of Arabia. Scholarly consensus is that it corresponds to Wadi Fa'idah or Wadi Fayd, a river bed that culminates in the Khawr al-Butan, outside Dahaban, just north of Jedda. Quite far inland, positioned on either side of the Betio, we find the Holy Cities of Islam. To the north is Lathrippa, a Latinised corruption of Yathrib, the pre-Islamic name for the settlement that became Madina. On the other side of the river is Macoraba, which most geographers believe constitutes Mecca.

Historically, both cities were connected to their respective ports on the Red Sea: Mecca to Jeddah and Madina to Yanbu. Even though Jedda was only fully developed into a commercial port after the advent of Islam, it is included on Berlinghieri's map as *Badeo Regio* (a Greek language corruption of al-Balad, the ancient name for Jedda's old town). While Jedda's position is more or less correct geographically, Madina's harbor of Yanbu (*Iabia-Vie* on Berlinghieri's map, though commonly named Iambia) has been placed far too north.

Arabia's Center: A Filled Empty Quarter

In their analysis of Arabia on Ptolemaic maps, Abshire and his colleagues convincingly show that Vodona in Central Arabia corresponds to the modern town of Bidbid, located near Nizwa in modern Oman (Abshire et al. 2020). All three Ptolemaic maps position this location erroneously in the interior of the peninsula. In effect, this error and others fill what should be Arabia's uninhabited center: the enormous Empty Quarter or Rub al-Khali desert. In Berlinghieri's map, this mistake is underscored by the placement of the Yemeni town of Najran (*Nagara*) to the northeast, conflating the eastern (Oman) and western (Yemen) halves of the southern peninsula.

By Ptolemy's time, Greek sailors had sailed around the Arabian coast and were familiar with its port towns. However, the interior remained largely unmapped until the 20th century. The northern part of the peninsula tended to be mapped more accurately because it was closer to populated lands and more frequently traveled. The cartographic legends of the interior came from stories told by sailors about what lies inland and the desire to fill space, which was common in pre-18th-century cartography.



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In this semi-mythological landscape, we note a curious range of elements and features that do not correspond to any known reality. Enormous rivers extend from interior mountain ranges. The map's southern river, labeled Prion Fl. by Berlinghieri and his contemporaries, is most likely a depiction of the mythological Pishon River, one of four rivers associated with the Garden of Eden. Other fascinating features include a string of islands in the Red Sea and what almost amounts to an archipelago around the Strait of Hormuz. Several islands figure to the south of Arabia, including a super-sized Socotra.

Berlinghieri: A Unique Tradition of Cartography

The cartography of Francesco di Niccolo Berlinghieri is viewed as a distinct tradition within the framework of Ptolemaic mapmaking. Most scholars agree that Berlinghieri used sources different from his contemporaries to delineate the world's land masses. The configuration of the Mediterranean, in particular, appears to have drawn on alternative sources. A common explanation is that Berlinghieri, as a Florentine, had access to far older and more accurate portolan charts and possibly even sources from within the Islamic world. Unfortunately, confirming what those alternative sources might have been remains speculative.

An important distinction between his Ptolemaic atlas and other 15th-century versions was Berlinghieri's deliberate use of the archaic homeotheric or equidistant cylindrical projection, which is attributed to Ptolemy's predecessor and primary source of geographic information: Marinus of Tyre (c.100 CE). As far as we know, Ptolemy never actually made maps himself, so we do not know which projection he favored.

Nevertheless, by the time the first Ptolemaic Geographies were going into print, most mapmakers had shifted to the new trapezoidal projection attributed to German cartographer Donnus Nicolaus (c.1420-1490).

Cartographic scholar Peter Meurer points out that all known Ptolemaic Geographies from the 15th century were built directly on the manuscripts of Donnus Nicolaus but that Nicolaus himself used different projections over time. While the new trapezoidal projection, known as the "Donis-projection," was used in the Rome Ptolemy and the influential maps of Henricus Martellus, the Ulm edition returned to an equidistant cylindrical projection in order to present the new and updated understanding of Scandinavia based on the work of Danish cartographer Claudius Clavus.

Berlinghieri's *Septe Giornate* is the only 15th-century atlas to use multiple projections depending on what parts of the world were being presented. The creative process behind the *Septe Giornate* thus differed from that of contemporary Geographies.

States of the map



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For a long time, most scholars agreed that much, if not all, of the *Septe giornate* was completed by 1479, including the maps, which were interpreted as having been printed in a single large batch and then subsequently bound and published in 1482 (Skelton 1966; Campbell 1987). A significant number of extra sheets were left over from the original printing, and after Berlinghieri's death in 1501, these were purchased and bound into a new edition with a new title page that was issued around 1503-1504.

A new and comprehensive study by Peerlings and Laurentius (2023) has nevertheless managed to identify subtle distinctions in many of Berlingheiri's maps, denoting that there were amendments made and that different states thus exist.

For Arabia, the authors identify two distinct states. The current example is the first state, confirmed by two features:

1. In the map's upper left-hand corner, we find the words "PAR DE ARABIA PETREA." In the second state, 'PETREA' has been overprinted, making it almost illegible; this is not the case in our example.
2. The other feature to confirm our sheet as an original first state is the word 'SARACENI' found in the northern part of the Arabian desert. In the second state, an additional 'S' has been added to the plate above the 'S' in 'SARACENI.' Once again, this does not figure in our map, unequivocally confirming its original state.

Detailed Condition:

First state (PETREA in PAR DE ARABIA PETREA still legible, S in SARACENI without additional S above it, above ARABIA of ARABIA FELICE, SSYRNO has no letters engraved over it). Mild toning.