



# Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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## [World]

**Stock#:** 95955  
**Map Maker:** Reisch  
**Date:** 1503 circa  
**Place:** Freiburg  
**Color:** Uncolored  
**Condition:** VG  
**Size:** 17 x 13 inches full sheet  
**Price:** SOLD



### Description:

#### ***Striking Ptolemaic World Map with Distinctive Windheads.***

First edition of Gregor Reisch's untitled map of the world, often referred to as the first printed map to provide information concerning Columbus's discoveries in the New World.

This is the first of several world maps issued by Reisch and which appeared in his *Margarita Philosophica*. This influential encyclopedia was first published by J. Schott in Freiburg in 1503 and included this fantastic and early Ptolemaic map of the world. The work was one of the most widely-read textbooks of the sixteenth century.

The map shows the *oikumene*, or the known world. This was the world based on the geography of Ptolemy in the second century CE and features Europe, Asia, and Northern Africa, with the Indian Ocean shown as an enclosed sea. Of course, when this map was made the world was changing rapidly in terms of what Europeans knew about geography. This map contains a hint of those changes, which is discussed below.

River systems are clearly marked, especially the Ganges in India and the Nile in Africa. Typically, mapmakers thought the Nile River rose from twin (here three) lakes south of the equator, which were near the Mountains of the Moon. Streams from the mountains fed the lakes. Ptolemy describes such a lakes-and-mountains layout in his works, although the precise identification of the Mountains of the Moon may have been a fourth-century addition to his text.

In the closed sea of the Indian Ocean lies a large island, Taprobana. Taprobana was what the Greeks called Sri Lanka. There were many rumors about the island in Europe. The author of *The Travels of Sir*



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*John Mandeville* said that Taprobana was part of the kingdom of Prester John, as well as that the island had mountains of gold guarded by man-eating ants. He went on to explain that the island was the home of the Sciapodes, or men with only one large foot, a detail he borrowed from Greek sources.

The map is embellished with twelve lively windheads, one of which includes what is believed to be the first printed depiction of eyeglasses. The stylized windheads are a significant departure from the traditional cherubic faces normally scene on fifteenth-century printed maps. They are based on the classical compass winds, which associate twelve directions with winds. These windheads use a combination of Greek and Roman names for the winds, but their distinction comes from the great detail with which they are drawn. They have neck ruffs, defining haircuts (or no hair at all), wrinkles, and other details.

#### **Hints of Columbus' voyages**

Thomas Suarez in *Shedding The Veil* (p. 36), has hypothesized that the map includes "the first hint of Columbus' discoveries on a printed map." While the map is certainly Ptolemaic in its overall geography, there is a note that suggests knowledge of the New World, on the land bridge connecting Southeast Asia to Africa. Translated from Latin, it reads, "*here there is not land but sea, in which there are such islands not known to Ptolemy.*"

Suarez theorizes that Reisch is referring to the islands of the Caribbean. However, given that this text is placed in the southern part of the Indian Ocean, it is significantly more likely that this is referring, in fact, to early Portuguese voyages around the Cape of Good Hope. This mention of an alternative to the Ptolemaic model is revolutionary and heralds the rapid change that would soon come to world maps.

#### **World Maps in Reisch's Work**

This is the original woodcut map that featured in some of the early editions of Reisch's textbook, starting in 1503. It remains unclear exactly which editions of the *Margarita Philosophica* this map appeared in, particularly due to the existence of "ghost" editions, but it is known to have first appeared in 1503, and remained included in the text until 1535.

Another, smaller Ptolemaic world map with only four wind heads also featured in several editions. That map presents a coarse derivative of the present map, reducing the number of windheads and simplifying the decorative elements. Two modernized world maps, one larger and one smaller but both based on Waldseemuller, appeared in the 1515 and 1535 editions respectively.

This is the original map to feature in the important work and it represented the forefront of cartographic knowledge when it was published.

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### **States**

We have recently identified changes in the woodblock that may correlate to the date in which the map was printed. Three states are identified:

1. The southern windhead reads "MERIDIES" and the coastlines of Arabia foelix and Taprobana appear without break.
2. A 5 mm gap appears in the southwestern coastline of Arabia foelix and a 3 mm gap appears in the northeastern coastline of Taprobana.
3. A break in the title of the southern windhead appears, with the "D" being mostly broken off.

This would be the third state of the map. Initial dating efforts suggest that the first state was printed in 1503, the second state between 1503 and 1520, and the third state in 1535, although this remains to be confirmed.

### **Detailed Condition:**

Woodblock on early-16th-century laid paper with simple crown watermark. Left margin expertly and near-invisibly extended with 1.5" of early laid paper. Small area of expert and invisible facsimile to leftmost portion of western windhead. Several additional professionally leafcast repaired tears at old fold intersections, etc.