



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

Comment[arium] rerum Graecarum libri II In quibus tam Helladis quam Peloponnesi, quae in lucem antea non venerunt, explicantur

Stock#: Lazius
Map Maker: Lazius

Date: 1558
Place: Vienna
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG+
Size:

Price: SOLD



Description:

Wolfgang Lazius (1514-1565) was an Austrian scholar who worked in cartography, history, and science. He became a professor in the medical faculty at the University of Vienna, where he was a student, and later became the curator of the collections of the Holy Roman Empire and official historian to Emperor Ferdinand I. He is thought to be the subject of Giuseppe Arcimboldo's famous painting, 'The Librarian'. His varied interests are shown by the title-page, where the border features his books on Austrian history and other works. Lazius states in the dedication that he drew both of the maps himself. They are highly attractive, and contain a wealth of detail.

The first map, in book I, covers all of Greece including the Peloponnese and coast of Asia Minor, drawing on the works of Ptolemy. It has a large and elaborate title cartouche, surrounded by classical deities representing the areas in Greece to which they are linked. On either side are the figures of Hercules (Thebes) and Hermes (Kyllini), with four portrait medallions showing Minerva (Attica, or Athens), Jupiter (Olympus), Ceres, and Neptune (Corinth). The map's border is composed of medallions with the names of Greek cities and small pieces of information, separated by region. The map itself is crammed with detail: place names, snippets of history, and small shields or medallions referencing Greek mythology. Ariadne reclines near the island of Naxos, waiting to become the bride of Dionysus after being abandoned by Theseus; the crippled Philoctetes appears near the island of Lemnos, left there with an injured leg by the Greek army on their way to Troy.

The second map, in book II, only covers the Peloponnese, based on Italian sources. It has a similar border of medallions with geographical information on the right hand side, with a pasted border of shields containing the names and biographies of famous rulers of Elis, the site of the first Olympic games. A



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charming strip of etchings showing the Labours of Hercules has been pasted at the upper edge (six of his labours were completed in the area shown). Theseus kills the Minotaur next to a tiny representation of the labyrinth at the lower edge; to his left, Paris sails towards Troy, his arm around the stolen Helen; the combined Greek forces sail after them to recover her. To the north we find Perseus with the head of Medusa on his shield, and above him Poseidon and Athena fight to become the patron deity of Athens.

There is no mention of a place of publication or publisher in the work. It has been suggested that it was published by Andreas Wechel in Frankfurt am Main but that seems rather unlikely as Wechel was still printing in Paris until 1572. Graesse lists Vienna as the place of publication which is supported by Karrow, who lists Raphael Hoffhalter as the publisher.

The first edition is the only one to contain maps, and is thus very scarce. There are institutional copies in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek and Bibliothèque Nationale.

Detailed Condition:

Small folio (370 by 255mm), woodblock title in red and black, three woodcut plates, note to the reader within a hand drawn frame, two large folding etched maps, the first map printed on three irregularly sized plates, the second on one plate with pasted border to upper and left margin, both with etched title cartouche with letterpress text pasted to verso, margins of title lightly soiled, first map with discolouration from the pasted slip, light worming in inner gutter of a few leaves at beginning, a few margins lightly waterstained, last gathering browned, light spotting, contemporary limp vellum, manuscript title on spine, a few light stains, remnants of ties.