



An incunable map of Arabia with lapis lazuli blue

PTOLEMY, Claudius.  
[Sexta Asie Tabula.]

Ulm: Lienhart Holle, 1482. Woodcut in fine original colour, printed area 285 x 565mm.

£150,000

A fine example of the map of classical Arabia from the First Ulm Edition of Ptolemy's 'Geographia', the first atlas printed outside Italy and the first atlas illustrated with woodcut maps. Holle's edition of the 'Geographia' contained Ptolemaic maps reworked by the cartographer Nicolaus Germanus (c.1420-c.1490) and cut by Johannes of Armsheim, who was the first woodcutter to sign a map (the world from this atlas). It was the first Ptolemaic atlas to include "modern" cartography, with maps of Italy, Spain, France, Scandinavia and the Holy Land. It was also the first to print the corresponding text description on the verso of each map, with a decorative woodcut border, also coloured. One extraordinary feature of this edition is that the publisher, Lienhart Holle, intended it to be sold coloured, with ultramarine used for the rich blue of the seas. This pigment, made from crushed lapis lazuli from mines in Afghanistan, was hugely expensive and was prized by Renaissance painters for use in skies and the clothes of significant figures in their paintings. It was not until the 19th century that an alternative was created. Holle's use of aquamarine appears to have been overly ambitious: his business was forced into bankruptcy shortly after publication of the book. The remaining sheets, woodblocks and types were sold to Johann Reger in Ulm, who reissued the work in 1486. This second (and final



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edition) is identifiable by having a letterpress title above the map and soft brown colour on the seas, a result of a cheaper blue oxidising over time.

TIBBETTS: 8.

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