

Ten vellum leaves, four bifolia with two blank leaves (one at each end) pasted together, four double page maps. Coastlines drawn in brown ink and heightened in green or gold wash, places names in brown ink, major place names and rivers in red ink, rivers in silver, islands in red, blue, or gold, mountain ranges (imaginary) in brown and green wash heightened with gold. Each map decorated with compass roses and scale bar in blue, green, red, and gold, cartouche with author's name and date on map of Western Europe. Folio (367 by 238 mm), French nineteenth century brown morocco binding by Marcelin Lortic, binder's stamp "Lortic Fils" to lower turn-in of front board, gilt fillet border to covers, spine divided into six compartments with raised bands, lavishly gilt, title lettered to spine in gilt, board edges and turn ins gilt.

A RARE PORTOLAN ATLAS SHOWING THE SHIFT IN FOCUS FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN TO NORTHERN EUROPE

[Portolan atlas].

Author
DOSSAIGA, Jaime [DOUSAIGO, Jacques]

Publication date
1590

Publisher

Publication place
[Portugal?],

Physical description
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Dimensions

Notes

A striking portolan atlas of the Mediterranean and northern Europe, beautifully coloured and highlighted in gold and silver. Surviving portolan atlases are very rare, given their practical use in navigation, especially in such fine condition. This atlas is also unusual in that it has a map of the coast of Scandinavia with a high level of cartographic and toponymic detail. Early portolans concentrated on the Mediterranean; later works by the Catalan school started to show Scandinavia and northern Europe, but were hampered by restrictions on Catalan mariners in the area (Winter).

The portolan contains four maps. The first map shows northern and western Europe, with a truncated Great Britain. As noted, this was an unusual area for a portolan to cover: it was mainly of interest for its fish trade. Earlier sixteenth century charts of the area, such as the nine chart atlas by Battista Agnese in the Library of Congress (c1544) and the atlas by Fernando Vaz Dourado in the British Library (1575), give only a very basic coastal outline, without outlying islands and, up until the second half of the sixteenth century, very few place names (the Washington chart carries only six, the BL chart 46). This chart gives 76 place names and includes many of the small islands off the Scandinavian coast, highlighted in red and blue. Amongst the identifiable places in Norway are Trondheim ('Dronten') shown on the river Nidelva and Langesund, an important shipping town, shown as 'Langesont' south of Oslo. The capitals are marked in red: Oslo appears as 'Sont'; Stockholm as 'Osrois'; and Helsinki as 'Elsenos'. There are no place names in Denmark but the country is labelled in red ('Danemarc').

The chart is also interesting because it shows the continued appeal of portolans for navigation, even at a time when the printed chart was reaching new levels of precision. Compared with Olaus Magnus's 'Carta Marina' (1539), the portolan shows a highly accurate coastline with a greater simplicity, particularly in the treatment of estuaries, and with the careful positioning of a wind rose in the Gulf of Bothnia, avoids the mistake Magnus makes of extending it too far north.

The second moves south, covering the whole east coast of Spain and the African continent, and the entrance to the Mediterranean through the Strait of Gibraltar. The third shows the central Mediterranean, with the Balearic Islands off the cost of Spain decorated with particular care, possibly providing evidence in favour of the theory that Dossaiga trained in the Mallorcan workshop of the Oliva portolan dynasty. The fourth map shows the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

This is one of only two examples of Dossaiga's work and the only one on the open market. The other work is also a portolan atlas, produced in the same year as the present example, which is housed in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. The author's name on both is sufficiently similar to assume they are the same person (Astengo). There are also striking similarities of colour and design: comparing, for example, the sea monster on the chart of western Europe in the present example and on the map of northern Europe in the Greenwich example. The cartouche in the Greenwich example carries the inscription "IACQVES DOUSAIGO A NAPOLI 1590"; the cartouche on the present example reads "IAIMES DOSSAIGA FECIT 1590". It seems probable that the difference in the names can be attributed to Dossaiga changing his name to adapt to the Italian and French speaking

customer base in Naples.

Astengo gives the place of production for the atlas as Naples on the basis of Uzielli and Amat di S. Filippo: however, on the first map there is an area of discolouration around the coast of Portugal, suggesting the chart was frequently touched there, giving a possible place of production or sale.

The binding is by Marcelin Lortic (1852-1928), the son of a Parisian binder, Pierre-Marcelin Lortic, a friend of Baudelaire who bound copies of ‘Les Fleurs du Mal’ for the author.

The atlas is the only example of Dossaiga’s work on the open market.

Bibliography

For the Greenwich atlas see RMG P/7(4). Corradino Astengo, ‘The Renaissance Chart Tradition in the Mediterranean’ in David Woodward (ed.), The History of Cartography, vol.3 part 1: Cartography in the European Renaissance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); ‘Chronicle for 1991’ Imago Mundi 44 (1992), pp.131-140; Heinrich Winter, ‘The Changing Face of Scandinavia and the Baltic in Cartography up to 1532’ Imago Mundi 12 (1955), pp.45-54. Not in Pflederer.

Provenance

Provenance
1. Bookplate of Luigi Arrigoni, Milanese book dealer and bon vivant.
2. Pierre S. DuPont III Collection of Navigation, Christie’s New York, 8 October 1991, Lot 211.

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