



A pair of gilt paper-cut maps on black silk; contemporary ebonised wooden frames, gilt.

“IT IS AMAZING TO ME,” SAID BINGLEY, “HOW YOUNG LADIES HAVE PATIENCE TO BE SO VERY ACCOMPLISHED AS THEY ALL ARE”

North America [and] South America.

Author

“J.B.”; after Thomas BOWEN

Publication date

1778 [and] 1779.

Publisher

Publication place

Physical description

A pair of gilt paper-cut maps on black silk; contemporary ebonised wooden frames, gilt.

Dimensions

220 by 175mm (8.75 by 7 inches) [and] 240 by 190 (9.5 by 7.50 inches)

Notes

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the delicate art of paper-cutting was amongst the many accomplishments to which the eighteenth century lady could aspire. Often delicate, sometimes dramatic, creating intricate designs in decoupage, silhouette, collage, and above all paper-mosaics, was a very acceptable way to spend a rainy afternoon. The acknowledged doyenne of the art, was undoubtedly Mrs. Mary Delany, whose iconic botanical “paper mosaicks”, are an astonishing combination of art and science.

As is this pair of minutely detailed maps, by "J.B.", created from very fine gilt paper-cuts, laid down on black silk. The maps are based on those of North and South America published by Thomas Bowen, from 1774, and were made at a time when "America" would have been very much "in the news", as the tide of the Revolutionary War had begun to turn in favour of the Continental Army, led by George Washington. And it is tempting to speculate that these black maps were executed with an air of mourning.

The maps are also apparently unique, as we are unaware of any other paper-cut maps of the period. Elaborately embroidered maps, and maps painstakingly copied in pen and ink and coloured wash, were the more usual pastime.

We do not know who "J.B." was, although the Bowen family of cartographers was a large one, and since the maps are based on those by Thomas Bowen, perhaps their creator was related.

Thomas Bowen (c1732 - 1790) was the son of Emmanuel Bowen, who was geographer to George II, from about 1747, and possibly (according to Chubb), geographer to Louis XV of France. Thomas Bowen officially began to work for his father early in 1748, principally contributing to the periodical commissions.

After his father's death Thomas continued to work on their joint project of large-scale English maps in the 'Atlas Anglicanus', which was issued to subscribers in 1768. Overall, his output was not as extensive as his father's, but during the 1770s he produced a number of significant maps, including 'A new and correct map of the countries twenty miles round London' (1770), contributions to British periodicals, three charts for Hawkesworth's account of the first voyage of Captain James Cook, a 'Map of the province of South Carolina' (1773), and contributions to Speer's 'Chart of part of the West Indies' (1773).

Like his father before him, Thomas is thought to have died in penury, in a workhouse, in 1790.

Bibliography

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 24042