

Oblong folio atlas (318 by 419 mm). Engraved title and 2 sectional titles, all printed in gold, 30 engraved plates printed in gold (29 of which are printed on a rich Prussian blue background). Plates mounted on contemporary white paper; holes punched out for stars of the first four magnitudes (with India paper pasted onto verso covering the punched holes); final plate printed in gold on white paper. Contemporary plain wrappers, within marbled blue half calf portfolio.

THE FIRST RUSSIAN CELESTIAL ATLAS, PRINTED IN GOLD

Sozviezdiia predstavlennyia na XXX tablitsakh... [Presentation of constellations in 30 tables with description and guide to finding them comfortably in the sky: composed for educational institutions and amateur astronomers].

Author
REISSIG, Kornelius Khristianovich

Publication date
1829.

Publisher
Tipografiia Kh. Gintsa,

Publication place
St Petersburg,

Physical description
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Dimensions

Notes
A previously unrecorded deluxe edition of the first printed Russian celestial atlas.

The chart titles are in cyrillic, but the geocentric format and design of the figures are based upon Bode's atlas of 1806, which in turn took its inspiration from Fortin's French edition of Flamsteed's 'Atlas Coelestis' of 1776. The work contains a number of constellations that are now obsolete, including Custos Messium, named in honour of the astronomer Charles Messier.

The use of a dark background in celestial atlases was not an innovation. Reissig's immediate precursor was Goldbach, who taught in Moscow and who used the technique in his atlas of 1799. The sumptuous printing of Reissig's atlas is, however, of a different order, and what the maps lack in originality they more than make up for by their sheer visual impact. Each chart was first printed in blue, and then a second plate was used to add the gold. The holes backed with japan paper allow the stars to shine when held up to the light. This, combined with the dark printed backgrounds, make Reissig's atlas particularly striking.

Kornelius Reissig (1781-1860) was an associate member of the Russian Academy of Sciences and director of the military academy in St Petersburg. He published a variety of works on mechanics, statics, and barometrics, as well as a manual on painting.

Uncommon. No example recorded on NUC, and OCLC only notes two examples in the US; those of Pennsylvania State University and the Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering and Technology, although the Library of Congress has recently acquired a third.

The present example is the only one recorded printed on the blue backgrounds, apparently an hitherto unknown deluxe edition issued without the 40 pages of descriptive text, not called for in our copy's title page and added only later to the normal black and white edition (we are grateful to Mr Nick Kanas for his assistance in researching this item).

Bibliography
N. Kanas, Star maps: history, artistry, and cartography. New York, 2007, p. 177 and fig. 6.11 (standard black and white issue). Lavrov, Bibliografiya Russkoi astronomicheskoi literatur, Moscow, 1968, p. 42f. Not in Warner, Sky explored.

Provenance
From the collection of the New York banker Gerald F. Fitzgerald (1925-2010) with his bookplate.

Price:

Inventory reference: 2282

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