

Pen, ink, and wash colour on vellum, heightened in silver and gold, extending west to east from Cape Finisterre to the Holy Land, and north to south from the Ukraine to the north coast of Africa, islands in red, blue and green, rivers in blue, numerous coastal place-names in red and sepia in semi-italic lettering, 7 large and small compass roses, all with fleur-de-lys north points, heightened in gold, crucifix to neck, the whole chart divided by red, green, and sepia, rhumb lines extending from the compass roses, gilt borders, scale upper and lower centre, a few small nicks to right margin of chart, one or two at shoulders, the neck of the chart with old vellum overlay repair.

A FINE PORTOLAN SIGNED AND DATED BY ONE OF THE MOST PROLIFIC CHART MAKERS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

[Portolan Chart of the Mediterranean].

Author
RICZO Joan [OLIVA, Joan]

Publication date
1586.

Publisher

Publication place
Naples,

Physical description
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crucifix to neck, the whole chart divided by red, green, and sepia, rhumb lines extending from the compass roses, gilt borders, scale upper and lower centre, a few small nicks to right margin of chart, one or two at shoulders, the neck of the chart with old vellum overlay repair.

Dimensions
460 by 860mm (18 by 33.75 inches).

Notes
Signed and dated: “Joan Riczo alias oliva fillo de mastro dominico Riczo alias oliva fecit carta nauticatoria in napolle adi 2 de frebaro ano domini 1586”.

A finely drawn chart of the Mediterranean by Joan Oliva (fl.1570-1614), a leading member of the Oliva family, a cartographic dynasty who dominated portolan production in Europe during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Charts signed by no fewer than 16 different members of the Oliva family are recorded between 1538 and 1673, and individual members apparently worked throughout the Mediterranean world, as their charts originate from Mallorca, Messina, Naples, Livorno, Florence, Venice, Malta, Palermo, and Marseilles. The exact relationships between the various members are unclear, but Joan appears to have been one of the most prolific and highly regarded. The earliest of his charts were executed in Messina, but he is also recorded as living in Naples as well as Marseilles, where he is thought to have died.

The present chart is a fine example of his work, with liberal use of gold leaf to the compass roses and crucifix. The coastline and cursive script are all finely drawn, and the whole chart is criss-crossed with lightly drawn rhumb lines. The eastern half bears similar stylistic traits with a signed chart dated 1599, and housed in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, in Venice. The rendering of both Crete and Cyprus is almost identical, as are the placement of the rhumb lines.

Bibliography
Richard L. Pflederer, Census of Portolan Charts & Atlases, (privately published, 2009); Pflederer, Finding Their Way at Sea: The Story of Portolan Charts, the Cartographers who Drew Them and the Mariners who Sailed by Them, (Houten: Hes & De Graaf, 2012), 98.

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 12954

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