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A RARE OTTOMAN MAP OF THE RED SEA AND HEJAZ REGION

[Map of the Red Sea and Hejaz]

Author
[ANONYMOUS]

Publication date
1886.

Publisher

Publication place
[Arabia],

Physical description
Lithograph, dissected and mounted on linen, in black and brown, sea in sepia wash, minor spotting or staining, occasional wear to edges.

Dimensions
2435 by 1085mm. (95.75 by 42.75 inches).

Notes
Despite the key role that the Arabian Peninsula and waters had played in Mediterranean trade for centuries, European cartographers historically paid surprisingly little attention to the area. The lack of rivers and waterways made Arabia particularly difficult to chart, but the exploration of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did see a number of new maps being produced. These, however,

were generally littered with errors, which were then compounded as later mapmakers drew on the inaccurate work of their predecessors.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, saw the rapid expansion of European empires giving rise to a renewed interest in foreign cultures and religions, a trend that came to be known as ‘Orientalism’. As a result, explorers and cartographers began to venture further into the Arabian Peninsula, undertaking expeditions to trace the deep-rooted incense trails and pilgrimage routes to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Maps began to appear showing the Hajj routes across the peninsula.

After annexing Arabia during the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire exerted various levels of influence; the emergence of Al Saud in the eighteenth century, however, introduced a rival power. In 1744, the founder of the dynasty, Muhammad bin Saud, had joined forces with the Wahhabi religious movement, and their alliance soon lead to the rapid expansion of their territories and power. Although the first Saudi state was overcome by Mohammed Ali Pasha, the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt, in 1818, a second state continued to exist in the eastern region of Nejd. Al Saud rule over the Emirate of Nejd was contested throughout the nineteenth century by the Al Rashid dynasty.

This map shows the southern portion of the Red Sea, bordered on the east by the Arabian peninsula. The majority of the map is taken up by Hejaz, the western region of Arabia where the two Holy Cities of Medina and Mecca are located. From 1845, Hejaz was under the direct control of the Ottomans, governed by an appointed official known as the Sharif of Mecca. Ottoman influence persisted in the region until the early twentieth century, when a popular revolt ousted them from power. In 1925, it was conquered by Ibn Saud, who combined the kingdoms of Hejaz and Nejd in 1932 to form Saudi Arabia. Al Saud now controlled almost the entire Arabian peninsula, with the exception of Yemen; Ibn Saud’s attempts to claim Yemeni land sparked the war of 1934.

Interestingly, on the present map there is no national boundary drawn between Hejaz and Yemen, probably because they were both subsumed under Ottoman control as part of the Egyptian Eyalet. The inset maps offer more detailed views of important cities and ports, with two of the urban views depicting specific buildings and walls. Further inland, where there were fewer significant settlements, general areas are identified, while towards the coast numerous towns, rivers, islands and harbours are labelled. At the bottom of the map, the Horn of Africa is partially visible, separated from Yemen by the Bab-el-Mandeb strait.

We have been unable to trace any other examples of this map in institutions or at auction.

Bibliography

Provenance

Price: £65000

Inventory reference: 15648

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