Engraved map with fine original hand-colour, with clear fold lines.

RARE UNDISSECTED JIGSAW MAP OF ASIA

Asia in its Principal Divisions, By J. Spilsbury, 1767.

Author
SPILSBURY, J[ohn]

Publication date
1767.

Publisher
Spilsbury, Engraver, Map and Print Seller in Russell Court, Covent Garden,

Publication place
London,

Physical description
Engraved map with fine original hand-colour, with clear fold lines.

Dimensions
430 by 470mm (17 by 18.5 inches).

Notes
The emerging children’s culture of the mid-eighteenth century produced toys and games that were often as ornamental as they were practical, and the demand for increasingly unique and interesting items had eventually resulted in jigsaw puzzles.
The invention of these is widely attributed to John Spilsbury (1739-1769), a British cartographer, engraver and map-seller who, in 1766, affixed a world map to a wooden board and carved each

country out. There are, however, earlier references to these sorts of geographical games made by a Madame de Beaumont in Paris. Her sets were typically expensive, and were of the style popular among the elite, for whom these items were made into symbols of status. In Jane Austen's 1814 novel 'Mansfield Park', for example, the poor protagonist is mocked by her wealthy cousins because she "cannot put the map of Europe together".
The cartographic jigsaws of John Spilsbury were also designed initially as games for the elite, his first one being presented to the children of King George III and Queen Charlotte, but were later sold to boarding schools as well, as teaching aids for geography classes. As pupils put the pieces together, they would learn how different countries connected to one another. During the 1760s, he created a variety of sets, including jigsaws of England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, together with puzzles of the four continents.
The present example, dated 1767, shows the continent of Asia, extending from the "Frozen Ocean" above Russia down to the islands of Indonesia. States are outlined, hand-coloured and labelled, with their significant cities, rivers and bodies of water also identified by name. As with many maps that were designed to be transformed into jigsaws, Spilsbury has placed more emphasis on strongly defined boundaries that would easily slot together when dissected, than of geographically accurate borders.The map of Asia would be cut into 21 relatively large pieces, including "Independent Tartary", "Chinese Tartary", and the sea-pieces. In fact, these were included as optional extras, with sets without them being significantly cheaper!
Exceedingly rare; we are only able to trace one institutional example: the British Library, lacking the Borneo piece. The present example of Spilsbury's Asia map is made even more unique by the fact that it remains undissected.

Bibliography
BLMC Maps 188.v.13

Provenance

Price: £5000

Inventory reference: 17653

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