



Engraved map, three small worm holes to centre of engraved surface.

## SEMEDO'S RARE MAP OF CHINA

**An Exact Mapp of China, being a faithfully Copied from one brought fro Peking by a Father Lately resident in that Citty. 1655.**

### Author

SEMEDO, Alvarez de

### Publication date

1665

### Publisher

John Webb,

### Publication place

### Physical description

Engraved map, three small worm holes to centre of engraved surface.

### Dimensions

370 by 290mm (14.5 by 11.5 inches).

### Notes

Fine dark impression of Alvarez de Semedo's map of China, one of the earliest maps of China published in Europe, derived directly from Chinese sources.

This rare and important early English map is based upon Alvarez de Semedo's map of China, a work of tremendous importance. As noted in *The Seventeenth Century Maps of China. An Inquiry into the*

Compilations of European Cartographers (Szczesniak, *Imago Mundi*, Vol 13 (1956), pp 116-136):

"The Semedo map, discussed briefly by Sanson together with three other maps, offers a problem of identification and research. Our efforts in this direction have not brought us to the discovery of the manuscript or to the engravings in various editions of Semedo's valuable relation of China. Curiously enough, an elegant map of China is attached to the English translation of Semedo's Italian edition of the *Relatione delta grande monarchia delta Cina* (1643): *The History of That Great and Renowned Monarchy of China... and illustrated with several Mapps and Figures, to satisfie the curious and advance the Trade of Great Britain...* (London, 1655). Here it is entitled "An Exact Mapp of China, being faithfully Copied from one brought from Peking by a Father Lately resident in that City. 1655", facing p. 1. The date included in this explanatory title of the map is the date of the publication and of the whole English translation. Interestingly, the map is associated with Semedo's work, and appears to have been translated by an expert and Semedo was undoubtedly an expert in Chinese geography. It might be that Semedo's map, wandering as it did from Rome to Paris, reached Nicolas Sanson; and it might well have come to England, through or from Sanson himself. Anyway, it is attached to the English edition of the celebrated Semedo's book. And there is no reason for denying Semedo's authorship of the map, especially since it is intimately associated with Semedo's celebrated work.

The map, however, may be regarded as an absolutely new drawing brought from China by an unknown person. On it there are names of metropolitan cities, provinces, rivers, and some other important localities. Peking is practically on 400 N and 129 E (from the Canaries). This map was also copied and translated from the general maps of the Kuang-yfi-t'u type, or from other Chinese atlases which followed it. This map was a forgotten map, unknown to the contemporary cartographers who even in the seventeenth century reprinted old and erroneous plan, on which, as we may discern, an insula Korea, the Cathay and Sinae linger.

The Semedo map of 1655 is identical with the Purchas map of 1625. Both are from the same source, and both are similarly arranged, with the Chinese type inserted in the map to illustrate the costumes of the Chinese man, woman, and emperor, as on the Semedo map; whereas on the Purchas map in place of the emperor there is the picture of Ricci. "That of Ricius I have added from the Jesuits, in thanks for his great paines, and to shew the habit of the head, etc.". This was Purchas' friendly observation about Matteo Ricci.

Purchas obtained a genuine map from Richard Hakluyt who got it from Captain John Saris. Saris, happening to stay in Bantam, Java, "apprehended" it and brought it to London in 1614. "The original Map, whence this present was taken and contracted, was by Captain Saris gotten at Bantam of a Chinese in taking a distresse for debts owing to the English Merchants; who seeing him carefull to convey away a Boxe, was the more carefull to apprehend it, and therein found this Map... The Original is above four foot one way, and almost five foot the other, whereof a yard and some four inches square is the Map itself; the rest are China Discourses touching the sayd Map in their Characters and Lines (running downward, and beginning at the right hand to be read, after their manner) which are heere omitted, as not understood. Yet have some understanding... by that which Pantoia hath told as before."

The provinces of China are marked and boundaries shown. Macao and Canton (Guangzhou) are both named.

The map was reissued with changed in 1669 with Edmund Squib's name and coat of arms added in the bottom left corner and the date removed from the title, in John Webb's *An Historical Essay Endeavouring a Probability that the Language of the Empire of China is the Primitive Language*.

## **Bibliography**

**Provenance**

**Price:**

**Inventory reference:** 1686

© Daniel Crouch Rare Books Ltd | 2025