

CHRISTIE'S

Price Realized

\$245,000

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Estimate

\$70,000 - \$100,000

Sale Information

Sale 12259

Ex Libris Jean R. Perrette: Important Travel, Exploration & Cartography

5 April 2016

New York, Rockefeller Plaza

Lot 265 / Sale 12259



Lot Description

QIANLONG, Emperor of China (1711-1799). [*Pingding Xiyu zhantu*]. Suite of thirteen etched copper plates representing the conquest of Jinchuan or the military campaigns at Jinchuan. [Peking: Wu Ying Ting Press], 1778-1785.

Suite of 13 (of 16) large copper-plate engraved plates (each measure approximately 505 x 864 mm), laid down on slightly larger sheets with painted brown borders, within each plate is a printed poem in Chinese based on Qianlong Emperor's own personal commentary on the battles (one plate with short marginal tear). Later morocco-backed and cornered marbled boards, cloth ties. Chinese issue, following the Paris printing of 1755-59. The "Battle Copper Prints" are a series of prints from copper engravings dating from the second half of the 18th century. They were commissioned by the Qianlong emperor of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), who ruled from 1735 to 1796. They depict his 1772-76 military campaigns, led by General A-Kuei, against the Jinchuan tribes in China's inner provinces and along the country's frontiers in the ethnically-Tibetan mountain regions of Szechuan. The master illustrations for the engravings were large paintings done by European missionary artists employed at that time at the court in Beijing. These artists were Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), French Jesuit Jean-Denis Attiret (1702-68), Bohemian Jesuit Ignatius Sichelbarth (1708-80), and the Italian Augustinian missionary, Jean-Damascène Sallusti (d. 1781). The engravings of the first set of 16 paintings were not produced in China but were executed in Paris, at that time home to the best European artisans working in this technique. The emperor even decreed that the work emulate the style of the Augsburg copper engraver Georg Philipp Rugendas the Elder (1666-1742), whose work he knew. Small-scale copies of the paintings by Castiglione and his Beijing colleagues were sent to Paris to be transferred on to copperplates, printed, and then sent back to China, along with the plates and prints. Later sets of engravings were executed in Peking by Chinese apprentices of the Jesuits and differ markedly in style and elaborateness from those of the Paris series.

Qianlong's 'Battle Copper Prints' were just one of the means the Manchu emperor employed to document his campaigns of military expansion and suppression of regional unrest. They served to glorify his rule and to exert ideological control over Chinese historiography. In the history of Chinese art, copper-print engraving remained an episode. Seen in their political context, the Qianlong prints represent a distinct and exceptional pictorial genre and are telling examples of the self-dramatization of imperial state power. Later campaigns of Qianlong which were similarly commemorated include Taiwan (1786-1788), Annam or Vietnam (1788), Gurkhas invasion of Tiber (1790), and Yunnan, Guizhou and Hunan (1795-1796).

The striking plates comprising this set appear to be examples of the Chinese versions printed later, with Chinese text within the plates and technical and stylistic differences which vary greatly from the earlier Paris 'Westernized' versions executed under the supervision of the accomplished Charles-Nicolas Cochin (1715-1790). Such a large complement from this suite of sixteen from the Chinese printing is EXTREMELY RARE. While copies of the earlier Paris printing have appeared on the market (recently a complete copy sold at auction at Christie's Paris, on 29 October 2012), we have been unable to trace a comparable sets of the Chinese issue. The Getty Research Institute has obtained a suite depicting one of Qianlong's last print commissions, produced nearly 30 years after the first series, the *Ping ding Kuoerke zhan tu*, or Pictures of the Campaigns against the Gurkhas, which like the Perrette set, stands out as highly unusual examples of Chinese images executed with European graphic techniques. The Getty's suite is the only complete set in American public collections of this later work. The Taipei Palace Museum has a

complete set of this series with the Chinese text apparently of the same issue.

References: Shiqu Baoji, *Imperial Catalogue*; Chuang Chi-fa, *Taipei Palace Museum - Ten Military Campaigns of Qianlong Emperor*; W. Fuchs, in *Monumenta Serica*, 4 (1939-40), 122; Paul Pelliot, "Les 'Conquêtes de l'Empereur de la Chine'", in *Toung pao*, 20 (1921), pp. 183-274; S. L. Shaw, *Imperial printing*, p. 22; Takata Tokio, "Qianlong Emperor's Copperplate Engravings of the "Conquest of Western Regions," *The Memoirs of the Tokyo Bunko*, 70, 2012.

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