

## ENSISHEIM METEORITE

Shortly before noon on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1492 a loud explosion was heard by hundreds of people along the Rhine River within a circle with a radius of 80 miles centered in the walled village of Ensisheim, Alsace. The sole witness to the cause of this thunderous noise was a young boy who reported seeing a large stone fall from the sky and bury itself in a hole five feet deep in a wheat field near the road that ran from Ensisheim south to Battenheim. He ran to town where he told his tale to a group of villagers who followed him to the field where with great effort they removed a 280-pound stone from the small crater.

Curious villagers knocked several pieces off the stone before the constable stopped them. Maximilian, the Germanic Roman Emperor, is probably the main reason the Ensisheim meteorite survives today. He lived in Ensisheim and was looking for a way to unite his nation to go to war against France. Maximilian, after removing a piece for himself and another for a friend, declared the stone to be an omen from god and to preserve the stone in the Ensisheim parish church. The stone remained fastened to the church wall for the next three hundred years. It was taken down during the French revolution in 1793 when it was taken to a national museum in nearby Colmar. The scientific study of meteorites began at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and many additional samples were removed for chemical analysis.

In 1803 It was returned to Ensisheim where it remains to this day. Today, in the old city hall of Ensisheim, you can see the 123-pound remaining main mass of this meteorite. It has been classified as a LL6 amphoterite chondrite stony meteorite.

### THE PRINT

Shortly after the meteorite's fall in 1492, several woodcut prints were made to announce the arrival of this thunderstone and explain its importance (As determined by Maximilian). Many other woodcuts depicting this meteorite were made in the centuries that followed. 1492 was soon after of the birth of the printing press. Artistic illustrations of natural phenomenon were in their infancy and the scientific study of meteorites was some 3 hundred years in the future. We have endeavored to make this print an artist's vision of the fall of the Ensisheim meteorite using only materials that were available in that year

### The PAPER

We searched for a quality hand made acid free, 100% cotton rag paper that would be similar to those available in Ensisheim in 1492. We came upon the Arches Company that fit the bill completely. They have been making high quality hand made acid free cotton rag papers in France since 1492 (amazing coincidence!).

### **The PAINT**

The few surviving Ensisheim woodcuts are not very colorful or artistically rendered. However when one looks at other hand colored prints and watercolor illustrations made in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, you quickly realize that a very attractive palette of natural mineral paints was available. Albrecht Dürer, the famous artist and illustrator who witnessed and painted a picture of the fireball created by the falling Ensisheim meteorite is noted for the brilliant colors he used in recording the natural wonders revealed in the tropical birds that were brought back to Europe from the new world. Fred is a mineral collector, he was familiar with and had samples of the minerals used to make these historically authentic paints. So he decided to recreate the watercolor paints used to paint the woodcut prints. He also decided to make some paint from a Meteorite, and that is what has been used to paint the two meteorites shown on the print. One in the sky and one on the ground, an interesting perspective shown on the 15<sup>th</sup> century print.

### **FRED OLSEN**

Fred is a professional geologist, college professor, and enthusiastic meteoriticist. He began his journey in meteoritics when he came upon Brian Mason's book on meteorites at the University of Florida in the early 1960s. He acquired his first meteorite, an Allende, from a traveling rock salesman soon after it fell in the spring of 1969. He made his first meteorite thin section from that Allende and now has nearly 100 in his meteorite thin section reference collection.

In August 1999 he, his wife Debbie, and friend Jean Klein who was born in Alsace, traveled to France to visit the meteorite of Ensisheim, the impact crater at Rochechouart, and to see the last eclipse of the century. They succeeded on two out of three of those objectives (It rained during the eclipse). After Fred returned to Colorado he started to investigate the woodcut broadside printed and distributed soon after the fall of the Ensisheim thunderstone in November 1492.

Fred and several librarians spent many hours contacting the Universitätsbibliothek at Tübingen and the Houghton Library at Harvard University to gain additional information on these historical relics. Additional information was very difficult to obtain and in the end the best reference is Ursula Marvin's comprehensive study published in Meteoritics in March 1992 to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall.

### **SUSAN FISHER**

The artist is Susan Fisher who studied art in France and is the director of art education program at the Denver Botanical Gardens. Susan is a very talented botanical illustrator and has been an integral part of the accurate reproduction of this block print made with the materials available in 1492 at the time of the Ensisheim fall.

### **Prices for Hand Printed and Hand Colored Wood Block Prints**

Paper Size = 15 X 22.....\$139.

Paper Size = 11 X 15.....\$129.