



# Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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## **Societatis Iesu In America Septentrionali pro Gloria Dei laborantis Sedium Jchnographia . . . Diu desideratae Mexicanae Provinciae divisioni, In Provinciam, et Vice=Provinciam, Humanissime annuenti Ann. 1754 . .**

**Stock#:** 33179gm  
**Map Maker:** Petroschi / Villaseñor y Sánchez  
**Date:** 1754  
**Place:** Rome  
**Color:** Uncolored  
**Condition:** VG  
**Size:** 18.5 x 15 inches  
**Price:** SOLD



### **Description:**

Fine example of Giovanni Petroschi's copy of Jose Antonio de Villaseñor y Sánchez's official Mexican Jesuit Province map, which has been called the first modern map of Mexico.

This map is an extreme rarity, based on geographic intelligence acquired by order of the Spanish Crown, but which was subsequently censored. It represents a masterpiece of Jesuit cartography and an important artifact documenting the history of both Mexico and Texas. It also illuminates the fascinating story of how information was controlled and disseminated at high levels throughout the Hispanic and Roman Catholic world during the eighteenth-century.

The eminent Jesuit cartographer Giovanni Petroschi devised this enlarged decorative version of Jose Antonio de Villaseñor y Sánchez's map, Yconismo hidroterreo ó Mapa Geographico de la America Septentrional. Delineado y observado por el Contador de Reales azogues Don José Antonio de Villaseñor y Sanchez, which is known today in only a single proof copy, residing in the Archivo General de Indias in Seville. The map is considered by many to be the earliest modern map of the Viceroyalty of Mexico.

During the mid-eighteenth-century the geography of the northern frontier regions of New Spain remained ambiguous. The need to travel vast distances over rugged terrain and the presence of hostile native tribes inhibited scientific reconnaissance. With the view to extending Spanish authority northwards into "the subordinate jurisdictions of the Viceroyalty", in 1741, the Marquès de Altamira, the auditor general of the



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military, commissioned José Antonio de Villaseñor y Sánchez (1703-1759), the official cosmographer of New Spain, to obtain the very best sources in order to draft a comprehensive report, accompanied by a map. Villaseñor y Sánchez was an accomplished geographer, historian and mathematician. In addition to his work on this project, he was commissioned by the Count of Fuenclara to conduct a census of New Spain, reporting in April, 1744, the total population to be 3,865,000. Subsequently, in 1750, he produced a highly regarded plan of Mexico City (1750).

The map illustrates the vastness of the territory and need to divide it into two provinces (as illustrated by the broken line in the center of Mexico proper). The original Villaseñor y Sánchez map contains significantly more detail and it is quite probable that this detail was suppressed by the Spanish authorities, allowing the Jesuit mapmaker Petroschi to take a general tracing of the map for purposes of identifying the Jesuit Missions and major topographical features, but omitting the more sensitive details of the interior of Mexico.

To fulfill his grander commission, Villaseñor y Sánchez was given unfettered access to the closely guarded manuscripts held within the royal archives in Mexico City. He would also have interviewed countless soldiers, clergyman and adventurers who had explored the mysterious lands to the north. Within five years, he had completed his report along with a fascinating map. In so doing, he had relied on a variety of sources, notably the intelligence gleaned from the epic expeditions of Francisco Alvarez Barreiro, including his map, Plano Corografico y Hidrografico de las Provincias de la Nueva Vizcaya y Culiacan (1727).

Villaseñor y Sánchez's original map embraced all of Mexico east of the Sea of Cortés, and the expanse of the Gulf Coast from the Yucatán to the northwestern part of the Floridian Peninsula. It contained an unprecedented wealth of information, including the locations of innumerable missions and presidios. While novel progress was made in the delineation of certain geographical features, unfortunately, as much of the base intelligence was vague and even contradictory, the map had its limitations. Firstly, as was the case with all Spanish cartographers in the New World, Villaseñor y Sánchez used an archaic system of measuring longitude eastwards around the globe, employing a single scale of 360 degrees, with Tenerife as the prime meridian. As this omnibus scale further complicated what were otherwise the great challenges in discerning longitude, the map's overall accuracy was affected.

In Texas, the map greatly exaggerates Matagorda Bay (Bahía del Espiritu Santo), while Aransas, San Antonio and Galveston Bays are all but eliminated. Further to the east, Louisiana's Chandeleur Islands are mislabelled "Massacre," while St. Joseph Bay and Apalache are not accurately located. However,



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notwithstanding these errors, the map demonstrated a better delineation of the Texas coastline than on other maps, with the courses of major rivers charted with an uncanny level of accuracy. As noted in Texas History On Line:

. . . in 1746 José Antonio de Villaseñor y Sánchez had drawn a map embracing most of the Gulf of Mexico littoral, nearly all of Mexico, and much of Texas. This map, entitled "Yconismo hidroterreo, ó Mapa Geográfico de la América Septentrional," appeared on the eve of José de Escandón's exploration and settlement of Nuevo Santander. This map improved on some of the Texas river courses but left much to be done.

The Marquès de Altamira was highly impressed with Villaseñor y Sánchez's insightful and comprehensive analysis, and authorized it to be published as the *Theatro Amercano* (Madrid, 1746). However, the carefully drafted proof copy of his map, which the author always intended to accompany his book, was embargoed by the censures of the Real y Supremo Consejo de Indias. Indeed, since the time of Columbus the Spanish authorities has sought to rigidly enforce a policy of cartographic secrecy, and given the wealth of militarily useful information contained on the map, it is easy to see how they did not want it to fall into British or French hands. This explains why the only known example of Villaseñor y Sánchez's original map was secreted into the Archive of the Indies, where it remains to this day.

However, at some point before his map was embargoed, Villaseñor y Sánchez lent it to his friend, Juan Francisco López (1699-1664), a Venezuelan-born, globe-trotting Jesuit authority on visual culture. He was permitted to trace the map, but had to agree to omit the more sensitive details such as the courses of certain rivers and the locations of presidios. López duly forwarded his manuscript tracing to Rome, where it found its way into the hands of the eminent Jesuit cartographer Giovanni Petroschi (1715-66), a foremost authority on the geography of Latin America, and the author of a famous map of Paraguay and the Río de la Plata basin.

Petroschi transformed Villaseñor y Sánchez's map into a fascinating and highly decorative work, showcasing the Jesuit order's highly enterprising activities in New Spain. Petroschi's map embraces a considerably larger expanse of territory than its antecedent, as it features most of the Baja California peninsula in the west, while in the east, it extends to include all of Florida. While far less detail is shown in the geographical rendering, it must be remembered that these omissions were intentional. The map does however, carefully label the growing number of Jesuit missions that had spread like an archipelago across New Spain.



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The line that runs diagonally across Mexico is a boundary suggested to divide New Spain into two new proposed Jesuit ecclesiastical provinces. It was considered that it would be administratively more expedient if the established parishes of southern and central Mexico were separated from the fast-growing network of evangelical missions in Sinaloa, Sonora and Baja California. To this end, the text below the map presents a detailed record of the Jesuit colleges and seminaries throughout New Spain, accompanied by a census of the number of Christians in the frontier regions.

The upper-left corner of this elegant composition is adorned with an expanse of drapery, containing the titular cartouche. Surmounted by the Jesuit insignia, along with the Sacred Heart, is the title and dedication. Portraits of the two dedicatees occupy the roundels located in both of the upper corners. Within the one on the right, is the Superior General of the Jesuit Order, Ignacio Visconti (1682-1755), and pictured within the one on the left is Aloysius (Luigi) Centurione (1686-1757), second in command of the order.

The only extant example of Petroschi's map which we could locate is the copy held by the Jesuit Historical Institute in Rome (illustrated by Polzer, in *The Jesuit Missions of Northern Mexico*, p.421, Plate XVI). A section of the original map is illustrated by Weddle, in his book, *The French Thorn: Rival Explorers in the Spanish Sea, 1682-1762*, fig. 24 (1746 map) and described at pp. 332-334.

References: Lowery; no. 384; Pitman, José Antonio de Villaseñor y Sánchez, 1703-1759, esp. pp.106-9 & 146; Polzer, *The Jesuit Missions of Northern Mexico*, p.421, Plate XVI; Torres Lanzas' (*México y Floridas*), no. 161; Wagner, pp.335-36, no. 5; Weddle, *The French Thorn: Rival Explorers in the Spanish Sea, 1682-1762*, pp.332-4 & fig. 24 (1746 map).

Provenance: The Collection of Mr. Glen McLaughlin, California, U.S.A.

**Detailed Condition:**

Minor spotting.