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Provincia Quitensis. Societatis Iesu in America Topographica exhibita nec non A.R.P. Ignatio Vicecomiti In Comitibus Generalibus Ao. 1751

Stock#: 33865hs
Map Maker: Petroschi / Brentano
Date: 1751
Place: Rome
Color: Outline Color
Condition: VG
Size: 36.5 x 25.5 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Fine example of the rare Giovanni Petroschi - Carolo Brentano map of the Northern part of South America, compiled by the Jesuit Society in America from Jesuit and other contemporary sources.

The Petroschi - Brentano map embraces all of the northern part of South America and part of the isthmus of Central America, within the equatorial regions between 16 degrees North and 16 degrees South of latitude, including the entire region drained by the Amazon River. Its stated purpose was to depict the Jesuit ecclesiastical Province of Quito, which included all of modern Ecuador, northern Peru, Colombia, much of Venezuela, and the Pacific coast of Panama. In effect, however, it is a fantastically detailed and highly sophisticated general map of the Northern part of Latin America, depicting the region's innumerable rivers and their tributaries, along with dozens of towns and missions.

The map depicts in red the Jesuit provincial boundary line and the locations of various ecclesiastical institutions. The title cartouche is surmounted by the three graces, in a magnificent expression of the Baroque splendor that typified the Jesuit style. The roundel near the center features the portrait of the Superior General of the Jesuit Order, Ignatio Visconti.

The map was printed in Rome under the supervision of the Jesuit scholar Giovanni Petroschi, having been drafted by Guilio Cesare Cigni and engraved by Dominico Cigni. It is based on a manuscript map compiled in Quito by the Hungarian Jesuit Carolo Brentano, with the assistance of Nicholas de la Torre. Two examples of the manuscript are known to exist. One resides at the Jesuit Archives in Rome, while another slightly different manuscript is preserved at the Library of Congress.



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Two printed versions of the map were issued in Rome, the present wall map and a smaller, reduced version, both of which are exceedingly scarce. Cartographically, the *Provincia Quitensis* is predicated on a variety of sources. The depiction of the Amazon Basin, Ecuador and Peru is based Juan de Narváez's map, prepared in Quito in 1724, which in turn is partially taken from the pioneering map of the Amazon by the Czech Jesuit Samuel Fritz, first printed in 1707. The depiction of the Orinoco region, including the presence of the fictional 'Lago de Parima', is largely derived from the map that was included in José de Gumilla's *El Orinoco Ilustrado* (Madrid, 1741). The present map has been updated to include an important recent discovery, the Casiquiare Canal, the natural connection between the Orinoco and the Rio Negro, encountered by Padre Emanuel Roman in 1744.

The *Provincia Quitensis* was one of the most important and impressive products of a select series of maps especially commissioned by the leadership of the Society of Jesus in Rome. In the mid-eighteenth-century, the Jesuit Order was at the height of its social and economic power. Through its seemingly infinite archipelago of missions that spanned Latin America, the order exerted tremendous influence over the hearts and minds of the people, and as one of the greatest landowners in the New World it accrued tremendous wealth. The Jesuits naturally required accurate general maps in order to administer their vast spiritual empire, and employed several cartographers of the first-rate to carry out the task.

The Jesuit's program to acquire the most advanced geographic intelligence was led during this period by Giovanni Petroschi. Evident, on the present map, Petroschi applied a series of high standards for all of the works printed under his auspices. While much of the geographic intelligence that was employed to create the *Provincia Quitensis* was sourced from the Jesuit's own intrepid and highly skilled missionary-explorers, Petroschi's associates were also able to draw upon the closely guarded manuscript maps in official Spanish colonial archives. The Jesuits forged an agreement with the Spanish authorities whereby their cartographers were permitted to trace the government's original manuscript maps, so as to give their copies the same geographic structure of planimetric accuracy, with accurately delineated mountain ranges, rivers and coastlines. The locations of Jesuit missions and large towns would also be included, however, Petroschi's agents had to agree to omit militarily sensitive details, such as the locations of roads and presidios. The fact that the Jesuits were given a conditional exemption from the strict policy of cartographic censorship enforced by the *Consejo de Indias* is truly remarkable, and was a testament to the power and prestige enjoyed by the order. While the resulting maps were printed (primarily under Petroschi's direction), they were issued in very limited quantity, intended only for high-level use. In spite of their very limited dissemination, true to the Jesuit élan, the maps were engraved to the highest technical standards and ornate cartouches.

In spite of the limited distribution of the *Provincia Quitensis*, it proved to be highly influential in rarified



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circles. During a visit to the 'Eternal City', the legendary intellectual Alexander von Humbolt remarked that "I was surprised to see in a very rare map I found in Rome", referring to an example the present work. An example was also formally entered as evidence by the British government during the Venezuela-Guyana Boundary Arbitration in 1899.

The present map is exceptionally rare, and we are aware of no other examples coming to the market in the last thirty years. We locate only the examples at the British Library and BNF on OCLC.

Detailed Condition:

2-sheet map, joined. Minor expert repairs on the verso.