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## Carte Reduite De L'Ocean Septentrional compris entre l'Asie et l'Amerique Suivant les Decouvertes qui ont ete faites par les Russes . . . 1766

**Stock#:** 54150
**Map Maker:** Bellin

**Date:** 1766
**Place:** Paris
**Color:** Uncolored
**Condition:** VG
**Size:** 33.5 x 22 inches

**Price:** SOLD

**Description:**

***Important Chart of the North Pacific by France's Preeminent Cartographer***

Fine chart of the Northwest Passage, Alaska, the Pacific Northwest and contiguous regions, published in Paris by Nicolas Bellin, Hydrographer to the King and head of the French map repository, the Depôt de la Marine. The chart appeared in volume two of Bellin's influential *Hydrographie Francoise*, one of the most important compilations of sea charts published in the eighteenth century.

Bellin's chart represents a significant step forward in the cartographic depiction of the region. It was the first major French chart to reject the Sea of the West hypothesis championed, in manuscript, by Guillaume Delisle and, in print, by Guillaume's brother, Joseph Nicholas Delisle, and son-in-law, Philippe Buache. Instead, Bellin has opted for a more conservative depiction of the region as posited by Gerhard Friedrich Müller, who was using information from the Russian expeditions to Alaska from the first half of the eighteenth century.

Despite the rejection of a prominent Bay or Sea of the West, Bellin does try to retain the prospect of an interior network of rivers linking the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean. The chart also incorporates the French discoveries in Canada and the Great Lakes regions, including a fascinating depiction of the sources of the Mississippi River.

The chart is drawn in great detail. There are six scales in the upper left corner, a nod to Bellin's erudition and international audience. A delicate cartouche adorned with flowers is in the upper right. It contains the title and reveals the main sources for this map, the Russian discoveries of recent decades and the map of

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Gerhard Friedrich Müller. Finally, the date of 1766 signals that this geographical snapshot details a North Pacific very different from the region as known in the following two decades, after the voyages of Captain James Cook.

**Bay or Sea of the West and the mythical geography of the Pacific Northwest**

Müller's chart is noteworthy in its omission of Delisle's mythical Sea of the West, although he does continue to hold out hope for a water route from the Pacific to the Atlantic via the tentatively located "R. de l'Quest" connecting the northern California coast (ultimately) to Hudson's Bay. This river continues inland from an inlet supposedly discovered by Martin Aguilar. This navigator was a Spanish captain who sailed with Sebastian Vizcaino on a reconnaissance expedition up the California coast in 1602-3. Aguilar, commanding the *Tres Reyes,* was blown off course, to the north. When the seas calmed, Aguilar reported that he had found the mouth of a large river. Eighteenth-century geographers, including Bellin, conjectured that the river was the entrance to the Sea of the West.

Bellin drops the reference to the Sea of the West which he included in his 1755 map of North America, but continues to expand on the information derived from indigenous sources. The Sea of the West was initially hypothesized by Guillaume Delisle, but he never published the idea. He postulated that it could exist, and that it might connect to a Northwest Passage through New France, not through English territory farther north. He said, the Sea of the West, “was one of my discoveries. But since it is not always appropriate to publish what one knows or what one thinks one knows, I have not had this sea engraved on the works that I made public, not wanting foreigners to profit from this discovery” (as quoted in Pedley, *Commerce of Cartography*, 109). The sea did appear in print on charts published by Johann Baptiste Nolin in ca. 1700, but he eliminated the feature and it quickly disappeared thereafter.

The re-introduction of the sea was the result of Philippe Buache’s review of his father-in-law’s papers. He and Joseph Nicholas Delisle published it in a famous map of June 1752. In many ways, this chart is a response to Buache and Delisle’s previous effort, which was very controversial.

However, like Buache and Delisle, Bellin has retained the information about Aguilar, which was only dubiously proven at the time. Another feature they shared was an inlet named for Juan de Fuca, the Castilianized name of Greek navigator Ioánnis Fokás (Phokás). Little archival evidence survives of Fuca’s career, but a chance meeting with an English financier, Michael Lok, in Venice in 1596 gave birth to rumors of Fuca’s voyages in the Pacific. Fuca reported that he had been sent north from New Spain twice in 1592 in search of the Strait of Anian. The Spanish Crown failed to reward Fuca’s discovery of an opening in the coast at roughly 47° N latitude and Fuca left the Spanish service embittered. His story lived on in Lok’s letters and eventually was published in Samuel Purchas’ travel collection of 1625. On many

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eighteenth-century maps, including this one, Fuca's Strait is linked with a River or Sea of the West. In 1787, the present-day Juan de Fuca Strait was named by the wife of naval explorer Charles William Barkley, making permanent a label that had previously just been hopeful conjecture.

Bellin is more suspect of a third source about the Pacific Northwest, one which Buache and Delisle heavily used in their 1752 map. A "pretended" inlet is labelled as sourced from a Fonte, according to Delisle. However, a note in the interior of what is today Canada explains:

In this part some geographers have marked the so-called discoveries of the Spanish admiral Bartholomew de Fuente on a relation published in English, of which it was easy to recognize the supposition; the details which it contains cannot sustain a critical examination without breaking down on itself, the same is always considered as fabulous.

Bellin found Fonte too fantastic to believe, yet too famous to ignore.

In addition to taking shots at Delisle and Buache, Bellin attempts to reconcile the details provided by the German cartographer Müller and the Russian explorers of the mid-eighteenth century with the information supplied by Jesuit missionaries and fur traders in the first half of the eighteenth century.

**Russian exploration of the North Pacific**

The chart shows the tracks and geographic encounters of the Russian voyages of Vitus Bering (or Behring) and his deputy Aleksei Chirikov conducted from 1728-30 and 1733-43. These voyages delineated eastern Siberia and touched upon the northwest of North America. Other than the bulge on the north coast of the Chuckchi Peninsula, the coasts of Siberia are extremely well-defined, attesting to Bering's enormous talent as a cartographer. Bellin depicts contacts with the Aleutians and the sighting of Mount St. Elias.

The Pacific Northwest to the south, however, is entirely conjectural. Japan, whose rulers were not known to be especially welcoming to foreign explorers, is not well understood, such that its large northernmost island, Hokkaido, does not appear at all on the map.

Bering's voyages were monumental in their achievements, even if they cost the life of the commander and many of his men. However, they were not immediately shared across Europe. Indeed, the 1752 map by Buache and Delisle was one of the first cartographic objects to show the results. Joseph Nicholas Delisle spent much of his career in Russia, where he helped to found the Russian Academy of Sciences. While there, he had access to the latest findings of Russian explorers and was at the center of Russia's geographic establishment; for example, he helped produce the first Russian atlas, the *Atlas Russicus,* with

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Ivan Kyrilov.

Delisle returned to Paris in 1747 with a large map collection, an event that drew some criticism from Russian academicians who thought he absconded with delicate materials. One of these disgruntled scholars was Georg Friedrich Müller, a German natural philosopher who, like Delisle, had been drawn to Russia to kick-start the Russian Academy. The German also served as Secretary of the Academy and translator between Bering and Delisle, so it is easy to see how he would have felt personally betrayed by Delisle and Buache's map.

Müller did not stay silent. He penned a letter railing against Delisle that was printed in French (1752) and English (1754). He also made his own map, published as part of the official account of Bering's voyages. It appeared in French in 1754, German in 1758 and was only translated into English in 1761, long after Buache and Delisle's ideas had spread.

Too late to combat the disloyal Delisle, Müller's ideas did find a ready audience in Bellin. Bellin's chart was the first major French work to incorporate the geography of Müller and assimilate this information with the French discoveries in the interior of the North American continent. Importantly, Müller's map also shows the discoveries of Semyon Ivanov Dezhynyov. Dezhynyov was a Cossack who traveled extensively in Siberia. In 1648, he sailed around the corner of Asia, proving to be the first European to sail through what would become known as the Bering Strait. However, his report was buried in archives until located by Müller in 1736.

The map is a foundational map for collectors of the northwest coast of America and northeast coast of Asia. The map is quite rare on the market, as it was apparently only briefly included in the *Hydrographie Francois*. We note only a single example of the map offered in a dealer catalog reported by AMPR in the past 30 years and we have seen the map only a handful of times.

**Detailed Condition:**
Repairs along lower centerfold.