



## Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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### [A Complete Set of the 12 Signs of the Zodiac]

**Stock#:** 68796  
**Map Maker:** Bevis  
**Date:** 1750  
**Place:** London  
**Color:** Hand Colored  
**Condition:** VG  
**Size:** 15 x 12.5 inches (each)  
**Price:** SOLD



#### Description:

#### *Complete Set of Bevis Star Charts of the Signs of the Zodiac in Early Color*

Quite possibly the only surviving separately published set of 12 star charts of the signs of the Zodiac, published by John Bevis.

These extremely charts were compiled by Bevis, an eighteenth century physician-turned astronomer, whose other claim to fame is as the discoverer of the Crab Nebula,

The present set is believed to be the only known separately issued complete set, according to Kevin Kilburn of the Royal Astronomical Society (London). Bevis's complete work is extremely rare. Plates were also sold individually, this being perhaps the largest known collection of the separate plates in private hands.

#### The Uranographia

Historians of astronomy name four great celestial atlases: Bayer's, Hevelius's, Flamsteed's, and Bode's. To this, they add one great work that could have been: Bevis's *Uranographia*.

John Bevis was an Oxford trained physician and amateur astronomer, who is perhaps best known for his discovery of the Crab Nebula in 1731, 27 years before Charles Messier's re-discovery. Bevis set up a private observatory in North London in 1738, where he made observations, which led to his attempt to create the second British Celestial Atlas. In the mid 18th Century, Bevis produced his *Uranographia Britannica*, which was the first major celestial atlas published after the posthumous publication of the Atlas of John Flamsteed, England's first Royal Astronomer.



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Although many astronomers praised the Flamsteed atlas for its accuracy, others were unhappy with the unwieldy size and inelegant plates. This dissatisfaction resulted in John Bevis's decision to base his work on Bayer's *Uranometria*, rather than Flamsteed's work. Bevis succeeded in having the plates engraved for his atlas with the assistance of publisher John Neale, but Neale's bankruptcy prevented publication of the Atlas, although a star catalog was printed.

Careful cross-referencing of the dedications on each work allows the date for the creation of the plates to be constrained to between 1747-1749. By comparing the titles suggested in the work to Royal Society and clergy records, upper and lower bounds of the date of creation can be made.

When one compares the Bevis atlas to Bayer's *Uranometria*, it is apparent that Bevis followed the plan of the Bayer atlas exactly. There are the same number of plates, of the same size, and each covers the same area of the sky. The constellation figures are also stylistically identical. But the two are not the same. Bevis has more stars, and more accurate positions for those stars. He also took pains to include the many new or variable stars that had been recently discovered, as well as the nebulous objects. There are in fact nine Messier objects on the Bevis charts (including M1, which Bevis discovered), and five of them had never before appeared in a star atlas.

The bankruptcy of the printer Neale resulted in the plates being sequestered by the courts, and the Bevis *Uranographia*, as it was to have been called, was not published until 1786, some 15 years after his death. Fortunately, a number of impressions were printed from the plates before they disappeared, and nearly all of these pre-publication sets--some sixteen in all--are still preserved in various libraries around the world. The individual plates were also offered for sale separately.

References to a posthumous 1786 Bevis *Atlas Celeste* prove difficult to follow. Academic debate as to the nature of a paper residing in the British Library copy of the *Uranographia* advertising a 1786 publication suggests that there was an effort after Bevis's death to resell the work, without crediting him. Other "title page" editions, including one from 1818 held at Cambridge's Whipple Library, advertise a similar thing. Ashworth concludes that several later entrepreneurs tried to resell the original copy under their own name, with the 1786 copy being a prime example of a "ghost work."

#### **Rarity**

Separate plates from the Bevis Atlas are very rare on the market. This set of the 12 signs of the Zodiac, in matching early color, is quite possibly the largest set of separately published plates in private hands.

The census of surviving individual plates compiled by the Manchester Astronomical Society records the largest existing set of separately published plates as 6, residing in the UK Government's Art Collection.



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[https://www.manastro.org/bevis/IDENTIFIED\\_Uranographia\\_sets\\_June\\_2019.pdf](https://www.manastro.org/bevis/IDENTIFIED_Uranographia_sets_June_2019.pdf)

**Detailed Condition:**