



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

**(Lasalle's Final Expedition) Dernieres Decouvertes dans L'Amerique Septentrionale de
M. De La Sale [i.e., La Salle], Mises au jour par M. le Chevalier Tonti, Gouverneur du
Fort Saint Louis, aux Islinois.**

Stock#: 69476
Map Maker: Tonti
Date: 1697
Place: Paris
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 4 x 6.5 inches
Price: \$ 24,500.00



Description:

"The most worthy and reliable reports of Lasalle's efforts to establish the French Empire in America" - Greenly

First Edition, First Issue, with the uncanceled leaves relating to pearl fisheries near Natchez, which were replaced in some copies with a single leaf in an attempt at suppression by the French government.

This work stands as one of the great rarities of French exploration in North America. It concerns La Salle's ill-fated final expedition in the interior of North America in the late 17th-century, to the mouth of the Mississippi. Henri de Tonti was an Italian soldier who served as lieutenant to René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle during their exploration of the interior of North America in the 1670s and '80s.

The overarching goal of this early expedition, which began in 1684, was to establish a French foothold at the mouth of the Mississippi, to be used for future explorations, and as a bulwark against the Spanish. Instead, the base was set up at Espiritu Santo Bay (in present-day Texas), where the group made excursions into the surrounding area. When their expected reinforcements failed to arrive, La Salle opted to return to Canada via the Mississippi. However, he never made it to Canada as a member of his own expedition assassinated him in March of 1687, near the Trinity River.



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Tonti was repeatedly left in charge of the French settlements in the interior when La Salle went back to Ontario and then again when he left for France in 1683. During these independent commands, Tonti traveled widely and suffered extreme privations. In 1680 he was stabbed during a battle with the Iroquois. In 1686, he gained word that La Salle was in the Gulf of Mexico and so made his way to the mouth of the Mississippi to meet him. However, Tonti learned that La Salle had been murdered by one of his men at the Trinity River. Tonti then attempted to reach the location before turning around due to insufficient supplies, returning to Illinois. While on his way to meet La Salle, Tonti founded the first permanent European settlement in the Lower Mississippi Valley, *Poste aux Arkansas*, or Arkansas Post, which led to him being called the "Father of Arkansas".

This is an example of the rare first issue, with the uncanceled leaves Q1-2 describing pearl fishing near Natchez. Tonti visited a village of Taensa Indians, who were apparently finding pearls in some of the clams they harvested near Lake St. Joseph, in what is now Tensas Parish, Louisiana. French authorities did not care to publicize these pearl discoveries. As stated by Sabin:

In some copies pp. 185-188 are cancelled and replaced by one leaf, printed in smaller type, and numbered in the upper corners of the recto 185-186, and on the verso 187-188. The portion omitted related to pearls. The NYP copy has the original pp. 185-188 and a photostat copy of the substitute leaf at the end.

Sabin relates the controversy over the authorship of the book:

Tonti disclaimed the authorship of this publication, but it was probably based in part on some of his papers. Charlevoix in his "Histoire ... de la Nouvelle France," vol. 2, 1744, p. 260, states that Tonti "protesta qu'elle n'étoit point de lui, mais d'un Aventurier Parisien, qui l'avoit composée sur de mauvais Mémoires, & la lui avoit attribuée, pour lui donner cours, & gagner de l'argent." See also Margry's "Relations et Mémoires inédits," 1867, pp. 1-5, and Winsor, vol. 4, p. 240.

Henry Wagner states that no copy seems to be known with a map, despite some indication that a map was issued with the book, adding:

Tonty's contribution is important because it was, no doubt, derived from survivors of the expedition who managed to reach Illinois. The work is made up from two manuscript accounts by Tonty, one written in Quebec and dated November 14, 1684... and another written in 1693....Tonty had nothing to do with publishing the book, - at least he disavowed it.



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Regardless of Tonti's disavowal of the book, it remains a vital and important account of the early western frontier and served as a promotional work for North America for French readers of the time. The book includes descriptions of buffalo hunts by Native American tribes, and incorporates other details about native inhabitants of America, as well as information on the animals inhabiting the regions traversed.

Rarity

This work is rare in the market and fetches a strong price whenever a copy appears for sale. A copy in a later 19th-century leather binding sold at auction for more than \$25,000 in 2021. In 1999 the Frank Siebert copy sold for \$29,900 (including commission) at the landmark sale of Dr. Siebert's superb Americana collection. Our example is comparable to the Siebert copy, which was also bound in a contemporary calf binding with marbled endpapers, with similar minor defects to the head and tail of the spine and some general scuffing.

Detailed Condition:

Duodecimo. Contemporary full speckled calf, spine in six compartments, raised bands, compartments gilt-tooled, red morocco lettering-piece in the second compartment: "Decouvert / Dans / L'Ameriq." Small losses spine ends (mainly to foot of spine, about an inch), corners worn and general edge scuffing, joints starting, but covers holding by cords. [4], 333, [21] pages. Complete. First marbled (free) endpaper excised (though pastedown portion present), thin marginal worm tracks to pages 97-120, 127-138, 231-253, 271-288, and to unnumbered pages at end (leaves [Eeiiii]-Gg) - maximum size of any worm tracks about one-inch in length, text unaffected).