



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
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[San Juan, Puerto Rico]

Stock#: 49459ba

Map Maker: Anonymous

Date: 1775 circa

Place: n.p.

Color: Pen & Ink

Condition: VG-

Size: 35 x 32 inches

Price: SOLD



Description:

Manuscript Plan of San Juan Harbor, Puerto Rico Showing Sounding and City Outlines

This manuscript map shows the exhaustive soundings that were conducted around San Juan Harbor to ensure the safety of sailors and ships. Sounding depths pepper the waterway, while dotted lines indicate sand bars and shoals with shallower waters.

The city of San Juan is laid out in neat, straight streets on its peninsula to the bottom of this south-oriented plan. Light pencil marks indicate the city walls and forts, with roads and outbuildings trailing to the east. The outlines are now faded, but the orderly city planning and fortifications characteristic of Spanish colonial ports is still evident.

The principal points of the city and bay are labeled in a key in the upper right corner, along with the key. These include forts, city entrances, islands, warehouses, and hills. Based on the city size and names, this map appears to come from the mid- to late-eighteenth century.

Given the unusually large size and condition of the map, we believe it is quite likely a working chart, either used by a harbor pilot or by a survey team, undertaking updated soundings in the harbor. This is by far the largest manuscript chart of the harbor of San Juan (or any other harbor) from the 18th Century and does not conform to other Spanish Charts of San Juan which we have located in institutional collections (with one exception below), with the average size of most such institutional charts being about 14 x 17 inches.



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The map does bear a similarity to Jose Montero de Espinosa's map of the San Juan Harbor in the Library of Congress (24.5 x 32 inches). The coastal features, soundings, shoals, depths and other information is almost identical.

Montero: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g4974s.ct000306/>

Puerto Rico

Originally occupied by the Taíno people, Puerto Rico was claimed by Columbus for Spain in 1493. However, the Spanish did not begin to settle the island until 1508, when Juan Ponce de León came from Hispaniola. He and his men began mining and built their first settlement at Caparra, to the west of San Juan. In 1526, the capital was moved to the strategic peninsula at the mouth of a bay; this is modern San Juan. This new site was preferable because it was easily defendable, had space for urban expansion (but not agriculture), and was healthier due to winds from the sea.

After the gold seams emptied in the 1530s, Puerto Rican settlers began migrating to other colonies. This inhibited the island's population growth and kept San Juan generally stable in size from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Over time, the island shifted in purpose, becoming a military outpost useful in defending passing ship convoys. This also made Puerto Rico a target for Spanish enemies. The French attacked in 1528 and 1539, spurring construction of the forts. The Englishman Francis Drake battered San Juan in 1595, followed by a three month occupation by the Earl of Cumberland in 1598. The Dutchman Boudewijn Hendriksz struck in 1625, leading to the 150-year construction of the city walls, whose outline is visible on this map. In the late eighteenth century, when this plan was drawn, the city was a strategic yet not central military outpost supported by imported agriculture.

Detailed Condition:

Soiled and some what crinkled, with areas of loss, repaired at an early date.