



# Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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## La mas Noble y Leal Ciudad de Oaxaca dividida en Cuarteles de orden del exmo. Señor Marques de Branciforte Virei de esta Nueva España.

**Stock#:** 49463ba  
**Map Maker:** Anonymous  
**Date:** 1795 circa  
**Place:**  
**Color:**  
**Condition:** VG  
**Size:** 14 x 11 inches  
**Price:** SOLD



### Description:

#### *Town plan of Oaxaca, a superb example of Spanish colonial urban planning*

This town plan shows Oaxaca in its colonial era. It depicts an orderly city and underlines the intense degree to which the Spanish planned their colonial cities.

Two rivers flank the sides of the town, which is divided into neat squares. The city itself is divided into quarters. The city's coat of arms is in the upper left corner, while a 32-point compass rose is in the upper right. The author left a signature in the lower right corner. In the final corner, the lower left, is a simple, unfinished scale and a cartouche. The cartouche is formed of a bird, flowers, and curlicues. It encloses the title with the city's official name, yet leaves some space blank, again suggesting the plan was unfinished.

### The Marqués de Branciforte

The title reveals that plan was ordered by the Marqués de Branciforte, the Viceroy of New Spain. Don Miguel de la Grúa Talamanca de Carini y Branciforte, first Marqués de Branciforte, was born in Palermo, Sicily around 1755. Young Don Miguel joined the Spanish army and rose to the rank of captain general. A protégé of the Spanish Prime Minister, Manuel de Godoy, Branciforte married Godoy's sister in 1790. He received the title of Marqués de Branciforte prior to being named Viceroy on March 26, 1794.

Widely believed to be one of the worst governors in New Spain's history, Branciforte concentrated on



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amassing a fortune for himself and Godoy. Ruling during the Napoleonic Wars, Branciforte seized all lands held by the French in New Spain and Louisiana and re-sold them, taking a piece of the profits in the process. When Spain declared war on Britain in 1797 he did the same to Britons living in Spanish lands. The Ayuntamiento of Mexico City eventually sued Branciforte for corruption, but the viceroy prevailed. He was removed from office in 1798, having only served four years. He died in Marseille, France in 1812. While his time in Mexico may not have been positive for Mexicans, it is helpful for dating this plan to ca. 1794-8.

#### **Oaxaca**

Oaxaca is located in the Central Valleys region of the state of Oaxaca, in southern Mexico. The city is in the foothills of the Sierra Madre and is tucked between the base of Cerro del Fortín and the banks of the rivers Jalatlaco (written as Xalataco here) and Atoyaque.

Zapotec and Mixtec peoples have lived in the Valley of Oaxaca for thousands of years. Near to modern Oaxaca are the ancient settlements of Monte Albán and Mitla, which are major tourist draws for the state today. The Aztecs came in 1440, lending the area the name of Huaxyacac, which the Spanish changed to Guajaca and, eventually, Oaxaca. The conquistadores arrived in 1521 under the command of Francisco de Orozco and in search of gold. They built a city on the site of an Aztec fort, at the foot of Cerro del Fortín.

Despite royal recognition as a town in 1526, Hernán Cortés continually menaced the settlers in an attempt to consolidate his own power. In 1529, the town was re-founded as Antequera; it was in this iteration of settlement that the first layout was completed, by Juan Peláez de Berrio. This layout was on a grid pattern, the expansion of which is shown in this document. Still harassed by Cortés, who was now Marqués de la Valle de Oaxaca, the city appealed to the Crown for recognition as a city, under the direct control of the King. This status was granted in 1532.

The town was built around a central *zocalo*, or square, which is near where the four quarters come together in this plan. During the colonial period the plaza was never paved, but it did have a marble fountain from 1739. On the south side was the Archbishop's Palace. The town's cathedral is on the north side of the square. The present church is the third church built on this site, but it is the same as would have been seen in the 1790s. The first two were destroyed by earthquakes. The third church's construction began in 1702; it was consecrated in 1733.

Churches, chapels, and other religious buildings are marked with black squares and crosses on the plan. Four blocks to the north of the Cathedral is the complex of Santo Domingo, a church and Dominican monastery. It was built beginning 1557 and was only completed 200 years later, just before the creation of



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this plan. Today, the former monastery houses the Cultural Center of Oaxaca.

#### **Spanish city planning**

One of the reasons Oaxaca city center is now a UNESCO World Heritage site is that it is a superb surviving example of the grid pattern so central to the Spanish colonial city. Of course, the Spanish were not the first to think of using a grid pattern, that is, blocks separated by streets set out parallel and perpendicular to each other. The Aztecs and the Maya both used grid patterns in their settlements. In Europe, the Ancient Greeks used the idea and the Romans spread it.

Initially, Spanish colonial settlements grew organically. However, later in the sixteenth century, the Spanish government issued the Law of the Indies, which included measures dictating the layout of new colonial settlements in a specific pattern, or *traza*. The goal of the planning was to project order and grandeur. All towns were to center on an open plaza, around which the buildings meant to direct the most important activities-religion, government, commerce, military, celebrations-were to be built. Those of higher social status were to live nearer the center of a town, creating a social as well as a spatial map of power. This geography of power is still visible on this town plan.

#### **Detailed Condition:**