



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

[Untitled Map of Mexico City]

Stock#: 49533ba
Map Maker: Ramusio
Date: 1556 (1606)
Place: Padua
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 11 x 7 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Rare and Important Early Plan of Mexico City from Ramusio's Navigazione et viaggi

With the exception of the image of Santo Domingo which accompanied Columbus' first letter, the earliest plan of any city in America is the Cortes map of Tenochtitlan (Mexico City), which first appeared in 1524 as part of the *Praeclara Ferdinadi Cortesii de Noua maris Oceani Hyspania narratio* published in Nuremberg. Variant editions of the plan appeared in Bordone's *Isolario*, Munster's *Cosmographia*, Antoine du Pinet's *Plantz, pourtraitz et descriptions de plusiueres villes et fortresses*, and Ramusio's *Navigazione et viaggi*. This example is from the latter.

Mexico City, or Tenochtitlan, was founded by the Mexica, or Aztecs, in 1325. The Aztecs built their city on

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an island on the western side of Lake Texcoco. While the location may seem strange, Aztec stories tell how Huitzilopochtli, their principal god, identified the location of the city as the place where an eagle would be perched on a nopal cactus with a snake in its beak, a sight found on the island. By the time the Spanish arrived in 1519, Tenochtitlan had come to dominate the other city-states around Lake Texcoco, and in the Valley of Mexico.

As seen from the south-oriented plan, Tenochtitlan had grown to become a large city, with floating gardens and an elaborate system of canals and dams controlling the water levels. The plan emphasizes the many ceremonial sites in the city, particularly the large temple in the central square. The level of detail is extraordinary and contains details not included in Cortez's letters. Initially, scholars thought the plan was entirely a German invention, but now scholars think the wood block engraver might have been working from an indigenous map brought back from America. Unfortunately, by the time this plan was published in 1524, let alone when it was reprinted and spread across Europe, Tenochtitlan had been largely destroyed in the Spanish conquest.

Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1485-1557) was an Italian geographer who worked within the Venetian Empire. His father had been a magistrate and he himself served as a civil servant to Venice. He served throughout Europe, allowing him to build up a network of informants and a collection of travel materials. He compiled this information into his enduring masterpiece, *Navigazioni et Viaggi*, in 1555 (first volume) and 1556 (third volume). The second volume appeared after his death in 1559, as the original manuscript had been destroyed by a fire.

Detailed Condition: