



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(Veracruz and Vicinity) (Manuscript Map)

Stock#: 56944
Map Maker: Anonymous
Date: 1700 circa
Place: Mexico
Color: Pen & Ink with Wash Color
Condition: VG+
Size: 8 x 11 inches
Price: \$1,800.00



Description:

Fine Manuscript Chart of the Waters Around Veracruz, Mexico, including the Fortress of San Juan de Ulúa

Nice manuscript chart of the waters surrounding the important port of Veracruz, Mexico. This chart was found laid in loosely in a Spanish edition of Van Keulen's volume on the coasts of the Americas, part of his sea atlas first published in the early 1680s.

The chart centers on what is here called Nueva Veracruz, which is today the main port of Veracruz. San Juan de Ulúa, the island fortress facing the port, is detailed with the walls of the fort outlined. Between Nueva Veracruz and the Punta de Hornos is a church called "Sto Chto." This refers to the Iglesia del Cristo del Buan Viaje, a chapel built in 1609. The church's age underscores the long history of this area, the first to be settled by the Spanish when they invaded in the early sixteenth century.

The paleographic evidence points to a likely creation date of ca. 1700. The chart is northeast oriented and shows many details meant to help pilots and sailors. The shore is shown with a thick blue line extending into the waters, warning of the shallows that border the coast. Obstructions to navigation are highlighted with numerous "x" marks. Large sandbanks and sediment build-ups, some around the islands near the port, are drawn in blue and outlined in a lighter color. Sounding depths also indicate that this was a document meant to aid navigators negotiating the port's tricky hydrography.

Veracruz

The chart focuses on Veracruz, which had long been an area important to Mexico's indigenous peoples



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and later the Spanish settlers. Indigenous peoples, specifically the Huastecos, Otomíes, Totonacas, and Olmecs, lived in the region that is now the state of Veracruz. Later, Aztec peoples conquered and lived in the area.

Although the island of San Juan de Ulúa was first contacted by Europeans in 1518, the town of Veracruz was founded by Hernan Cortez when he landed farther north on the mainland of New Spain on April 22, 1519. It was Good Friday, also known as the Day of the True Cross, hence the name Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz, or Rich Village of the True Cross. The settlement received a coat of arms in 1523, the first place on mainland America to receive one. It is also the site of the first Catholic church to be built on the American mainland.

This settlement, however, is not the one shown on this chart. The original settlement is now called La Antigua and is located 20 kilometers north of present-day port of Veracruz. The settlement relocated in 1600 to the defensible position shown here, with the intimidating San Juan de Ulúa as protection.

Veracruz's main exports were silver and gold, mined from Potosí and other American mines, while its imports were numerous as Spain forbid the manufacturing of many goods in the New World. One of the most notable imports were human slaves from Africa. The region surrounding the port had the largest enslaved population in Mexico in the colonial period.

Veracruz was an important city in the Spanish American empire, and not just as a slave port. From the sixteenth century, Spain operated a closed monopoly of trade with its colonies; the colonies were only allowed to trade in Spanish goods brought on Spanish ships, although many smugglers and pirates undermined this system. Veracruz was the port on New Spain's eastern coast that received the Spanish treasure galleons, while Acapulco served this function on the west coast. The goods were then taken by wagon to the interior and sold at lucrative fairs; each fair produced around 20 million pesos worth of trade.

San Juan de Ulúa

As mentioned, Juan de Grijalva landed at and named San Juan de Ulúa in 1518, but Cortes settled farther north. Previously, the island had been used as a ritual site for the local peoples. The fort itself was begun in the 1560s and continued to be remodeled and fortified into the nineteenth century. It was an important site for the beginning and ending of Spanish rule in Mexico.

Veracruz was the gateway to trade with Spain, as well as the entrepot to the Americas. To lose control of the port would spell disaster for the Spanish Empire, which explains why San Juan de Ulúa was so heavily fortified and constantly updated—it was considered one of the most technically advanced and formidable



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forts in the world in the early modern period. Originally constructed from the coral of nearby waters, and built with forced African and indigenous labor, the walls of the fort were 30 meters thick. By the mid-eighteenth century there were six massive bastions.

However, it was not impervious and was also the site of frequent attacks by Spain's enemies. For example, John Hawkins and his cousin, Francis Drake, set out from Plymouth in 1567 to harass Spanish trade and win prizes. Their venture came to a screeching halt when the Spanish fleet caught up to them near San Juan de Ulúa. Initially, the Spanish agreed to allow the Englishmen, who were likely carrying on an illegal trade with Spanish settlers, to water and repair their ships. Then, the Spanish attacked. Drake and Hawkins both managed to escape in two small ships, but over 500 of their men and their other ships were lost.

Later, San Juan de Ulúa would be the final stand of the Spanish in Mexico. Although the Mexican Revolution to break free of Spain ended in 1821, a contingent of Spanish soldiers managed to maintain control of the island fortress until 1825. Later, the fortress was used as a prison and as a presidential palace, a switch brought about by Benito Juarez, who had been a prisoner there before becoming president. The French attacked in 1836 and 1863, while the Americans invaded in 1848 and 1914.

San Juan de Ulúa and the port of Veracruz are potent symbols of Mexican history and heritage, a story powerfully captured on this chart. Manuscript charts like this are rare, making it a fine addition to any collection of Mexican cartography.

Detailed Condition: