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Carte du Mexique et des Pays Limitrophes...d'apres la Grande Carte de la Nouvelle Espagne De Mr. A De Humboldt . . . 1811

Stock#: 90904
Map Maker: Von Humboldt
Date: 1811
Place: Paris
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 28.5 x 17 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

Humboldt's Striking Map of Mexico, a Central Document in the Mapping of the American West

This is the seminal map of the American Southwest, the Rockies, and Texas from the rare Grand Folio edition of the atlas volume from Humboldt's *Essai Politique*, one of the most important works on the West in the early nineteenth century.

The map shows North America from Atlantic to Pacific, and from just south of the Yucatan Peninsula to the 42nd parallel. The map shows a clear command of Spanish travel accounts, New Spanish archival documents, and the other map published of the region. Mountains are marked with hachures, one of the first to do so in such detail. Humboldt has added many notes from his research, yet also leaves open spaces where he cannot corroborate information. As he explains:

I chose rather to leave vacant space in my map than to draw from suspicious sources...I have traced on my map of New Spain the direction of the Cordilleras, not from vague suppositions or hypothetical combinations, but from a great variety of data. (as quoted in Wheat, 134)

Humboldt correctly surmises that the Rio Napestle was actually the Arkansas River. He also had heard of the vast expanses of the Great Plains, although he had never seen them, as he wrote that there were, "*Plaines immenses ou paissent les Bisons (Cibola)*." To the west, is the eastern shore of the Great Salt Lake, the dimensions of which are *inconnues*.

Mapping Mexico

Humboldt spent five years, from 1799 to 1804, travelling throughout South America and Mexico. Prior to



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leaving, Humboldt secured permissions from the court of Carlos IV, giving him the freedom to travel and, crucially, access to archives and reports in Spanish colonial possessions. While traveling, he would make important discoveries, like his observations on the variation of plant life at altitude, which resembled their variance over latitude. For cartography, he recorded and mapped isothermal lines, lines connecting points of equal temperature, one of the first and certainly one of the most famous examples of thematic mapping.

Humboldt spent his final year in the Americas in Mexico, where he mined all documents he could find for geographical information. While at the *Real Seminario de Minería* (Royal School of Mines), he sketched the manuscript precursor to this map. Humboldt was particularly dedicated to the project of a new map because he thought the existing models were poor. He said:

It appears astonishing that the most recent map which we possess of that part of New Spain which we are analyzing, and which bears the name of a justly esteemed author, should be the falsest of all. I speak of the large English map, which has for title, Chart of the West Indies and Spanish Dominions in North America, by Arrowsmith, published in June, 1803. From Mexico to Vera Cruz the names appear to be scattered at random. (as quoted in Wheat, 133)

His attempt to rectify this cartographic travesty resulted in the "most important and most accurate published map" of the American West to date, according to Wheat (137).

The *Carte Generale du Royaume de la Nouvelle Espagne* was printed in 1809 (Paris, Aubert) and again in 1811 as part of the *Atlas Geographique et Physique de Royaume de la Nouvelle Espagne* (Paris, Schoell). The atlas was the visual accompaniment to Humboldt's *Essai Politique sur le Royaume de Nouvelle Espagne*. The *Carte Generale* covers the region from the Gulf of California, or the *Mer de Cortes* as it is on Humboldt's map, to the Gulf of Mexico. The importance and respect the map commanded is best illustrated by the fact that Zebulon Pike and Aaron Arrowsmith both plagiarized Humboldt's work in their 1810 maps.

In 1811, J. B. Poirson released this map, which includes a reduced version of the *Carte Generale* yet extends farther east and west; it shows the entirety of Baja California and the Caribbean. It follows the *Carte Generale* in the *Atlas Geographique et Physique de Royaume de la Nouvelle Espagne*. Information for the Pacific coast came from the accounts of the *Sutil* and *Mexicana*, the Spanish ships that explored the Pacific Northwest in the 1790s and helped George Vancouver chart the area near the Strait of Georgia. Poirson also used an 1806 astronomical account by M. Espinosa. To the east, material came from a map by Lafond, a French engineer. This is a first edition example; there was at least one re-issue in 1827.



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Alexander Humboldt and his collaborators

Alexander Humboldt (1769-1859) is one of the most famous botanists and natural historians of the nineteenth century; he is also known as an innovative cartographer. Born in Tagel, near Berlin, he attended university in Frankfurt, Gottingen, Hamburg, and Freiburg. Although he showed some promise as an administrator in the mining industry, Humboldt opted instead to go to Vienna to study botany. In 1799, he set off for the Americas on a self-financed voyage of discovery to study all the subjects he had hitherto read about, including geology, mining, botany, and astronomy.

After his time in Latin America, Humboldt visited the United States. He left a manuscript copy of his *Carte Generale* in Washington; it is this chart which Pike used for his own 1810 map. Upon his arrival in Europe, he found that his letters had been published in his absence, cementing his celebrity. Humboldt settled in Paris and began to share his findings. He had published 69 works on the American trip alone by 1870. In 1829, Humboldt answered a summons to return to Prussia where he became an advisor to the court. Besides a trip to Siberia, Humboldt never traveled seriously again. He died in Berlin in 1859.

This map was engraved by Barriere (1764-1823), who was also responsible for the *Carte Generale*. The Barriere family was well known for their engraving skill and were associated with the War Department. It was drawn, from Humboldt's manuscript, by Aubert, and sold by F. Schoell (1766-1833), bookseller. Schoell, in addition to selling books, also worked as a diplomat.

The map is central to the history of Mexican and American cartography and an essential item for collectors of the Transmississippi West, Mexico and Texas.

Detailed Condition:

Minor offsetting and evidence of old folds.