

## CALIFORNIA AS AN ISLAND



### TITLE

Carte de la Californie suivant I. La carte manuscrite de l'Amerique de Mathieu Neron Pecci olen dresse a Florence en 1604 II. Sanson 1656 III. De L'isle Amerique Sept. 1700 IV. le Pere Kino Jesuite en 1705 V. La Societe des Jesuites en 1767.

1772 (undated) 11.5 x 15 in (29.21 x 38.1 cm)

#### DESCRIPTION

This is a scarce and important engraving combining five seminal maps of California on one sheet. European understanding of the region's geography was convoluted and changed many times over the course of more than a century. This map, engraved by the important French cartographer Robert De Vaugondy for the 1772 edition of the Denis Diderot (1713-84) *Encyclopedie*, traces the gradual clarification of the geography of California through five key stages in the mapping of the region. It opens with the work of Italian cartographer Matheau Neron Pecci (1604) which correctly presumed that the main body of California extended southward into a peninsula. The next map illustrated, by Nicolas Sanson in 1656, was among the most influential of the maps of the 17th century to propose an insular California. Map no. III, by Guillaume Delisle (1700), was one of the first maps produced by a prominent geographer to abandon the insular California. The fourth is the seminal Kino Map. This map, rendered by a Jesuit missionary c.1705, was the work that finally disproved the California Insular theory. Father Franz Kino walked this region between 1698 and 1701. The final map, produced by unnamed Jesuits c. 1767 is a more accurate depiction of the Baja California peninsula. These maps all predate the discoveries of Captain Cook's voyages and hence Diderot's work was as much speculative as historical in many respects - though the Jesuit reports pertaining to California's non-insularity were authoritative. A fine example of an essential work for all serious California collections.

This map is part of the 10 map series prepared by Vaugondy for the *Supplement to Diderot's Encyclopedie*, of which this is plate 5. This remarkable map series, exploring the mapping of North America and specifically the Northwest Passage was one of the first studies in comparative cartography.

## Insular California

The idea of an insular California first appeared as a work of fiction in Garci Rodriguez de Montalvo's c. 1510 romance *Las Sergas de Esplandian*, where he writes:

*“Know, that on the right hand of the Indies there is an island called California very close to the side of the Terrestrial Paradise; and it is peopled by black women, without any man among them, for they live in the manner of Amazons”.*

Baja California was subsequently discovered in 1533 by Fortun Ximenez, who had been sent to the area by Hernan Cortez. When Cortez himself traveled to Baja, he must have had Montalvo's novel in mind, for he immediately claimed the 'Island of California' for the Spanish King. By the late 16th and early 17th century ample evidence had been amassed, through explorations of the region by Francisco de Ulloa, Hernando de Alarcon, and others, that California was in fact a peninsula. Nonetheless, by this time other factors were in play. Francis Drake had sailed north and claimed Nova Albion, modern day Washington or Vancouver, for England. The Spanish thus needed to promote Cortez's claim on the 'Island of California' to preempt English claims on the western coast of North America. The significant influence of the Spanish crown on European cartographers spurred a major resurgence of the Insular California theory.

## Printed Maps with Insular California

The earliest surviving map to illustrate California as an island is considered to be the 1622 title page to the Michiel Colijn edition of Antonio Herrera's *Descriptio Indiae Occidentalis*. Even so, the insular California convention formally dates to 1620, when the Dutch seized a Spanish ship transporting the account of Friar Antonio de la Ascension, which was intended for the Council of the Indies. In that work, the good Friar apparently asserted his strong belief that California is insular - although his sources are unknown. While the Friar Antonio account is now lost, a legend on the Henry Briggs map of 1625 conveys this information and that Briggs saw such a map in 1622. Colijn may have seen the same map when preparing this Herrera title page.

## CARTOGRAPHERS

Gilles (1688 - 1766) and Didier (c. 1723 - 1786) Robert de Vaugondy were map publishers, engravers, and cartographers active in Paris during the mid-18th century. The father and son team

were the inheritors to the important Sanson cartographic firm whose stock supplied much of their initial material. Graduating from Sanson's map's Gilles, and more particularly Didier, began to produce their own substantial corpus of work. Vaugondys were well respected for the detail and accuracy of their maps in which they made excellent use of the considerable resources available in 18th century Paris to produce the most accurate and fantasy-free maps possible. The Vaugondys compiled each map based upon their own superior geographic knowledge, scholarly research, the journals of contemporary explorers and missionaries, and direct astronomical observation - moreover, unlike many cartographers of this period, they commonly took pains to reference their source material. Nevertheless, even in 18th century Paris geographical knowledge was severely limited - especially regarding those unexplored portions of the world, including the poles, the Pacific northwest of America, and the interior of Africa and South America. In these areas the Vaugondys, like their rivals De L'Isle and Buache, must be considered speculative geographers. Speculative geography was a genre of mapmaking that evolved in Europe, particularly Paris, in the middle to late 18th century. Cartographers in this genre would fill in unknown areas on their maps with speculations based upon their vast knowledge of cartography, personal geographical theories, and often dubious primary source material gathered by explorers and navigators. This approach, which attempted to use the known to validate the unknown, naturally engendered many rivalries. Vaugondy's feuds with other cartographers, most specifically Phillippe Buache, resulted in numerous conflicting papers being presented before the Academie des Sciences, of which both were members. The era of speculatively cartography effectively ended with the late 18th century explorations of Captain Cook, Jean Francois de Galaup de La Prouse, and George Vancouver. After Didier died, his maps were acquired by Jean-Baptiste Fortin who in 1787 sold them to Charles-François Delamarche (1740 - 1817). While Delamarche prospered from the Vaugondy maps, he also defrauded Vaugondy's widow Marie Louise Rosalie Dangy of her inheritance and may even have killed her. [Learn More...](#)

Denis Diderot (October 5, 1713 - July 31, 1784) was a French Enlightenment era philosopher, publisher and writer. Diderot was born in the city of Langres, France and educated at the Lycée Louis le Grand where, in 1732, he earned a master of arts degree in philosophy. Diderot briefly considered careers in the clergy and in law, but in the end chose the more fiscally challenge course

of a writer. Though well respected in philosophical circles Diderot was unable to obtain any of the government commissions that commonly supported his set and consequently spent much of his life in deep poverty. He is best known for his role in editing and producing the Encyclopédie . The Encyclopédie was one of the most revolutionary and impressive works of its time. Initially commissioned as a translation of Ephraim Chambers' Cyclopaedia, or Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences, Diderot instead turned into a much larger and entirely new work of monumental depth and scope. Diderot's Encyclopédie was intended to lay bare before the common man the intellectual mysteries of science, art and philosophy. This revolutionary mission was strongly opposed by the powers of the time who considered a learned middle class it a threat to their authority. In the course of the Encyclopédie production Diderot was imprisoned twice and the work itself was officially banned. Nonetheless, publication continued in response to a demand exceeding 4000 subscribers. The Encyclopédie was finally published in 1772 in 27 volumes. Following the publication of the Encyclopédie Diderot grew in fame but not in wealth. When the time came to dower his only surviving daughter, Angelique, Diderot could find no recourse save to sell his treasured library. In a move of largess, Catherine the II Russia sent an emissary to purchase the entire library on the condition that Diderot retain it in his possession and act as her "librarian" until she required it. When Diderot died of gastro-intestinal problems 1784, his heirs promptly sent his vast library to Catherine II who had it deposited at the Russian National Library, where it resides to this day. [Learn More...](#)

#### SOURCE

Supplement to Diderot's Encyclopedie, ou dictionnaire raisonne des sciences, des arts et des metiers. or Vaugondy's Recueil de 10 Cartes Traitant Particulierement de L'Amerique du Nord, (1779).

#### CONDITION

Fine condition. Original platemark visible, with generous margins deckled on the upper edge. An unusually sharp, bold strike.

## REFERENCES

Tooley, R. V., Landmarks of Mapmaking; an Illustrated Survey of Maps and Mapmakers, p.215.  
Tooley, R.V., The Mapping of America, p. 134, #100. McLaughlin, G., The Mapping of California as an Island: An Illustrated Checklist, #241. Fite, D. E., and Freeman, A., A Book of Old Maps, Delineating American history from the Earliest Days down to the Close of the Revolutionary War, #52. Heckrotte & Sweetkind #15. Wheat, C., The Mapping of the Transmississippi West, 1540-1861, 160. Pedley, Mary Sponberg, Bel et Utile: The Work of the Robert de Vaugondy Family of Mapmakers. 474. Leighly, John, California as an Island; an Illustrated Essay, 177. Schwartz, Seymour I. and Ehrenberg, Ralph E., The Mapping of America, p. 136. Wagner, Henry R., The Cartography of the Northwest Coast of America to the Year 1800, Vol II, 637.