

A Buyer's Guide to Maps of Antarctica

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Lot 657D

Topographical Map of the Ross Ice Shelf (The Seal Map)

Acuña, Nahuel, 1908

Minor tear, upper left corner. Moderate staining in left margin.

Landmass centered, Argentinean coast visible in the extreme upper quadrant. Latitude and longitude in sepia ink. Compass rose: a seal indicating north with her head, east and west with her flippers, south with the serrated ice floe on which the beast is situated. Legend in original handwriting. Ross Ice Shelf depicted with remarkable precision for the era, see Referent A (recent satellite imaging) for comparison.

The 1907 expedition to the Antarctic continent was doubly notable: it was on this virgin crossing that young Nahuel Acuña, barely free of university, lost his right foot to an Orca in estrus, and by simplest chance the good ship *Proximidad* employed an untested botanist by the name of Villalba Maldonado. Maldonado, himself a recent graduate of no less note than his illustrious shipmate, worked placidly as a cook to gain his passage, having no access to the funding that pursued Acuña through his career like a cheerful spaniel.

One may only imagine an unremarkable Saturday supper in the ice shadows and crystalline sun-prisms in which Villalba, his apron stained with penguin oil, his thinning black hair unkempt, his mustache frozen, laid a frost-scrimmed china plate before Acuña. Would he have removed his glasses before eating? Would they have exchanged words? Would he have looked up from his sextant and held the gaze of the mild-eyed Maldonado, even for a moment, before falling to? One hopes that he did; one hopes that the creaking of the *Proximidad* in one's mind is equal to its creaking in actuality.

Acuña's journal records only: *seal flank and claret for supper again. Cook insists on salads of red and white lichen. Not to my taste.*

The famous Seal Map, the first of the great Acuña Maps, offers a rare window into the early days of the rivalry, and has been assessed at \$7500US.

Curator's Note: Whiskey stains date from approximately 1952.

Lot 689F

Topographical Map of the Ross Ice Shelf (The Sun Dog Map)

Maldonado, Villalba, 1908

Single owner, Immaculate condition.

Landmass low center, no other continents visible. Latitude and longitude in unidentified black ink. Compass rose: three-horned sea-goat, a barnacle-cruled tail indicating south, upturned muzzle designating north, vestigial fins pointing east and west. Sun shown centered, with rays embossed in gold extending all the way to the ice shelf. Parhelion is indicated, however, in the place of traditional concentric circles, two large dogs flank the orb of the sun, apparently Saint Bernards or similar, their fur streaming as if in a sudden wind, embossed in silver. Their jaws hang open, as if to devour the solar rays; their paws stand elbow-deep in the seawater, creating ripples that extend to the shoreline. The Map Legend explains that the pair of dogs, called Grell and Skell, may be found at coordinates (*redacted*) and that they require gifts of penguin feet and liverwort before they are willing to part with a cupful of the sun, which if carried at the end of a fishing pole and line before the intrepid polar *conquistador*, may burn

with all the heat and pure light that he requires.

Offshore, a large, grinning Orca whale is visible, with a severed leg in her mouth.

When Maldonado returned from the *Proximidad* expedition, he arranged, presumably without knowledge of any competition, for the dissemination of his maps in parallel to Nahuel Acuña's own efforts. The printing of the Sun Dog Map, illustrated by Maldonado himself, was funded by the daughter of Alvaro Caceres, best described as a sheep and cattle magnate in the grace of whose shipping interests the *Proximidad* functioned. Pilar Caceres was delighted with the Maldonado sketches, and sold an ornate necklace of onyx and diamonds (Lot 331A) in order to finance this first map.

While the phenomenally precise Seal Map made Acuña's name and allowed him a wide choice of whalers and naturalists eager to avail themselves of his guidance, the Sun Dog Map stirred a mania for all things Antarctic in Buenos Aires. Nevertheless, Maldonado was not able to fund a second expedition until 1912, while Acuña booked passage on the *Immaculata* the following spring, confounded by the popularity of a clearly fraudulent document. He gave a lecture on the necessity of precision at the Asociación Cartographica Argentina in December of 1908, declaring it a ridiculous matter that he should be required to address such an obvious issue. He was, however, interrupted by vociferous requests for more exact descriptions of Grell and Skell.

Maldonado himself declined to appear before the Asociación despite three invitations, and published the Toothfish Map (Lot 8181Q) in early 1909 without their stamp.

This first and perhaps finest example of the cartography of Villalba Maldonado is one of only three remaining copies and has been assessed at \$18500US.

Lot 699C
Map of the South Orkney Islands
Acuña, Nahuel, 1911
Sun damage throughout, fair condition.

Four large islands and sixteen smaller isles lie in the center of the map. Isla Coronación is the only named landmass. Latitude and longitude demarcated in Mediterranean octopus ink. Thirty-two point compass rose, crowned with military arrows wrapped in laurels, and bearing the archaic *Levante* designation on its eastern arm. See Referent B for satellite comparison.

The comparatively moderate climate of the South Orkney Islands (now the Orcadas) allowed Acuña to remain there throughout the war, returning his maps to the mainland via Jokkum Vabø, an illiterate sealer and loyal friend of the cartographer. The two men built the cabin in which Acuña worked and lived, and Vabø made certain that they smoked enough seal-meat in the summer months to keep his friend breathing, returning with costly inks and papers when migrations allowed. This was to prove the most prolific period of Nahuel's life.

From 1909 to 1918, Nahuel Acuña walked the length and breadth of the South Orkneys, polishing his teak prosthetic with the snow and grasses of the coast. He built a circular boat of sealskin and walrus-bones (Lot 009A), paddling from island to island with a gargantuan oar of leather and Orca-rib, a tool he must have found rich to use. He grew a long black beard that was said to glint gold in the sun, and never thereafter shaved it. He claimed later to have given Maldonado not the slightest thought during this hermitage, though Vabø would certainly have reported his rival's doings during his visits, and as the coyly titled Seal Pot Map details just this area, there is some dispute as to whether Maldonado might have actually managed landfall during his 1912 expedition aboard the *Perdita* and met cordially with Acuña. It is not possible to ascertain the authenticity of such rumors in either direction, but it is again sweet to imagine it, the two bearded mapmakers seated upon a snowy boulder, sharing lichen-tea and watching the twilight fall onto the scarlet flensing plains. It is a gentle pleasure to imagine that they had no enmity for one another in that moment, that their teapot steamed happily between them, and that they discussed, perhaps, the invention of longitude, or methods for

slaughtering walrus.

First in the *Orcadas* series, this prime specimen of Acuña at his height has been assessed at \$6200US.

Lot 705G

Map of the South Orkney Islands (The Seal Pot Map)

Maldonado, Villalba, 1914

Single owner, very slight water damage, lower right corner.

Five large islands and twenty-six smaller isles lie in the center of the map. All are named: Isla Concepción, Isla Immaculata, Isla Perdita, Isla Proximidad, Isla Gloriana, Isla Hibisco, Isla Sello Zafiro, Isla Pingüino Azul, Isla Cielo, Isla Pájaros del Musgo, Isla Valeroso, Isla Ermitaño, Isla Ocultado, Isla Graciento, Isla Mudanza, Isla del Leones Incansable, Isla Sombras Blancas, Isla del Ballenas del Fantasma, Isla Zapato, Isla del Mar de Cristal, Isla del Morsas Calvas, Isla Rojo, Isla Ónice, Isla Embotado, Isla Mentira, Isla del Araña Verde, Isla Abejas, Isla del Pie de la Reina, Isla Acuña, Isla Pilar.

All ink sepia, compass is a seal's head peeking out of an iron pot, her flipper pointed south, the pot handles east and west, and her head, capped by the pot's lid, indicating north. Smaller versions of this creature dot the island chain, their faces intricately inscribed. The legend claims that these Footless Seals can be found on the sometimes-green shores of Isla Graciento, on the long Norwegian flensing plain that occupies most of the island: *When the Iron Try Pots left to render Seal Fat are left to boil until Moonrise, it occasionally Happens that a severed Seal Head which has a Certain blue Tinge to its whiskers will Blink and open its Eyes, and with Cunning Hop Away into the surf, carrying the Iron Try Pot with it as a new Body. If an Explorer is very clever, he will leave a few of his campfire Embers burning and pretend to Sleep. If he is an Excellent Feinter of Slumber, the Queen of the Seal Pots whose name is Huln will come to rest upon the dying Fire and warm Herself. If he has brought three Pearls as tribute, the Queen will allow him to dip his Spoon into the Pot and drink of her Broth, which is sweeter than dandelion honey, and will keep him Fed and Happy for a fortnight and more.* (translation: Furtado, 1971)

Unable to convince the skeptic Alvaro Caceres to fund a second expedition despite the popularity of his work, Villalba Maldonado contented himself with the attentions of Pilar Caceres. Portraits (Lots 114 & 115A-F) show a handsome, if severe woman, with a high widow's peak and narrow eyes. She continued to sell her jewelry to print his maps, but no amount of necklaces could equal a southbound vessel. However, she became an expert in the preparation of sheepskin parchment, and in this manner became all the more Maldonado's patroness. She wore red whenever she met with him, and allowed her thick hair to fall at least three times upon his arm. With the grudging consent of Alvaro, Villalba and Pilar were married in April of 1911. She wore no jewels, and her dress was black sealskin. She was soon pregnant, and their daughter Soledad was born shortly after Maldonado departed on the *Perdita* in 1912. Pilar arranged for him to stay on through 1915 as a nominal military service, and thus both cartographers walked the ice floes during the Great War, far from each other and as ignorant of the other's activities as of the rest of the world.

Six maps were printed and distributed between 1908 and 1912. Each was received with ravenous acclaim, and applications for passage to Antarctica tripled. "Paquetes" were sold at docks (Lots 441A-492L), wooden boxes containing "supplies" for a successful Antarctic expedition: desiccated penguin feet, bundles of liverwort, fishing poles, sheets of music to be sung at the ice-grottos of the Dream-Stealing Toothfish, cheap copies of the six maps, and three small pearls. However, most enthusiasts found themselves ultimately unable to make such a perilous voyage, and thus Maldonado's reputation grew in the absence of Acuña or any definite rebuttal of Maldonado's wonderful maps.

Not to be confused with the plentiful copies included in the *paquetes*, this original Caceres-issue map has been assessed at \$15900US.

Lot 718K
Map of Queen Maud's Land
Acuña, Nahuel, 1920
Single owner, immaculate condition.

Landmass right center, Chilean coast visible in top left quadrant. Latitude and longitude in iron gall ink. Compass rose is the top half of a young woman, her head tipped up toward north, her arms open wide to encompass east and west, her hair twisting southward into a point. See Referent C for satellite comparison, Points 1, 4, and 17 for major deviations.

Curator's Note: Obviously Queen Maud's Land was not the common appellation at the time of Acuña's map, however, his own term, Suyai's Plain, was never recognized by any government making a claim to the territory.

Upon returning from the South Orkneys in 1919, Acuña was horrified by the *paquetes* and Maldonado's celebrity. The sheer danger of packing penguin's feet instead of lamp oil made him ill, and he immediately scheduled a series of lectures condemning the cartographer, challenging him to produce either Grell or Skell (he did not state a preference) on a chain at the Asociación banquet, or Huhn, if the dogs were recalcitrant.

Attendant at these lectures was a young woman by the name of Suyai Ledesma. In imitation of her idol, Suyai had begun to produce her own maps of the *pampas*, the vast Argentine interior where both she and Acuña had been born. She presented her research at the Asociación banquet in a modest brown suit, her voice barely audible. She concluded with a gentle reminder that "the cartographer's art relies on accuracy as the moon relies on the sun to shed her own light on the world. To turn our backs on the authentic universe, as it exists beneath and before us, is to plunge into darkness."

Though Ledesma and Acuña never married, they were not often separated thenceforward, and she accompanied him along with their two sons on the *Lethe* expedition to Iles Kerguelen in 1935.

However, until the 1935 expedition, Acuña felt it was his duty to remain in Buenos Aires, to struggle against Maldonadan Antarcticana and its perils, and to rail against his rival whenever he was given a podium and a crowd with more than two folk to rub together. These philippics were eventually assembled and published posthumously by Carrizo and Rivas under the title *On Authenticity* (1961). One copy remains outside of private collections. (Lot 112C)

Maldonado responded slowly, as was his habit in all things. In 1922, his sole rejoinder was a small package, immaculately wrapped, delivered to Acuña's home. Inside was long golden chain attached to a crystal dog's collar (Lot 559M) and a note (Lot 560M) reading: *As you see I do not, as I see, you disdain. It is big enough.*

But fate would have her way, and in the end the Antarctic was not quite big enough after all. In January of 1922, three young men were found frozen to their ship on the Shackleton Ice Shelf, still clutching their *paquetes*, in possession of neither a cup of sun nor the Queen of the Try Pots. In May, Acuña had Villalba Maldonado arrested for public endangerment.

This pristine map of Queen Maud's Land, produced at the height of conflict, has been assessed at \$6700US.

Lot 781A
Map of the South Pole (The Petrel Map)
Maldonado, Villalba, 1925
Significant damage, burns in top center portion

Landmass center, eastern Antarctic coast visible. Latitude and longitude in walnut ink, black

tea, and human blood. Compass rose: a snow petrel rampant, her claws demarcating southeast and southwest, her tail flared due south, her wings spread east and west, and her head fixed at true north. Beneath her is emblazoned: Seal of the Antarctic Postal Service—*Glacies Non Impedimenta*. (Ice Is No Impediment.) Alone of the Maldonado maps, color of indeterminate and probably morbid origin have been used to stain portions of the interior red, differentiating zones of "watermelon snow," fulminating plains of lichen grown bright and thick, bearing fruits which when cracked open are found to be full of fresh water, more and sweeter than any may ask. The red fields encircle a zone of blue ice, frozen rainwater enclosing a lake of brine. Upon this rainwater mantle, explains the map legend, sits the Magnetic Pole, which is a chair made of try pots and harpoon-blades. The Pole sits tall there, her hair encased in fresh, sweet water gone to ice, her eyes filmed. Her dress is black sealskin, her necklaces are all of bone and skulls. *Grell and Skell they are Her Playmates, Her Guardians Dire, and Huln she is Her Handmaid, but Never moves She, even Once.* (translation: Peralta, 1988.)

She is waiting, the notations go on to state, for the petrels which are her loyal envoys, to deliver a letter into her hands, written on sheepskin, whose ink is blood. What this letter will read and who it may be from, no whaler may say—it is for her alone, and she alone may touch it.

The Petrel Map was produced in Maldonado's third year in prison, delivered to the printer's by his bailiff and repaired there, as the original document was created using unorthodox methods, owing to Villalba's lack of access to plentiful inks. The viciousness and length of his incarceration and Acuña's uncommon success in enforcing the sentence may be credited to many things: the influence of the spurned Asociación, the corrupt bureaucracy which was prone to forgetting and misplacing whole cartographers, the persuasiveness of Acuña and the pregnant Suyai as to the menace of Maldonado and his clearly deliberate deceptions. Nevertheless, the summer of 1925 saw the first map in three years, and a new rash of *paquetes* eagerly broke the docks, the Shackleton incident all but forgotten. Stamps of the Antarctic Postal Service were now included, along with stationary and "ice-proof" pencils.

The Petrel Map was completed from memory, according to Pilar, a testament to an extraordinary intellect bent on total and accurate recollection. Public outcry warred with the Asociación on the subject of Maldonado's release, and funds were mounted for a *Proximidad II* expedition, but there was no one to receive it, the Caceres-Maldonado accounts having been frozen, and the usual half-benign institutional fraud absorbed the money once more into the body of the state. Meanwhile, Acuña's tarnished star rose, and he was commissioned by the British Navy to deliver maps of the subcontinent.

By 1928 Maldonado was in complete isolation. He was not allowed visits from his wife, or perhaps more tellingly for our purposes, letters. Acuña was recorded as visiting once, in 1930, with his young son Raiquen. It is not for us to imagine this meeting, so far from the decks of the *Proximidad* and salads of lichen, far from claret and the green shadows of the *aurora australis*. However, after this incident, Acuña arranged for Maldonado to be moved to a special penitentiary in Ushuaia, on the southern tip of Argentina, with the shores of the South Shetlands in sight, on very clear days.

The Great Man looked up from his bread and held the eye of the Naval Cartographer. Their beards were both very long, but Acuña's was neatly cut and kept, while Maldonado's snarled and ran to the stone floor.

"I promised you, my friend," he said, his voice very rough, "that it was big enough. Big enough for us both to look on it and hold in our vision two separate countries, bound only by longitude."

"What's big enough?" little Raiquen asked, tugging on his father's hand, which had two gold rings upon it.

But Acuña did not answer. For my own part, my heart was filled with long plains of ice receding into eternity, and on those plains my prisoner walked with bare feet and a cup of gold.

—*Keeper of the Key: The Autobiography of a Prison Guard, Rafael Soto, 1949*

Villalba Maldonado died at Ushuaia on June 4th 1933. Acuña lived, feted and richly funded, until 1951, when he drowned off the shore of Isla Concepción. Suyai and her sons continued in residence on the islands, producing between them twelve maps of the area. (Lots 219-231H) Raiquen relocated in middle age to the mainland where he lives still in well-fed obscurity.

The Petrel Map was Maldonado's final work, and as such, has been assessed at \$57000US.

Lot 994D

Captain's Logbook, the *Anamnesis*, disembarked from Ushuaia, 1934

Here is presented the logbook in which Soledad Maldonado signed her name and declared her cargo—an iron coffin lashed to a long sled. She left her ailing mother in Buenos Aires and sailed south as soon as tide and melt permitted, and Captain Godoy deposited her on the floes of the Weddell Sea per instructions. His full account of the voyage and Soledad's peculiar habits, studies, and intentions will be released only to the buyer, however, his notes conclude thus:

I watched the young lady amid her supplies, her sled, her eight bristling dogs, her father's long, cold coffin. She gave me a cool glance in farewell and turned southward, towards the interior ice. She waited for a long while, though I could not think what for. It was drawing on night, and there were many stars showing when it happened, and I must insist that I be believed and not ridiculed, no matter what I may now write.

Two great dogs strode out from the long plains of ice, enormous, thickly furred, something like Saint Bernards. They pressed their noses into her hands and she petted their heads, scratched behind their ears, let them lick her face slowly, methodically, with great care. The huge hounds allowed her to yoke them at the head of her team, and without a whip she directed them inward, onward, hoisting aloft as they flew a long fishing pole, at the end of which was an orb of impossible light, like a cup overturned and spilling out the sun.

The Log Book has been assessed at \$107000US. Bidding begins at noon precisely.