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LETION



November 6th, 2014

Latin-Americana Library of W. Michael Mathes Sells for \$1.2 Million

by Jeanne Schinto



Swann Auction Galleries, New York City

Photos courtesy Swann Auction Galleries

A number of items in the Latin-Americana library of Dr. W. Michael Mathes—offered by Swann Auction Galleries on November 6, 2014, in New York City—made the Bay Psalm Book look like a Johnny-come-lately. While the metrical psalter, issued in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1640, was the first book printed in Britain's North American colonies, it was not—not by a long shot—the first one printed in the New World.

A compilation by David Szewczyk and Cynthia Davis Buffington of the Philadelphia Rare Books & Manuscripts Company—39 Books and Broadsides Printed in America before the Bay Psalm Book—was published in 1989 to celebrate the 450th anniversary of the introduction of printing in the Americas, and 20 of those titles were on the block at this sale. There were 12 volumes printed in Mexico City between 1556 and 1635; seven that issued from presses in Lima, Peru from 1595 to 1636; and one published in 1612 at what was once a remote Jesuit mission on the shore of Lake Titicaca. And as Swann's Americana specialist Rick Stattler pointed out, although a copy of the Bay Psalm Book sold in 2013 at Sotheby's for \$14,165,000 (including buyer's premium) to philanthropist David M. Rubenstein, books 100 years older were on offer at this sale and estimated at a fraction of that news-making price. A fraction of the press, likewise, took notice of this occasion at Swann. I can say with certainty room at the sale itself, along with fewer than ten live bidders. Among them were Szewczyk and Buffington, who had four bidding cards between them. Sitting beside them were Ken Ward, curator of Latin American books at the John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island, and an associate. In front of them was Teri Osborn of the William Reese Company of New Haven, Connecticut, the rare books firm that arguably sells more Latin Americana than anybody in the United States. Behind them was a young man who identified himself as a member of the trade from Buenos Aires. And that was it. Indeed, as Stattler quipped before the sale began, he had intended to put out only four chairs, but now that he saw the size of the group, he was going to put out one more. To be sure, it was a small gathering, but a collegial one. "It was a very different vibe from what we have at our usual sales," Stattler noted in a phone interview afterward. They were not—again not by a long shot the full extent of the bidding pool, however. Interested bidders on phones and on the Internet did not miss this one. In all, Stattler said there were 98 people registered to bid, and 60 of them were successful, spending a total of \$1,227,600 (with buyers' premiums) on material recognized as extremely rare, not seen at auction in decades or ever, and, in a couple of instances, cataloged as "possibly unique."



What is believed to be the first book written by a native of Mexico to be printed in Europe sold to a phone bidder for \$17,500 (est. \$10,000/15,000). Published in Perugia in 1579, it is *Rhetorica* Christiana, a manual about Mexican culture intended to instruct missionaries. The author, who also engraved the plates and drew the illustrations, was Diego Valadés. The son of a conquistador and an Indian woman, he was the first mestizo to be ordained in the Franciscan order.



Swann has done well with Latin-American culinaria in recent past sales. At this one, this little pamphlet on techniques for carving and serving meats sold for \$7250 (est. \$1000/1500). Printed in Mexico in 1826, it predates by five years what are generally regarded to be that I was the only reporter in the Mexico's first published cookbooks.

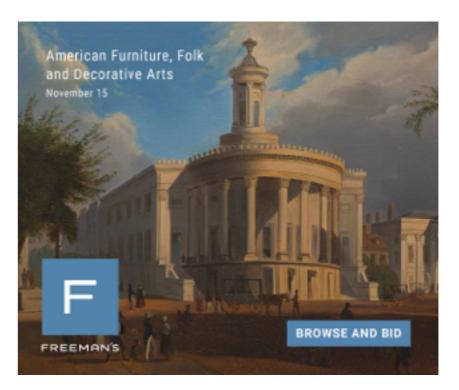


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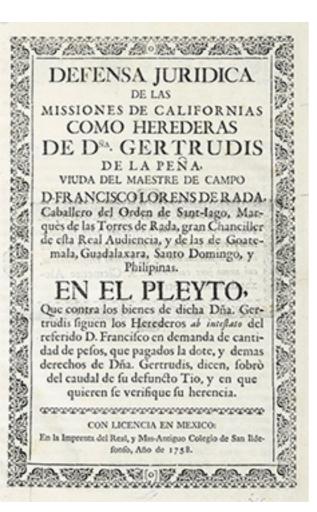






"The collection was put together by a scholar. He was not just collecting high spots," Stattler stated. "He had some real obscurities, and those who understand the field were pretty impressed when they came in for the previews. Very many books in this collection had never been seen at auction before and may never be seen again. It was certainly a special sale for us and the results, I think, confirmed Doctor Mathes's taste."

For 27 years, Mathes (1936-2012) Toledo, Molina, y Salazar, Marques de Manzera, Uirrey de taught Mexican history at the efta Nueva-Efpaña, Er. Como protector de dicha Congregacion, debaxo de cuyo amparo effa. University of San Francisco. His Cos Licencia: Imprefis en Mexico. Per Francista Robrigues, Lapersia, «Alta da elda. 44 interest in the subject was piqued when he was a child living in Southern California. "I lived two kilometers from the ruins of a Memorial que el P. Diego Luys de Dominican mission built in Sanvitores went to a dealer bidding 1775," Mathes, who was born in via the Internet for \$46,800 (est. Los Angeles, once told an \$10,000/15,000). Printed by interviewer. "You can imagine Francisco Rodrigues Lupercio in what that does to you as a kid." Mexico in 1669, it is a report by Acknowledged as the world's Jesuit Diego Luis de San Vitores, the expert on Baja California, Mathes first missionary to the Mariana had a much more comprehensive view of "California" than most of substantial report-40 leavesus. In accepting an award in describes the importance of the absentia from the Book Club of islands (Guam, Tinian, Saipan, and California, he wrote that he was Rota) to the Spanish empire, not "particularly honored," not only for the natives whose souls because the award recognized were being saved but for its him, "but because it recognizes location. Situated between Hawaii that California does not begin and the Philippines, the islands with a fence at San Ysidro or end were well placed for exploring with the Oregon border. From Australia for future colonization. the beginning of my work I have viewed California in its greatest length and breadth—Cabo San Lucas to the Gulf of Alaska, that is, California as it was seen by its founders and settlers from 1535 to 1848."



Defensa juridica de las missiones de Californias comos herederas de Dna. Gertrudis de la Pena sold for \$10,400 (est. \$3000/4000). Printed in Mexico in 1758, it is a legal brief filed on behalf of missions that had been bequeathed the considerable estate of Gertrudis de la Pena, the Mexican widow of two marquises. Her first husband's nephews sued to get part of the estate. Sold with sermons delivered upon her death, the 155page item was cataloged by Swann as "a first edition, possibly unique."



Cataloged as "not known at auction, and possibly unique," this sample book of a printing house's capabilities, printed in Mexico in 1814, fetched \$12,500 (est. \$500/750).



In addition to his professorship, Mathes was director of the Mexican collection at San Francisco's Sutro Library, a major U.S. genealogical library. Because of his published works and his service in international relations and communications between Mexico and the United States, the Mexican government awarded Mathes the Order of the Aztec Eagles medal in 1985, the highest honor that government gives to non-natives. In 1995, he donated his first collection of Latin Americana—some 45,000 books—to Mexico's El Colegio de Jalisco in Zapopan, Jalisco. It is a collection that one estimate puts at \$12 million today.

"It's my understanding that many of the books we offered were collected by Mathes between 1995 and his death in 2012," Stattler said, although he did not provide details on why it was consigned to Swann by Librería José Porrúa Turanzas, booksellers of Madrid. Nor did he know why Mathes had donated his first collection instead of selling it, like this one, or why he had chosen to do so 20 years ago.

The more than 500 lots at Swann—some 1500 items in all—were divided into two sessions. The first one was devoted to early European books and manuscripts on Latin America, some dated as early as 1501. The other comprised Latin-American imprints. In each group there were dictionaries, early travel books, catechisms, grammar books, maps, natural histories, civil histories, textbooks, poetry, epistolary works, biographies, missionary narratives, sermons, and much more. Throughout, the most prevalent themes were exploration and religion. Among them were many "firsts." For example, there was Juan de Vega's Institutiones grammaticae Latino carmine, Hispana cum explicatione, produced by Lima's first printer, Antonio Ricardo, in 1595. There was also Speculum conjugiorem by Alonso de la Vera Cruz, the first book on marriage printed in the New World, in Mexico in 1556. That one actually had two firsts to boast, having been produced by the first printer in Mexico, Juan Pablos.

While the first session was lively, the second session was seriously competitive. "As you saw, when we got into the Mexican material, that's when it really got heated," Stattler recalled in our phone interview. Sometimes everyone in the room took a crack at a particular lot, trying to ignore the proximity of their competitors. At one point, though, while Szewczyk was bidding on a first edition of a 522-page work on medicine published in Mexico in 1712, Ward, of the John Carter Brown Library, encouraged him to keep going against a phone bidder. Ward's library already had a copy of the item. "It's incredibly rare," Szewczyk agreed and carried on, ultimately winning Juan de Esteyneffer's Florilegio medicinal de todas las enfermedades for \$12,500.

"That lot had passed through our gallery before, in 1988," Stattler said after the sale. "When we sold it in 1988, it brought \$605. This time it got \$12,500. That's a two thousand percent return on investment."

Besides the John Carter Brown Library, other institutional purchasers that Stattler was at liberty to name were Loyola Marymount University of Los Angeles—Mathes's alma mater; the Hispanic Society of America, a reference library and museum based in New York City; and the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Pennsylvania.

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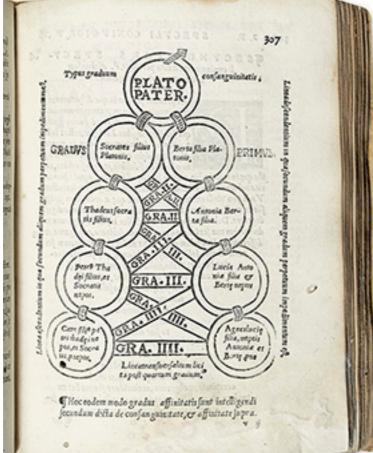
Unnamed, unseen dealers took the top Read all the stories, complete with all their photos and captions, along with two lots. A dealer bidding by phone all the news and features every month. paid \$42,500 for a first edition of *De* septem novæ legis sacramentis ANTIQUE DIGEST subscriptions page. summarium by Bartholomé de Ledesma. The treatise on the seven sacraments was printed in Mexico by Antonio de Espinosa in 1566. A dealer on the Internet bought Memorial que el P. Diego Luys de Sanvitores for \$46,800. Printed by Francisco Rodrigues Lupercio in Mexico in 1669, it is a report by a Jesuit who was the first missionary to the Mariana Islands. As the catalog stated, only two other copies have been known at auction in the 20th century, one in 1917, the other in 1986.

For more information, contact Swann at (212) 254-4710 or via its Web site (www.swanngalleries.com).



The John Carter Brown Library paid \$9375 (est. \$2000/3000) for a first edition of *Regulations of the* Order of the Immaculate *Conception*, whose members were known as the Conceptionists. Printed in Mexico by Juan Ruiz in 1635 for the Conceptionist convent, the volume includes a woodcut that is perhaps the first image of the Virgin of Guadalupe to be published in a book.

According to Swann research, only two other copies of the book are known. A first edition of the first



book on marriage written and published in the New World went to the William Reese Company for \$18,750 (est. \$6000/9000). Printed in 1556 by Juan Pablos, Mexico's first printer, Speculum conjugiorem was written by Augustinian missionary Alonso de la Vera Cruz. A guide for solving complicated cases concerning the newly converted Indians, it covers such subjects as the nature of polygamy as well as

divorce.



A first edition of the illustrated life of San Felipe de Jesus, the first Mexican-born saint, sold for \$13,750 (est. \$6000/9000). Martyred in Japan, he is the patron saint of Mexico City. Printed in Mexico in 1801-02, the two-volume work-one of the earliest entirely illustrated books issued in Mexicoincludes numerous engraved scenes of San Felipe's life.

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