

Dorothy Sloan - Books

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AUCTION 23

EXCEEDINGLY RARE & LITTLE-KNOWN PLATE BOOK BY A HUNGARIAN ARISTOCRAT

LITHOGRAPHS FROM VERY EARLY PHOTOGRAPHS OF VENEZEULA & MEXICO

515. ROSTI, Pál. *Uti Emlékezetek Amerikából*. Pest: Kiadja Gusztáv Heckenast, 1861. [4] [5] 6-198 [2, contents] [1, errata slip tipped in at end of text] pp. (printed in double columns), occasional ornamental initial letters, 16 leaves of plates, most after photographs by Rosti (15 lithographs, one steel-engraving showing two subjects), 2 lithographs in original full, bright color, 13 toned lithographs on maize grounds (including pictorial title), 25 wood-engraved illustrations in the text (one of which is full page and a few of which are maps, also after Rosti's photographs); subjects include views, towns, architecture, costumes, archaeology, natural history, etc. 4to (37 x 28.5 cm), original blue pictorial wrappers with engraving on upper cover, untrimmed, as issued. Except for some marginal chipping and minor soiling to wrappers, and an occasional minor stain to interior, a superb copy, plates pristine. Preserved in a clamshell case of three-quarter tan calf and raw linen. One of the rarest Latin American plate books, with beautiful lithographs and engravings of Mexico, Cuba, and Venezuela.

Plates

The majority of the lithographs are based on Rosti's original photographs (among the earliest of Mexico and Venezuela) as rendered by Gustav Klette (a.k.a. Gustaw Keleti, Hungarian artist, draughtsman, illustrator, and critic, 1834-1902). Some lithographs contain elements from Casimiro Castro's *México y sus alrededores* (see CASTRO herein). Rosti's use of Castro's imagery could be perceived as derivative. However, given the technical constraints of photography at the time he produced the images, Rosti was an innovator. The slow emulsion speeds available in 1857-1858 could not capture moving figures. Therefore, in order to bring the human element to the images of landscapes and architecture, Rosti and/or Klette added human figures to the drawings that were then prepared for making the lithographs. The artists relied upon Castro's iconic work, the best possible source of Mexican types and costumes, for inspiration and guidance.

Four of the plates are not based on Rosti's photographs. The illustrated title is a whimsical flight of imagination evocative of the romance of travel in Mexico and South America. Additionally, the two fully colored lithographs are artistic creations utilizing elements of Castro while the two engravings on one sheet (Puebla and Orizaba) are straight from Rugendas (see SARTORIUS herein). All the lithographs were made by the Viennese firm of Reiffenstein Röscha. The text engravings cannot be fully set out here, but they include the famous tree Samán Gûere (associated with Bolivar, Humboldt, and Rosti), Rancho de Tlamacas, Xochicalco, etc. (many after Rosti's photographs delineated by Freemann and others). Provided are short titles without imprint or additional information other than measurements, which are of image only, or image and border, where applicable.

[1] *Jelenet a chalcoi (S^{ta}. Anita) csatornán Mexicoban....* Frontispiece, mounted (as issued), lithograph in full, bright color. 17 x 25 cm. View of a canal in Mexico, with colorfully dressed

people on a small flatboat laden with fresh produce at the shore. Another boat with two men rowing is piled high with hay. In the distance are buildings and a snow-covered mountain. The right side of the image is a close copy of Castro's *Dresses of Mexican...* in *México y sus alrededores*, showing a market scene with fruit seller and sunshade (see *Castro 1* herein).

[2] *Uti Emlékezetek Amerikából*. Pictorial title, lithograph on toned ground. 29.7 x 21.9 cm. An intricate composite view within a decorative twig and vine border, attempting to take in the American travel experience, with a jaguar and alligator in the foreground, sweeping back to a tiny stagecoach and other details, magnificent mountains in the far distance, tropical foliage surrounding all.

[3] *Plaza de Armas (Habanában.)*. Lithograph on toned ground. 18.5 x 26.3 cm. Main plaza in Havana with fountain, statue, palm trees, strollers, and carriage. Facing p. 12.

[4] *Caracas*. Lithograph on toned ground. 17 x 24.2 cm. Distant view of the city taken from a high view with ruins in the foreground. Facing p. 42.

[5] *Káve-Ültettvény az araguai völgyben*. Lithograph on toned ground. 23.8 x 16.9 cm. Scene from El Palmar coffee plantation in the Aragua Valley, 36 miles southwest of Caracas, 1500 feet above sea level. In a scene similar to plein-air Barbizon painting, two workers take a break under the trees and converse with a woman on the road with a basket on her head and wagon in the distance. Lush tropical scene. Facing p. 52.

[6] *El Palmar*. Lithograph on toned ground. 16.9 x 24.2 cm. Plantation house with people in the foreground, some on horseback, others walking. When Rosti's funds ran low, the Vollmer family who owned the rich plantation graciously took him in, and he enjoyed their hospitality for about a month and made several photographs there. Humboldt had been a guest there earlier. Facing p. 56.

[7] *San Juan de los Morros*. Lithograph on toned ground. 16.8 x 24.3 cm. The town of San Juan is depicted in the far distance, foreground with a family making a fire in front of a thatched-room house, and in the distance the strange, looming mountains which Humboldt described in 1800 as similar to ruined castles. Facing p. 60.

[8] [2 engraved images on a single plate] *Plateau of Puebla....* Border & image: 12.7 x 19.6 cm; [and] *Barranca (Ravine) of Santa Maria with the Heights of Mirador and the Volcano of Orizava....* Border & image: 12.4 x 19.2 cm. These two images are credited to Johann Moritz Rugendas, and indeed they are the same as appeared in Sartorius' editions on Mexico, even retaining the captions (see SARTORIUS herein). Facing p. 120.

[9] *Mexicoi-Lovasok. a chalcoi (Sta. Anita) csatornán Mexicoban....* Mounted (as issued), lithograph in full color, 16.3 x 25 cm. At left, well-equipped equestrian group (two hacendados decked out in charro garb, between them a barefoot lad holding the reins of a white horse); at right: a lad with a pigskin container on his back harvesting pulque next to a large stand of cactus; background: two riders. The left side of the image is a close copy of Castro's *Dresses of Mexican...* in *México y sus alrededores*, showing an equestrian group (see *Castro 1* herein). Facing p. 132.

[10] *A Székesegyház Mexicoban....* Toned lithograph, 16.7 x 24.7 cm. On first glance, this view of the Metropolitan Cathedral in Mexico City appears somewhat similar to Castro's image of the same subject (see *Castro 2* herein), but the Cathedral itself fills the frame. The perspective is from a higher viewpoint, which is what Rosti frequently preferred for his images. Facing p. 140.

[11] *Salto de Agua A beleni vízvezeték kutfeje Mexicoba....* Toned lithograph, 23.4 x 17.1 cm. The perspective and architecture are more detailed in this view than in Castro's image of the same subject, but some of the figures are imported from the Castro's Fuente del Salto de Agua (see *Castro 1* herein). Facing p. 144.

[12] *"A Szomorú éj Fája" Popotlában....* Toned lithograph, 24.2 x 16.7 cm. The tree and the Chapel of Saint Hippolytus in the background are from Rosti's photograph. The tree is the legendary Arbol de la Noche Triste where Cortés retreated (he subsequently founded the chapel in 1521). In the foreground Rosti and/or Klette have added Indian costume figures from Castro's plate *Road from Tacubaya to Chapultepec* (see *Castro 1* herein). Facing p. 154.

[13] *Dambus erdő Trinidad Szigetén....* Toned lithograph of bamboo forest on the Island of Trinidad, with two figures pointing to a river over which the bamboo arches. 16.7 x 24.2 cm. Facing p. 162.

[14] *Popocatepetl az amecamecai völgyből tekintve....* Toned lithograph. 22.9 x 26.9 cm. View of awe-inspiring Popocatepetl, as seen from Amecameca, showing the valley in front of the mountain. Facing p. 172.

[15] *Pachuca bányaváros Mexicoban....* Toned lithograph. 23.3 x 17.1 cm. View of Pachuca in middle ground and large mountain in background. Facing p. 180.

[16] *A Reglai Zuhatag....* Toned lithograph. 23 x 17 cm. Taking inspiration from his hero Humboldt, Rosti shows the basalt rock formation in Hidalgo, northeast of Mexico City. Humboldt's view, which included a self-portrait of him drawing the scene, was below the falls. Rosti presents a view of the rapids above the falls, from a high, winding mountain road. In the foreground a man and a woman rest on the side of the road, and a little farther down is a man on horseback with a smaller person leading the way. Facing p. 184.

First edition. Palau 279201. Rosti (1830-1874), Hungarian naturalist and pioneer photographer in Latin America, studied photography in Paris in order to illustrate his travels in America. Four copies of Rosti's albums of original photographs from America are known to survive in European museums and libraries. Rosti came to America to follow the tracks of his hero Humboldt. Variant versions of the author's name are Rosti Pál (the standard Hungarian form, with surname first), Paul de Rosti, Pal Rojti, and Pál Rosty.

Peter E. Palmquist et al. give a good summary of Rosti's photographic work and travels in *Pioneer Photographers from the Mississippi to the Continental Divide* (Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 524-525):

In early August 1856 he embarked from Le Havre to New York City. Although Rosti toured the United States as far West as Wisconsin, evidently he did not take photographs during those travels. He sailed from New Orleans in January 1857 and went by way of Havana to Venezuela, where he spent several months touring a circuit from Caracas and San Juan de los Morros to the Orinoco. Rosti followed that river to Angostura (now Ciudad Bolívar) and photographed the plantations, towns, and scenery along the way.

In late June 1857, Rosti took a ship from Venezuela and island-hopped through the Antilles to Veracruz, Mexico, where he landed on July 28. For the next eight months he traveled the region between the Gulf Coast and the capital, visiting and photographing such places as Orizaba, Puebla, Amecameca, Pachuca, Cuernavaca, and the dormant volcanoes Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl. Rosti photographed the ancient tree at Popotla where on *la noche triste*, the army of Cortés licked its wounds after being driven from Tenochtitlan. He also photographed numerous places of interest in Mexico City, including the Belén aqueduct and fountain, the Metropolitan Cathedral and Sagrario, the Aztec calendar stone, the National Palace, and Cortés's palace. In early 1858, Rosti gave up plans to visit Peru and instead returned to Veracruz, where on April 7 he departed for home by way of New Orleans and New York. Before returning to Hungary, in early November Rosti stopped in Berlin to give a briefing on his travels to Alexander von Humboldt.

It was probably soon after his return to Europe that Rosti assembled several copies of an album of his Latin American photographs. Titled "Fényképi Gyűjtemény melyel Havannában, Orinocco oidékén és Mexicóban" ("Picture Collection: Havana, the Orinoco, and Mexico"). At least four examples of the album still exist. Rosti's album shows him to have been an accomplished photographer, capable of producing views of surprisingly precise resolution.

Although Rosti kept a journal of his travels in the Americas and contributed articles on his travels to Hungarian newspapers, it was not until 1861 that he published a full account of that tour, *Uti Emlékezetek Amerikából....* This book was lavishly illustrated with lithographs and engravings by Gusztáv Klette, D. Freemann, and Johann Moritz Rugendas.

Júlia Papp has the best summary of the content of Rosti's book, "Pal Rosti (1830-1874), Traveller and Photographer" in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 188 (Winter, 2007), pp. 85-90:

Rosti took pictures of the larger cities and the natural wonders, mines, architectural monuments, and flora of Cuba, Venezuela and Mexico. Venezuelan and Mexican historians regard his photographs as the first to depict the landscapes and distinctive features of their countries with the aim of producing a scientific record. In its treatment of subjects and technical execution, Rosti's work rivals that of any of his contemporaries.... He devotes as much attention in his book to the siting of the cities, the climatic conditions and the natural

spectacles (waterfalls, volcanoes, caves) as he does to individual buildings, mining, and agricultural industries (sugar, coffee and tobacco plantations and sugar refining). He takes an archeological interest in pre-Columbian remains, devoting several photographs and detailed descriptions to the Aztec ruins at Xochicalco and captured the Aztec stone calendar walled up in the cathedral in Mexico City. The exposures in which he presents the history, customs, religion, outward racial characteristics, clothing and weapons of the indigenous peoples of South America (the Mexican Indians among them) indicate his ethnographic bent. Rosti was an acute observer of the social structures and peculiarities of South American society.

Balázv Venkovitz, "Writing with Devotion, Drawing with Light: Images of the Americas in Nineteenth-Century Travelogues" pp. 104-112 in Grzegorz Moroz, et al., *Metamorphoses of Travel Writing across Theories, Genres, Centuries, and Literary Tradition* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010):

A major and often neglected Hungarian soldier, scientist, and photographer, Pál Rosti...was one of the first people to use the new medium of photography in travel writing and to publish photos of Latin America.... [He] published one of the most fascinating and beautiful travel books of the time. *Uti Emlékezetek Amerikából....* Rosti's work is a milestone not only because of the application of "light drawing" but also because the text itself provides us with valuable insights into the view and values of a nineteenth century (Eastern) European intellectual's mind regarding issues of race, slavery, and politics. Besides introducing new regions to Hungarians, he also provided interesting insights into life in the United States.... Rosti's book is different from earlier writings, as besides recognizing the important achievements of the United States, he also criticizes the country harshly. He mentions the negative attitude towards African-Americans as one of the biggest social problems and explains how the love of the "almighty dollar" can corrupt the valuable political achievements and institutions of the nation.... Today, he is regarded as a major figure in cultural history because his work provides a good example for the use and usefulness of travel writing and because his achievements in the field of photography were pioneering in his age.

In his study of twenty German travellers in Venezuela in the nineteenth century, José Ángel Rodríguez, comments on Humboldt's strong influence in inspiring travellers to explore Venezuela and notes that many of them considered Humboldt's writings as their travel guide. Ángel Rodríguez remarks that the most obvious and severe case of the Humboldt cult was not a German, but rather the Hungarian traveller Rosti Pál (*Viajeros alemanes a Venezuela en el siglo XIX*, 1983, pp. 240-241).

As noted above, four of Rosti's lithographs obviously employ some elements of the iconography of Casimiro Castro in *México y sus alrededores* (see CASTRO herein). Rosti arrived in Mexico when the Castro album was first published, and he astutely chose to use elements from the best images of Mexico of that time, particularly the people and their customs. The images are adapted and changed, and Rosti outstripped Castro in his vibrant coloring to a level that the Castro albums would not achieve until later editions. The majority

of the lithographs and text engravings are from Rosti's photographs. In a few cases Klette augmented Rosti's photographic images with figures from Castro's costume prints. The frontispiece, however, is a vivid melange capturing the vibrancy of Mexico at that time, with some elements in homage of Castro's iconography.

Helmut Gernsheim mentions Rosti in connection with Charnay's photographic work (see CHARNAY herein): "Concurrently with Charnay, Paul de Rosti, a Hungarian political exile after 1848, took excellent photographs in the same district, in Havana, and Venezuela, which he published on his return to Budapest in 1861." (*A Concise History of Photography*, Dover Publications, 1986, p. 47). In *Mexican Suite: A History of Photography in Mexico* (UT Press, 2001, p. 79), Olivier Debroise states that Rosti made the first known photographic views of the ruins of Xochicalco, one of which is found as a text illustration in Rosti's book (p. 189; see also January 1859 issue of *Le Magasin Pittoresque*, p. 113). Debroise goes on to say:

Rojti's images can be compared with those made by Désiré Charnay during the same years and in the same places. Both photographers were primarily interested in colonial architecture, still well preserved at that time and obviously characteristic of the country. Like Charnay, Rojti photographed key sites in Mexico City... [Rojti's photographs include] the earliest appearances of the industrial landscape in Mexican photography.... Rojti's Mexican series reveals a more modern point of view and a broader thematic range.... With the notable exception of Pal Rojti, traveling photographers in Mexico before 1880 all had other professions. They were diplomats, naturalists, archaeologists, or ethnologists. The few who left written accounts or travel diaries admitted using photography solely as a useful tool for recording data.

In his preface, Rosti comments: "I believe there is no more effective device for the spreading of geographical knowledge than providing clear images about the places, cities, buildings, plants, etc. of various climates by characteristic faithful drawings. Therefore, I consider the major goal of my journey to create such images by means of light drawing" (English translation).

Finally, a few last notes: Richard Slatta in *The Cowboy Encyclopedia* cites Rosti's book as a source for information on gauchos. Another study which should be consulted is Károly Kincses, *Rosti Pál 1830-1874* (Budapest, Magyar Fotofábiai Múzeum & Balassi Kiadó, 1992, pp. 5-11). Reprints of Rosti's book (or portions thereof) appeared in 1968-1969 (Spanish-language edition published in Caracas), 1992 (Hungarian-language edition published in Budapest), and 1998 (English-language edition published in San Francisco). These reprint editions finally make this very rare book more accessible to a wider audience, but nothing can compare with the wonderful plates and illustrations in this original 1861 edition. Copies of the original edition are held by: Bibliotheque Nationalè (Paris), University of Toronto, University of California (Fresno), Columbia University (NYC), University of Minnesota, Hamilton College (Clinton, NY), New York Public Library, British Library (London). The last copy at auction was at Sotheby's (September 21, 1984).

(\$10,000-20,000)