

*El saber de los jesuitas, historias naturales y el Nuevo Mundo.*

Edited by LUIS MILLONES FIGUEROA and DOMINGO LEDEZMA. Textos y estudios coloniales y de la independencia, vol. 12. Frankfurt: Vervuert; Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2005. Illustrations. Maps. Notes. Bibliographies. Index. 349 pp. Paper.

Since its foundation in 1540, the Society of Jesus has counted among its member a large and growing number of accomplished scientists who have published widely on astronomy, mathematics, geography, biology, and many other subjects. The Jesuits arrived in the Americas to preach and teach, but their mission was not limited to these tasks; scientific work could and should be a part of their everyday ministry. To comprehend the mission field in all its complexity was considered necessary in order to convert the inhabitants. The late-sixteenth-century work of Peruvian missionary José de Acosta, including studies of both the natural and social worlds of the Indies, would become a model for many later Jesuit publications.

*El saber de los jesuitas* includes 12 substantial contributions concerning Jesuit natural histories of the New World written during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, after the time of Acosta. The emphasis is on Spanish and Portuguese America, but New France is also included. Most of the articles focus on a particular Jesuit author or a limited geographical area. Many of the subjects are, naturally, familiar to many. This book takes a place among many other recent contributions on early modern Jesuit scientific work in the Americas and elsewhere, including Mordechai Feingold's edited volume *Jesuit Science and the Republic of Letters* (MIT Press, 2003), *Jesuit Encounters in the New World* (1997), edited by Joseph A. Gagliano and Charles Ronan, and not least the voluminous collection of articles edited by John W. O'Malley under the title *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773* (Univ. of Toronto Press, 1999). However, given the explicit focus on the genre of natural histories in the Americas, *El saber de los jesuitas* is an important and welcome contribution to the field.

In the Jesuit natural histories of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, empirical observations of the flora and fauna of the New World were mixed with theological interpretations of nature. The plant and animal species previously unknown to the Europeans were often presented as wonders of nature and as clear signs of the greatness of God. The study of such things thus contributed to the greater glory of God, which should be the goal for every Jesuit endeavor. Both reason and emotion should have their place in the Jesuit natural histories. Margaret Ewalt demonstrates this exceptionally well in her case study of the rhetorics in Joseph Gumilla's *Orinoco ilustrado* (1741–45), in which Gumilla readily combined the use of the logos and the pathos to inform, edify, and entertain the audience.

However, the Jesuits in the Americas were not the only ones to use this information in their writings. Their reports and books also gave material to metropolitan Jesuit scholars such as Juan Eusebio Nieremberg or Athanasius Kircher, whose books were very widely circulated and debated in seventeenth-century Europe. The remarkable articles by Luis Millones Figueroa and Domingo Ledezma, respectively, analyze the American impact on these members of the Jesuit intelligentsia.

After having been expelled from the Spanish realms in 1767, some exiled Jesuits wrote books on the countries they left behind. These texts were often written as responses to natural philosophers such as Georges Buffon and Cornelius De Pauw, who, based on climatological reasoning, argued that America was a degenerate continent and that its native inhabitants were equally perverted. Jesuits such as Juan Ignacio de Molina for Chile, Francisco Javier Clavijero for Mexico, and Juan de Velasco for Ecuador empirically studied their own regions while directly or indirectly refuting the arguments of the European “armchair researchers” and presenting the Americas as a land of milk and honey.

The majority of the articles here are in Spanish, but some are in English or Portuguese. This might be a problem for some readers. To those accustomed to publications on Jesuit history, however, such a polyglot volume will not seem out of the ordinary. Given the well-defined theme of the volume, the articles are, of course, thematically intertwined. Yet repetitions are very rare, which is a clear sign of the good work of the authors and the editors. A great number of well-chosen illustrations also contribute to the value of the book, which could be read by both Americanists and general students of the history of science and ideas.

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