

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Gloria Beatriz Chicote, Barbara Göbel. *Ideas viajeras y sus objetos: El intercambio científico entre Alemania y América austral*. Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag, 2011. 356 S. ISBN 978-84-8489-638-8; ISBN 978-3-86527-689-6.

Reviewed by Ralf Modlich

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## G. B. Chicote u.a. (Hrsg.): *Ideas viajeras y sus objetos*.

This based on the homonymous Humboldt Colloquium, held from September 14th to 16th 2009 at the Universidad Nacional de la Plata, Argentina. The book opens up with a prologue by Gisela Janetzke, the Deputy General Secretary of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, who locates the conference in the long-standing Humboldtian tradition of universal science. The publication's main concern is the exchange of knowledge produced in Germany and the Austral America region in the second half of the 19th and first half of the 20th century, and features 23 articles by researchers affiliated to institutions in Argentina, Chile, Germany, and Uruguay.

In the introduction, the editors point out that the contributors are academics who have been examining scientists' transatlantic movements, the construction of international research networks, and the foundation of institutions attributable to scientific exchange. Moreover, they state that the original conference emphasized topics on knowledge circulation, the intertwining of knowledge and culture, and the conflictive nature of relations between different spheres where research is carried out. A first glance at the content of the book shows that it lives up to this proposition. The editors are also right to claim that the publication opens up a multiplicity of perspectives and topics, since it contains articles by academics from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, research interests, and geographical provenance. Nevertheless, a closer look reveals the volume's strong bias towards Argentine-German relations: Sixteen articles focus on this particular connection, and only three are written by

researchers from institutions outside Argentina or Germany. Furthermore, a definition of the not fully self-explanatory concept of Austral America in the opening remarks would have been helpful to understand the envisioned cultural-geographical scope.

The volume is divided in four thematic sections. The title of the first one, "Models in Dispute: The Role of German Thought in the Development of Scientific Systems and Higher Education", implies an emphasis on the America-bound direction of knowledge exchange. Most articles stick to this proposition, aiming their attention at the presence of German ideas and/or scientists in Argentina and Chile. Accordingly, Carreras investigates group identity among German scientists in Argentina, and Sanhueza analyzes elements that linked the different presences of Germans in Chile. Buchbinder looks into Argentine intellectuals' different approaches in examining the German educational system, Pasquevich concentrates on the role of physics in the foundational period of the Universidad Nacional de la Plata, and Wamba Gaviña explores the early reception of German philosophers in Argentine universities. They are all concerned with the time around the turn of the century. Nevertheless, the two remaining contributions neither share the unidirectional focus nor the temporal boundaries of the previous ones. Werz expressly concentrates on the reciprocity of scientific relations between the Cono Sur countries and Germany after 1945. Wentzlaff-Eggebert's contribution, outlining the 30-year-old history of an international academic network, exceeds the stipulated scope of

the section, and might have better fitted into the subsequent one, which is entitled “Ideas in Movement: Scientific Fields and the Development of Transnational Networks”.

Just as the first one, the second section assembles researchers from a wide range of disciplines: Jurisprudence, sociology, philosophy, literature studies, anthropology, and historiography. One thread throughout the chapter is the subject of how academic disciplines have evolved by means of transnational networks. Examples for this are Schiffrin, who traces the impact the German doctrine has had on criminal law in Latin America, and Blanco, who explores how sociology was established as a full-fledged discipline in Argentina. Besides this, Pérez reconstructs the reception of German philosophical thought by three Argentine intellectuals; Delgado scrutinizes Ernesto Quesada’s presence in an important monthly review of humanities and social sciences, and Gil Montero is concerned with the geologist Ludwig Brackebusch’s role in the history of mining in northwestern Argentina. With the exception of Schiffrin, who covers a large time span, and Göbel, whose contribution will be subject to a closer look afterwards, all concentrate on turn-of-the-century Argentina.

The third section, entitled “Towards Mass Culture: German Migration, Distribution Media and Technological Development”, is the least extensive one, containing only four articles. De Diego deals with the work of German editors in Argentina in the context of market and societal transformations in the last decades of the 19th century; Varela elaborates on the Argentine media pioneer Enrique T. Susini and his connections to German culture; Vazquez brings out traces of German culture in the work of Héctor Germán Oesterheld, and Margulis analyzes cinematographic material showing German immigrants in a remote region of Patagonia in the 1930s.

“Cross Perspectives: Receptions and Interpretations of Alterity” is the heading of the final section, which has a stable temporal focus on the decades surrounding the turn of the century. It exhibits the most heterogeneous sample of investigators (according to the geographical location of their institutions) and stands out for comprising several articles that examine cultural/geographical entities composed of more than one country: Potthast/Reinert investigate European imagination of South America on the basis of photographs; García reflects upon German scientists’ phonograph recordings of indigenous peoples’ utterances in Tierra del Fuego; Lobato explores the contribution of pamphlets to affective ed-

ucation in the Río de la Plata region, and Chicote gives an account of Robert Lehmann-Nitsche’s escapades from scientific tradition in his analyses of marginal spheres of urban culture. Further contributions in the section are those of Block de Behar, who compares the views of a German doctor and a Uruguayan poet who each lived in the other’s country, and Salinas Campos, who examines an unpublished manuscript by the German-Chilean philologist Rudolf Lenz.

In the second part of this review, prominence will be given to Göbel’s article “Travelling Ideas, Practices and Objects: German Scientists’ Contribution to the Development of Anthropological Sciences in Austral America”. It deserves special attention for picking up many key elements of the volume’s title, a circumstance that underlines its representativeness.

Göbel’s article is well-structured, its three parts being logically built upon one another. The first one is concerned with vital changes German anthropology underwent from the end of the 19th century to the mid-20th century. At the outset, the reader’s attention is directed to the favorable conditions the young German state provided for the development of anthropology. After that, Göbel highlights the holistic and interdisciplinary character of early anthropology, conceived as “a science of mankind”. The next step is a description of the changes triggered by increasing professionalization in Anthropological Sciences, which first led to a larger differentiation of formerly overlapping institutional structures and eventually to a clear separation of different functional areas. Göbel manages to underline the essential role museums played as points of departure for scientific debates, the organization of anthropological expeditions, and the creation of the first chairs in anthropology. Lastly, priority is given to the key role material objects played in allowing museums to capture the world’s diversity in a microcosm.

The second part of Göbel’s article focuses on the adaptation and transformation of ideas and practices coming from Germany in Austral America, exemplified by the work of four German scientists employed by Latin American institutions, all of them coming from the scientific context outlined in the first part. According to the subheading they were “anthropologists”, but the text clarifies that they could not be anthropologists by training due to the state of the discipline at their time. Originally, Robert Lehmann-Nitsche had studied medicine; Max Uhle was a philologist, Martin Gusinde a theologian and Max Schmidt a lawyer. A nutshell

summary of their scientific careers and research periods abroad show that this article deals with the Austral America region in its broadest possible sense. What follows is a description of the four scientists' different institutional affiliations, with particular stress on their activities in institutional management, university education and international scientific networking. A rough overview of the different places their scientific expeditions took them completes the picture.

The third part treats the other dimension of the movement delineated before: the material impact of the scientists' activities, the circulation of artifacts, letters, notes, recordings, photographs and alike. Much of this movement was directed to the German-speaking countries, where the material found its way into different collec-

tions. But Göbel advises not to underestimate the complexity of the movement, which involves different institutions in Austria, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Germany, Peru and the United States.

As a closing remark, it remains to say that whoever is looking for an informative and entertaining read on Germany's scientific relations with Argentina, complemented by several analyses on its neighboring countries' scientific relations to Germany, will not be disappointed by this book. Its interdisciplinary character, the rich gamut of influential researcher personalities through which it works, and the many non-conventional approaches it offers definitely add to its value. However, the compilation of the articles does not reflect the geographical heterogeneity the title seems to promise.

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