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**Tiago Bonato on Encounters in the New World: Jesuit Cartography of the Americas**

In 1673, Jesuit Jacques Marquette and cartographer Louis Jolliet went down the Mississippi River from the Great Lakes to its confluence with the Arkansas River. These two Frenchmen were the first Europeans to explore the river in the territory under the French Crown. One of the aims of their expedition was to find a route to the Pacific Ocean, a failed enterprise that revealed that, instead, the river flowed into the Gulf of Mexico. Their journey generated countless reports and maps of the region.

A century earlier, in 1571, Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta had arrived in Lima. He spent the next fifteen years traveling to remote corners of the immense Viceroyalty of Peru, which included the Amazon Forest and the Andes Mountains. His reports were a source of information for many maps of the period, including the first atlas of America, by the Flemish cartographer Cornelius van Wyfliet.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, two Spanish Jesuits, José Quiroga and José Cardiel, departed from Buenos Aires with eight other members of their order, led by Matthias Strobel. Quiroga, before entering the order, had been a naval officer and experienced cartographer. Cardiel, for his part, was deeply interested in ethnography, geography, and cartography, and lived for more than a decade in Paraguay. To map Patagonia, the expedition headed to the far south of the Americas, to the city of Río Gallegos.

These three cases paradigmatically represent the Jesuit contribution, in a broad space-time context, to the cartography of America in the early modern period, which is the central theme of Mirela Altic’s book *Encounters in the New World*. The ambitious task undertaken by the author, professor of history of cartography at the University of Zagreb, Croatia, was to synthesize Jesuit cartography in America since the arrival of the first representatives of the order in the New World (in 1549, 1566, and 1609 in Portuguese, Spanish, and French possessions) until the suppression of the order in these territories in the middle of the eighteenth century (in 1759 in Portuguese America; in 1764 in the French; and in 1767 in the Spanish). Altic analyzed more than a hundred Jesuit maps, scattered in forty institutions around the world. The resulting study, as handsomely produced as it was carefully conceived, includes 121 black-and-white reproductions in the body of the text, and 47 full-page color plates.
The book is at the intersection of two large academic fields: the history of cartography, an area that has been growing in recent decades, with ample theoretical and methodological approaches to the challenges inherent to map studies; and Jesuit studies, which are voluminous, not unlike the records of the members of the order written during the almost two centuries they spent in the New World. Altic’s book addresses an important gap in these areas: the absence of a synthesis of Jesuit cartography, a corpus widely dispersed in time and space.

Since the 1980s, the history of cartography has consistently demonstrated that maps are instruments of power with strong performative content. This premise, much discussed and refined, is even more compelling in the context of maps of colonized territories. One of the aims of Altic’s book is to “find out what Jesuit cartography was, in which contexts it developed, what its most salient characteristics were, and what impact it had on the development of the history of cartography in general” (p. 7). The author emphasizes at many points how “Jesuit geographical knowledge was at the service not only of religion but also of the colonial power” (p. 31). And she argues that “Jesuit maps were used by colonial agents to design strategies of occupation and territorial control,” which demonstrates a “complex relationship between missions, knowledge, and empire” (p. 32).

Altic begins with the state of research on the Jesuit order and its contributions to science and cartography. In addition to the literature review, the reader is introduced to the institutions she visited and the sources she used in her research.

In the first chapter, “The History and Concept of Jesuit Mapmaking,” the author immerses the reader in the Jesuit world, showing the profound link between Jesuit education and science. The chapter deals in general terms with the founding of the order and its rapid growth and spread throughout the extensive Iberian territories of the period. Furthermore, it also examines and compares the relevant Jesuit maps, analyzing common practices including the mapping technique, editorial interventions, iconography, and changes in discourse in the post-suppression period.

In the three following chapters, which, due to the number of sources available, are uneven in size, Altic divides the territory spatially and separately analyzes the Jesuit role in the cartography of Spanish, Portuguese, and French Americas. In chapter 2, “The possessions of the Spanish Crown,” the maps produced by Jesuit priests in the vast viceregalies of New Spain and Peru are presented in detail. In this section, the author separates map production by location: the first category includes Florida, Mexico, and Baja California; the second, Peru, Chile, Patagonia, Paraguay, Quito, and New Granada. Each topic also includes subtopics dealing with specific Jesuit cartographers. In all of them there is a description of each cartographer’s maps and their contributions to the mapping of that region.

Chapter 3, “Portuguese Possessions: Brazil,” concerns the endeavors of the order in Portuguese America, especially in the repeatedly contested frontier areas of the Amazon, Minas Gerais, and the extreme south of present-day Brazil. As in other parts of the Americas, the priests’ maps played an important role in the margins and hinterland of the territories.

Finally, chapter 4 deals with the presence of Jesuits in the French possessions in America. Although somewhat later chronologically, Jesuit cartography was fundamental to the exploration of the far north of the Americas and the indigenous territories of New France.

Altic’s book makes several important contributions to the history of cartography. The first of these is the synthesis of a vast Jesuit cartographic production, including information and references to maps that have not been preserved—or at least have not yet been found. The effort of assembling this material is in itself a significant contribution to studies on the subject. The comparison of a
A large number of Jesuit maps makes possible the visualization of common technical and epistemological characteristics of the order’s cartography. It also allows the reader to gain a new awareness of the map-publishing world, both to understand the censorship of the post-suppression period and to follow the rare cases in which it is possible to analyze a manuscript map made with firsthand information and compare it with the final edited and published version.

A remarkable component of the book concerns Altic’s determination that Jesuit cartography served as a link between the cartography of the first decades of the European invasion, almost entirely focused on maritime usage with an emphasis on the contours of the American coastline, and the military cartography of the eighteenth century, with an epistemological basis founded on more precise instruments and the mapping of inland territories. Jesuit cartographers, as demonstrated throughout the book, were the first to map territories unknown to Europeans in the interior of the continent, regardless of which crown claimed dominion over the area. The implications of this observation are also very important: the link between science and power, much discussed by historiography dedicated to the early modern period, or, in other words, the use of Jesuit cartography not only to show the presence and power of the order, but also in the service of respective colonial empires. The missions among the indigenous populations and the reconnaissance of territories where the European presence was absent are known to have been important tools that served the European Crowns.

In addition to the themes already discussed, which attest to the book’s historiographical value, Altic’s work points to paths that still need further study in the field of the history of cartography. The most important of these is the role played by indigenous populations in early modern cartography, a subject that is common to all historiography dedicated to the period. Despite the author’s stated aim to pay attention to the “influence of the knowledge of local communities that was to a great extent implemented in Jesuit maps” (p. 2) and her effort to find evidence of this knowledge in the sources analyzed, only in rare cases is it possible to glimpse the indigenous contributions, which are certainly greatly underestimated. In order to mitigate this issue, it is necessary to constantly review historical methods for the study of populations that, for the most part, did not produce their own written records. If this is a question of method, there is another, more difficult matter, of an epistemological nature. Altic states that “both sides benefited from this exchange of knowledge” (p. 2). Yet it is difficult to conceive how indigenous populations would benefit from an exchange, unless they were already part of a colonized society. The encounters in the New World, which provide Altic’s work its title, were very asymmetrical, to say the least. Here we seem to be coming dangerously close to conceptions with deep ethnocentric roots, that of teaching Western science to indigenous populations. This is not a particular issue of the book in question, but a reflection on the epistemological gap between Western knowledge and indigenous knowledge. It is even more difficult to consider it within science, and therefore, within our epistemological paradigms.

A second path that remains open is the subject of borders in the Americas, a theme very present in Jesuit cartography. It is necessary to move away from nearly teleological conceptions that conventionally start from the expansion of the Tordesillas line, as in the case of the borders between Portugal and Spain, for example. American borders were indigenous long before they were imperial. You don’t draw a line in a vacuum. The advance of the occupation inevitably takes place through alliances, wars, reversals, detours, successes, and failures. Indigenous populations, from the Spanish Patagonia to the French Huronia, are a fundamental part of this dynamic. It is our job to revisit the sources and tell another story of the American continent. These are two of the many subjects that
Mirela Altic’s excellent work makes us reflect on, confirming its importance and impact in the field.

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