CHAPTER THREE

SCIENCE AND IDEOLOGY
IN THE SPANISH ATLANTIC

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INTRODUCTION

Spain’s encounter with the New World in the fifteenth century had a crucial impact on both sides of the Atlantic. One important aspect was its contribution to the progress in different fields of scientific knowledge through the then unknown nature and cultures of America. This process unleashed in the year 1492, and consisted in the beginning of the intellectual awareness of this part of the world, until then ignored by the European consciousness. The activities of Spanish royal officers, soldiers, merchants and missionaries constituted what can be considered an early scientific revolution, since the information collected in America questioned and in some aspects even contradicted the European classical scientific tradition. Furthermore, it was indeed an innovative approach to validate the personal experience of a scholar as source of learning; this new empirical tradition emerging in America was opposed to the textually based scholastic and humanist tradition. Nevertheless, evaluating the impact of the newly obtained scientific information about natural history, geography, ethnography and medicine of the New World, we have to keep in mind the fact that this knowledge was essential for controlling the acquired regions and for establishing the Spanish empire overseas. As a consequence, it cannot be seen disconnected from its colonial purpose; thus analyzing the history of Spanish scientific research undertaken in America and its contribution to early modern European knowledge includes also the study of colonial science in the frame of an imperial expansion.

During the last 500 years, in different historical epochs there were many approaches to the historiography of the scientific exploration of America. This essay does not focus on the much debated question of which approach can be considered scientific in a modern sense. Rather it departs more from the idea that scientific research is subject to evolution, that it is imbedded in ideological, political, philosophical and social currents and cannot be meaningfully analyzed in isolation from these factors. Two main aspects that have to be mentioned in this context are on one side the ideology, the actual discussions and philosophical currents which define the consciousness of the researchers and their way to approach the object of the study, modify the focus of their work and conduct the topic of their interest. On the other side, the political
circumstances deciding which topics are to be investigated, which studies are actually to be published and which research fields should receive financial support.

My intention is to demonstrate the impact of these questions on the evolution of the Americanist anthropology in Spain. The definition of Americanism being used in the following study comprehends the knowledge and the research of the American, namely the entire environment which comprises the persons as well as the institutions dedicated to the study and interpretation of the American cultures, in their merely theoretic as well as practical aspects. In fact, the Americanism conceives a complete aggregation of disciplines and interests, united by the only but sufficient link of the American as a primarily geographic concept. Our focus of attention centers basically on the anthropological and ethnographic aspect – though, in certain moments, other aspects, such as the American archaeology for instance, will receive corresponding attention.

Spain was a pioneer in the discovery, as well as in the scientific investigation of the New Continent, therefore there exist strong historical, cultural and traditional links between both worlds on either side of the Atlantic. This also explains the extraordinary possibilities that Spain had in the research related to different human cultures, since the New World for a long time has been considered a singular laboratory for questions related to this field.

This study approaches the Americanism exclusively from the Spanish side, particularly taking into account its rather dynamic and variable character during the centuries. It is a study of the Spanish science in America from an inside view; due to the limitation of its extension, no comparisons to other nations can be established, nor can the critics from outside regarding the Spanish science, what is understood as Leyenda Negra, be included. For the same reasons, unfortunately, within the framework of this article, the American voices cannot be considered.

This historic process will be presented in its different phases in order to highlight the characteristic aspects of each period of time and to indicate the evident modifications undergone from one to the other. The focus of this essay is not to chronicle all Spanish activity undertaken in the field of Americanism, but rather to demonstrate the basic research interests and methods that characterize the studies undertaken in each epoch. Therefore, the scope of this contribution is based on the description of main theories and the scientists behind the projects conducted overseas as well as the modifications in the methods of work applied during the different phases.

**PHASE OF CONTACT AND DISCOVERY: 1492–1600**

A certain polemic debate arises when trying to find the most appropriate term for the historic occurrences of those times – was it a discovery, an encounter between two worlds or a culture clash? We can definitely say that in the year 1492 an encounter occurred between the *Old World*, bearer of the so-called western Christian culture, and the *New World*. There was an enormous richness in different cultures, situated in very distinct levels of development. Actually, since it was not a contact between equals, but a quite aggressive encounter, the term encounter becomes somewhat euphemistic. Looking at it this way, it could be more adequate to name it a violent *cultural clash*. Nevertheless, this paper adopts the point of view that there was indeed a discovery – the scientific discovery of America.
The first phase of the development of the Americanism can be considered from the point of view of a naturalist, since it is characterized by a marked predilection for the natural elements in its broadest understanding. When the Europeans encountered the New World, this put into question a large part of their existent knowledge or their acquired ideas about geography, biology, fauna, flora as well as the nature of the human being. Inevitably the richness of the American nature, regarding the variety in the flora, fauna as well as the different cultures, has been contemplated from the perspective of the Old World and compared with what had been known until then. A first attempt to classify the entirety of new knowledge – followed by the majority of the authors – was to divide it into two large categories: the natural (geography, flora and fauna) and the moral or cultural (the human being and its different cultural manifestations). The numerous Spaniards in this period of time who conducted studies or research projects in America had one general interest: getting to know the native societies. Nevertheless, behind this common aim, very different intentions became manifest. Basically, three groups with their particular approaches to the indigenous societies can be differentiated: the military, the missionaries and the royal officials. Whereas the soldiers were looking for information about these cultures for military reasons; the missionaries depended on knowledge about the native population in order to convert them to Christianity; and finally, the officials needed this information in order to be able to administer these societies in a more efficient way.

The group that provided us with most information and whose working methods were more similar to the tasks of a modern anthropologist is without doubt that of the missionaries. What were the interests and the motivation of these first chroniclers? Which aspects of the work of those scholars caught more attention? One of the first and main tasks of the missionaries was the study of the functioning and origin of the American religions. The majority of the missionaries who wrote about the autochthonous cultures recognized that it was imperative to know the principles of the indigenous religions before proceeding to the Christianization of the native population. Therefore, in this period, an elevated number of descriptions of the different religious systems were produced giving an account of their deities, sacred intermediaries, mystic formulations, festive rites or rites of transition, forms of religious organization, the different classes of priesthood or shamanism, as well as their ethical convictions, which were all integral parts of their religion or at least legitimized this way.3

Along with the interest in converting the indigenous population to Christianity, the linguistic work of the missionaries was carried out in parallel. At the beginning, the predominant intention was to teach Spanish in order to establish a better communication with the Indians, but due to the obtained experience, the missionaries saw that they had an easier access to the people by learning their language. As a consequence, many missionaries dedicated their time to the study of the native languages, annotating the obtained information and thus writing the first dictionaries.

Another important issue, the axis of the anthropological considerations of those times, was the functioning and the legitimacy of the native societies. The contemplation about this aspect has always been conditioned considerably by the Spanish policy towards the autochthonous population – their interest to obtain information, which could help to administer the new colonies. Thus, their efforts to understand the local form of government originated an elevated number of descriptions about the political and cultural systems of the indigenous societies. In addition, both the legitimacy of these societies as
well as the much-debated question of the ‘capability of the Indians’ were discussed. Another topic of interest, generated in this context, was the process of acculturation of the indigenous population in the communities and the towns as a hybrid society.

A part of these first studies had as a fundamental motive the defense of the Indians. There was an intellectual movement in the sixteenth and seventeenth century called indigenist or criticist, which criticized the Spanish behaviour during the colonization of America. The first to express their protest regarding the treatment of the native population in the public were the missionaries. A considerable number of them dedicated their time to write about the American cultures with the intention of finding arguments to defend them against the aggressions of the Spanish military as well as the encomienda system, the slavery, the labour in the mines or other ways to dismantle the cultural order established prior to the arrival of the Spaniards.

Without doubt, the most famous representative of this group was the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566), whose treatises are today considered as indispensable indigenist writings. One of his lifetime concerns was to define with precision and clarity the cultural content of the American Indians. He considered them as a cultural unity, in disregard of the differences among the diverse cultures. For Las Casas, the Indians were human beings equal to all in everything except their beliefs – a point of view that shocked his contemporaries – and it can be asserted that, though his language was not that of a modern anthropologist, his concepts in many aspects contain an approach well ahead of his time.

One common element in the writings of the first chroniclers in their descriptions of the curiosities of the New World, regarding nature as well as the indigenous cultures, was comparing them with the European knowledge of those times. On one hand this served to give a point of reference to the scholars and researchers for their studies and on the other hand, it made it easier for the readers to imagine from what they were reading.

Another subject that has been a constant issue in the Americanist bibliography was the question of the origin of the American Indian. Since the discovery, all type of speculations and theories were spread: apart from the most absurd and inept ones, there were also others which raised the question with a certain rigour based on rather scientific methods. Already in the first period of research in the New World this topic had been addressed in a more theoretical way, without direct implications in the practice of evangelization or of the functionaries of the colonial administration. This subject was of interest because it answered the question of how to connect the American population with the Old World – by using the comparative method between cultural features and institutions of the Euro-Afro-Asian and American cultures.

Among the numerous scholars and authors of this epoch, the Franciscan missionary Bernardino de Sahagún (1499–1590) is especially noteworthy for his applied working methods and his decisively scientific approach and can be considered as one of the first anthropologists regarding the American cultures. His famous publication Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España, written between 1570 and 1580, is appreciated as a veritable anthropological writing of the Aztec population in which he meticulously studies their cultural reality. Another person who influenced the thinking and approach of the chroniclers at the end of the sixteenth century was the Jesuit José de Acosta (1539–1600) whose paradigmatic opus Historia natural y moral
Figure 3.1  Bartolomé de las Casas  
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Acosta could also be qualified, in the more open sense of the word, as 'scientific' or 'systematic', since he analyzed the reality of the American continent as if it were a natural history, in which the climate, geography, fauna, flora and the human being had an equivalent value; though the latter was addressed in a special manner, as being the creator of culture and for holding moral values. Another of the primary natural history books of America in the sixteenth century was published by Gonzalo Fernández Oviedo (1478–1557), who in 1532 was officially appointed cronista de Indias, having been assigned the task of writing the social and natural history of the Indies. Under the title Historia general y natural de las Indias his major work appeared between 1535 and 1547, which was based on his prior writing, Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias of 1526. The main purpose of his natural history was practical and utilitarian – to identify the use of plants, animals, trees and fish for human purposes. It comprised two aspects of natural entities: the empirical description of single entities and their incorporation into a single framework for the understanding of this diversity. According to Oviedo’s conception of the world, both hemispheres shared the same system of relations and the diversity of the natural phenomena was merely the product of diverse provinces and constellations.
Regarding the testimonies of these first chroniclers it has to be mentioned that there have been doubts and concerns about the authority and reliability of these early historical sources. Some scholars claimed they were based on Eurocentric misinterpretations, misleading testimonies or even imaginary elements associated with the *New World*. This raised the question – impossible to answer in the framework of this article – regarding what point in time material to reconstruct historical processes should be considered as scientific in the more narrow sense.

In addition to these writings by early scholars there were other important sources for ethnological or ethnographical information, such as the *Leyes de Indias*, promulgated by Felipe II in 1567. This was a compendium of legal dispositions aimed to organize life in the Spanish colonies. Part of them were the so-called *Relaciones geográficas de Indias*, which through detailed questionnaires gathered concrete information about the geographical, cultural, social and economic situation of the new territories as well as their inhabitants. Another way to glean information of anthropological interest was from the *Probanza de Méritos*, a system to accredit private or communal rights regarding the Crown, which usually included relevant data of the indigenous world. Also the *Casa de Contratación*, a government agency created in Seville in 1503, which attempted to control all Spanish exploration and colonization from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, is an important resource in this context. Thanks to the many experts dedicated to produce information about the *New World*, it became a real chamber of knowledge regarding the navigation, cosmography and geography of America.

Without doubt, what gives a unique and indispensable importance to the information collected in the first part of the sixteenth century was the fact that the cultures were still existent and almost without influence from the European world. Thus, valuable observations could be obtained and registered about an anthropological reality that was on its way to extinction as a sequel of the discovery and conquest.

To summarize, it can be asserted that this initial period of Spanish Americanism was characterized on one side by the lack of correct and exact data about the American reality, and on the other by the broad search for precise information considered necessary to clarify the mysteries of the *New World*. Besides this scientific curiosity, the interest for the American continent derived mainly from the possibilities it offered for a future economic exploitation. In this phase also the study of the unknown cultures in its last instance was undertaken with the aim to use this information for a better and more profitable administration of the Spanish empire. Therefore, in this context anthropology in its initial stages can also be considered as a weapon of knowledge for the exploitation of the colonies.

**PERIOD OF COMPILATION: 1600–1750**

This period was a phase of revision and reorganization of the information obtained during the prior centuries. By then there were fewer unknown things to discover compared to earlier, and certain idea about the American cultures already existed. Therefore, the scholars of those days dedicated their time mainly to the lecture of the works of the first chroniclers in order to make compilations about what had already been investigated and to note the modifications that had been produced since then. In this context the works of the Jesuit scholar Francisco Javier Clavijero (1731–87) should be pointed out in particular.
Another reason to study the already known data was to write the first historical books of certain regions of America in general. Therefore, the seventeenth century was very fruitful, the New Continent seemed now less mysterious than before and the acquired knowledge helped to see and understand its context. Some of these historians wrote exclusively from Spain, using these written sources, others combined them with their own research in America. One of the best known examples is the Historia del Nuevo Mundo written by the Jesuit scholar Bernabé Cobo (1582–1657). This work, which remained incomplete, was conceived in three parts, the first one dealing with natural history and the other two with moral history, one about Peru and the other about New Spain.

Another example is the Franciscan historian Juan de Torquemada (1562–1624), who was chosen to be chronicler of the Orden de San Francisco de Nueva España to write a history of the Franciscan missionary work and to compile the most notable of the indigenous traditions. He produced several books, though he is basically known for his Monarquía Indiana, finished in the year 1613. For this major undertaking he used several sources such as ancient pictographic codices or those produced at the moment of the conquest, Indian relations written mainly in Nahuatl in addition to oral information provided by the Indians themselves. Finally, both Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala and Martín de Murúa devoted their time to write the history of Peru, and should be mentioned in this context as well.

In addition to these revisions of the main publications of the eighteenth century, there was another anthropological interest, more of a philosophical orientation, which occupied the scholars: The polemic about the ‘nature’ of the Indians. Not only in Spain, but also later in other colonizing nations, this subject provoked many philosophical discourses about the ‘good savage’ or the ‘bad savage’. The various American peoples evoked different images by the Spaniards and attracted more or less sympathies. For example, the Araucanos were associated with braveness and independence, and, the Patogones were rather described as miserable and ‘animal-like’ people. The ethnic group that caused the most controversy were the Jíbaros whom the Spaniards saw as clear manifestations of the ‘bad savage’, due to their social anarchy, misanthropy as well as their religious indifference. Particularly the last aspect was of considerable weight; therefore, it is not surprising that the Spaniards rejected the Jíbaros from their Catholic ideal.

Among the few concrete research projects undertaken in this period of time is the work of some missionaries. The publications of Jacinto de Carvajal (1648), who carried out expeditions along the rivers of Santo Domingo, Apúre and the Orinoco, described the geography as well as the fauna, flora and anthropology of the Llanos. He developed large lists of ethnic groups with their more or less precise localization, along with excellent descriptions of their traditions, rituals and diverse habits. In 1741 José Gumilla presented a book focused mainly on the missionary activity, in which he treated with the same passion aspects of the language, physical appearance and culture of the Indian groups living on both sides of the River Orinoco. Another example is Miguel del Barco (1706–90), who described in his work Historia natural y crónica de la antigua California (1757) first the animals, then plants, mineralogy and finally the subjects of anthropological matters, particularly the indigenous languages and cultures of California. In the second, apparently added, part of his work, known as crónica, he addresses the Spanish activities in this region, particularly the missionary labour.

These three cases belong to what can be considered ‘late naturalism’, a period of time which connected the discoveries of the sixteenth century with the so-called scientific
travels of the eighteenth century. According to Alcina Franch, in the first half of the eighteenth century a confluence of two traditions can be observed: One is represented by the naturalism of the prior centuries, typical for the labour of the intellectuals of this period of time on the American continents, and the other more recent tradition of a rather scientific character, which proceeded from Europe and had a specific interest for the territories in the New World. This preference was in part political and always of an economical nature, since the incipient capitalism, which was to peak in the second half of this century, had at the same time a need for raw materials, places for experimentations with cultivations and, furthermore, markets for the expansion of Western Europe.27

With this focus and reference to the Spanish Americanism, the seventeenth century and the first part of the eighteenth can be considered as a period of transition, in which fewer new aspects were discovered, but where the bases were prepared for the future developments.

PERIOD OF THE GRAND SCIENTIFIC TRAVELS: 1750–1862

With the Enlightenment, from the second half of the eighteenth century an important project to modernize the country began. The ministers of the Spanish monarch Carlos III pretended to reform the Antiguo Régimen from inside the regime, and this was reflected in their opposition to the isolation of Spain, towards the Inquisition as well as the exaggerated privileges of the aristocracy, which were conceived as obstacles for the progress of the country.28 Moreover, the enlightened Bourbons had a major cultural interest; among other ways this became evident in numerous scientific expeditions that were sent towards different regions of America.

These travels, encouraged and patronized by the Crown or by different institutions, caused a significant advancement in the knowledge about the New World, basically in the fields of botanical, geological, zoological or cultural questions. Several of these expeditions were called ‘vaccination expeditions’, and their aim was the protection of the indigenous population against diseases, for instance smallpox. It remained difficult to establish a clear category for these scientific expeditions, because even if the main focus were directed to a specific field, this did not diminish their interest for other collateral aspects or subjects of equal scientific value, such as anthropology or archaeology.

What can be asserted is that in this epoch there was no predilection for the human element, it was rather conceived as a part of the whole complex of natural sciences. The eighteenth century represented the rise of the biological and natural sciences, which explains why a significant number of the Spanish scientific expeditions of this period had a particular fondness for botanical and zoological questions. Important expeditions in a more anthropological context were those directed by Alejandro Malaspina and Guillermo Dupaix; thus their principal characteristics will be mentioned as representative examples.

The large expedition of Alessandro Malaspina (1754–1810), an Italian born nobleman and naval officer in Spanish service, and José Bustamante y Guerra (1759–1825) was undertaken along the American and the Asian coasts in the Pacific Oceanic during the years 1789 to 1794 and constituted one of the major economic, scientific and logistic efforts achieved by a European country during this fruitful period of time. The group of naturalists on this expedition had an intrinsic fondness
for the topics related to geography and particularly the improvement of the cartography of the coasts along where this expedition sailed, as well as the fauna and flora of the regions visited. Regarding the more anthropological questions, it can be said that though they were not focusing on these matters in particular, from an ethnographical point of view the Malaspina expedition is considered one of the most important ones of its epoch. During its journey from south to north along the Pacific coast of America, numerous and valuable data about the various indigenous groups was collected, concerning the human beings themselves, their culture, instruments, clothing, ornaments, celebrations and funeral customs.

Figure 3.3  Alessandro Malaspina  
© Mary Evans/Iberfoto
Figure 3.4  Nootha Indian, drawn during Malaspina’s visit to the Spanish outpost on Vancouver Island
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Guillermo Dupaix (1750–1817), on the other hand, with his travels through Mexico between 1805 and 1808, became one of the pioneers of the archaeological sciences. The travels of Dupaix can be taken as the culmination of a posture of archaeological curiosity at the end of the eighteenth century, and on the other hand, as the first of a large series of what we have called ‘archaeological travellers’. He would compare his discoveries in Mexico constantly with what he had read about Egyptian, Greek and Roman artwork. Through this method, very soon he became aware of some deficiencies in the first archaeological questions of his time and this gradually evolved into methods that we could qualify as to some extent scientific.

Nevertheless, the veritably innovative aspect of his approach was his anthropological interest from the point of view of an archeologist, showing the link between the cultures he encountered with the constructors of the artwork he described. Meanwhile, during the entire nineteenth century and occasionally even at the beginning of the twentieth century, many archeologists did not get further than an esthetic or stylistic interpretation of the objects, or their pure classification. Dupaix – foreseeing what was going to be the real content of archeological science – explained that the major interest was not in the objects themselves, but in the fact that they were the evidence to understand their complex culture.

These scientific travels coincided with a new spirit in European society known as exoticism and defined as a certain fascination for foreign and distant cultures or ways of life. The enlightened Spanish nation again manifested its interest in the American cultures, although now from a different angle: a considerable number of publications around the idea of the ‘good savage’ came up, particularly dramas with a romantic–philosophical background. In these writings, the enlightened idea became apparent that it would have been better to civilize the Indians instead of destroying them as the conquerors had done. This exoticism materialized in a certain passion for the curiosities brought from America by those travelers, and as a consequence, in gathering these rarities.

A crucial role in this context was played by the Spanish king Carlos III, as the art of collection reached its peak during his kingship. Due to his special predilection for the objects coming from the New World, he instructed the colonies in America to collect samples of all types of material. Therefore, several expeditions were sent overseas with the aim to remit to the Peninsula all types of material that belonged to both the natural and the social sciences. In this context a number of expeditions can be highlighted: the expedition of Martín de Sessé y Lacasta and José Mariano Mociño in New Spain (1787–1803), the voyage of Hipólito Ruiz and Joseph Pavón through Peru and Chile (1777–88), the long experience of the Spanish botanist and physician José Celestino Mutis in Nueva Granada and furthermore the scientific exploration of Cuba conducted by the Count of Mopox (1796–1802) as well as Félix Azara’s expedition through Mesoamerica (1781–1801).

In order to display the numerous objects gathered at the most distant points of America, in the year 1771 the Real Gabinete de Historia Natural in Madrid was created, being officially opened in 1776 under the direction of the natural scientist Pedro Franco Dávila (1711–86). This demonstrates that the ethnographic–anthropologic interest of this period of time had a very important museographic or collectionist component, since in the Real Gabinete de Historia Natural almost the same significance was given to the anthropological and archaeological collections as
to the objects of a strictly natural sciences provenance. Besides these kinds of
collections, Carlos III also expressed a notable fondness for American antiquities and
he was considered the protecting spirit and first promoter of the archaeology in Spain
– a role that was assumed and developed by his successor Carlos IV. Thanks to the
effort of Carlos III, archaeology emerged as a scientific branch, with the first
excavations carried out in the years 1785 and 1787 in the Maya ruins of Palenque,
which had considerable significance as the beginning of the official study of ancient
cultures. The eighteenth century was not only an important period for travellers and
collectors, but as a consequence of these circumstances, the interest to classify the
obtained material arose. The idea of the classification emerged from the necessity to
sort the newly acquired plants in the botanical gardens and the collections in the
 cabinets and perhaps even more from the need to prepare and print catalogues of the
obtained material.

In this context, the labour of Carl Linnaeus (1707–78) leading to the creation of a
taxonomical system of universal value should be emphasized. This system permitted
the natural scientists of the entire world to understand each other and enabled them
to accumulate in a rational manner the acquired knowledge of the nature in a way
which facilitated comparison of this information coming from very different places.34

Another decisive event that resulted from the arrival of an increased amount of
information from the New World in those times, was the creation of the Archivo
General de Indias in 1785 by the historian Juan Bautista Muñoz (1754–99) in
Sevilla.35 This archive was built to collect all types of documents such as unpublished
travel reports of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, countless geographical
surveys, various manuscripts on natural history as well as the entire official
correspondence between Spain and its colonial territories in America. At the same
time, Muñoz began working on his opus magnum Historia del Nuevo Mundo,36
which included a compilation of numerous and relevant facts about the indigenous
peoples of America. It constituted a clear replication from Spain’s side to the work of
William Robertson (1721–93) titled The History of America, published in 1777,
which revealed the English point of view, and was sought to present the contribution
of Spain to American natural history and geography.37 Unfortunately, Muñoz was
only able to finish the first volume, leaving behind countless preparative documents.38

In this manner, the travels of the eighteenth and the first years of the nineteenth
century with all their corresponding consequences, directly or indirectly set the tone
for the beginning of scientific Americanism in the second half of the nineteenth century.
Nevertheless, there was a crucial event which ruptured this process for a considerable
period of time: That event was the end of the Spanish rule in their American colonies
as one of the results of its War of Independence against the French in the context of
the European Napoleonic wars.39 This major change emerged in most Hispanic
territories at approximately the same time and provoked a radical cut in the relationship
of the ancient colonies with their mother country. Until the beginning of the 1860s,
Spain refused to admit this independence and still intended to recover its former
American belongings. Therefore, from Spain’s side there was also a loss of scientific
interest in these territories and thus the expeditions and the research in these regions
of the New World were suspended. Another consequence of the independence of the
American countries was the end of the strict and exclusive politics established by the
Spaniards for their colonies that prohibited scientific research conducted by other
European nations in these territories. The expeditions under the auspices of the Spanish Crown were then substituted by travels, missionary work or expeditions organized by other countries, mostly European. There were also progressively more and more North American initiatives. In this context we can discuss a certain ‘rediscovery’ of America as a result of the decline of the Spanish empire: scholars no longer had to rely upon the information given by Spanish authors, as they were now able to undertake their own studies according to their own questions and methodology.

Though until the year 1862 no research of relevance launched in America can be pointed out, there was certain progress in the anthropological sciences in Spain, which also had its impact on the theoretical development of the Spanish Americanism. The first anthropological publications of a general character appeared, for example, the philosophical-moral treatise of Vicente Adam entitled Lecciones de Antropología ético político-religiosa⁴⁰ or the work of Francisco Fabra y Soldevila with the title Filosofía de la legislación natural, fundada en la Antropología.⁴¹

A considerable number of these first enthusiasts of anthropology in the early nineteenth century were physicians. Their incentive for increasing their studies in this aspect was their desire to categorize the human being; which soon turned out to be one of the favourite discussion topics in the national Ateneos, the traditional forum for intellectual discussions.

In general it can be presumed that in the period of time described above, the interest for America was no longer inspired because of it being something magic, susceptible of numerous interpretations, but by the fact that it was now something more familiar, better known and conceivable for Europeans. In contrast to prior centuries, the base for manifestations of Americanism was rationalism. One consequence of this new spirit was the reestablishment and redefinition of the order of the world, by integrating the American cultures in the general history of mankind.

**PHASE OF FORMATION: 1862–1936**

Since the 1860s, Spain recognized the impossibility of recovering its colonies and this was manifested by a change of its policy towards these countries. As a consequence, new relations were established with these independent republics, though now under a different concept: no longer in the frame of the motherland–colony relationship, but as an encounter of equality between sovereign governments. The proof of this modified attitude was the dispatch of a new scientific expedition to America in 1862: the Comisión Científica del Pacífico (CCP), a Spanish scientific expedition to the Pacific,⁴² under the leadership of Marcos Jiménez de la Espada (1831–98).⁴³ The idea for this project was born in 1860 due to the lack of material from the New World for the universities and museums; finally two years later, the departure of a naval squadron to the coast of South America was approved, organized by the Spanish government in order to include a commission of several scientists tasked to carry out an in-depth study of the geography, fauna, flora, etc. Among these specialists in different fields there was also the anthropologist Manuel Almagro y Vega, who was responsible for the research undertaken on the indigenous cultures, being the first Spanish anthropologist with this academic denomination conducting studies in America.⁴⁴

Until their return in 1866 the participants of this project spent almost four years travelling through different countries of America, from time to time divided in smaller
groups in order to work in a more effective way, studying in detail the reality of this world and collecting an elevated number of objects of the encountered material culture. These data and collections were sent to the Peninsula and there received by a special commission, in charge of cataloguing and arranging the collections until the return of the members of the expedition. Shortly after their return to Spain, this material was exposed to the public in the context of a major exhibition prepared in the Real Jardín Botánico of Madrid. Unfortunately, the political and economic problems that Spain had to face at this point in time deferred the study of this collection according to the planned manner. They were consigned to the Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, from where they would be later on transferred to other places, such as the Museo de América and the Museo Nacional de Etnología, both located in the Spanish capital.

The Comisión Científica del Pacífico can be regarded as the decisive event for the development of the Spanish Americanism in the second half of the nineteenth century, since now the focus, under which America was studied, had changed: for the first time the New Continent was approached as an autonomous region. A new generation of researchers had been formed, who now saw America as completely independent and different from Spain, a territory where Spaniards were to be merely neutral observers.

Aside from this scientific exploration, there was only sparse Spanish activity in America in this period of time. Indeed this was the last large voyage to America undertaken by Spain and it took almost one century until another interdisciplinary project was accomplished; meanwhile the travelers and scientists from other countries showed a substantial eagerness to conduct their research in these regions.

Nevertheless, during the same years the institutionalization of anthropology in Spain progressed considerably through the creation of museums, anthropological societies, research laboratories or similar institutions. A very important personality in this process was Pedro González Velasco, considered also as one of the first modern anthropologists in Spain. In 1865 he created the Sociedad Antropológica Española, which edited two publications: the Revista de Antropología (1874), and the Antropología moderna (1883). In addition to this editorial activity, the Society promoted a favourable environment for teaching as well as for debate of contemporary scientific questions such as the evolutionist theory of Charles Darwin regarding the classification of the races and the variety as well as the origin of the human species. Another merit of this institution was the study of the ethnographical problems using as their basis the extensive information of the scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth century (Gómara, Fernández de Oviedo, Diaz de Castillo, Francisco de Xerez, Cieza de León, etc.).

In 1867 the Museo Arqueológico Nacional was created, to which the historic collection – such as the antiquities and rarities of the Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, the former Real Gabinete de Historia Natural – was transferred. The objects of American origin were there established in different categories, which were primarily comprised of archaeological and ethnographic objects, next to a smaller section of colonial art.

Also, due to the personal initiative of González Velasco, in 1875 the Museo Nacional de Etnología was founded as the first museum with an anthropological character in Spain. During its history it has undergone different stages, having been renamed, changed its institutional situation and, as a consequence, its corresponding...
scientific conceptions as well. Nonetheless, this museum was not merely a place for the exposure of objects since it also collaborated closely with other scientific institutions. It was, for instance, the first director of this museum, Manuel Antón Ferrándiz, who implemented anthropological studies in the Spanish university in the year 1892. He started teaching in the laboratory that he created in the museum, where he inaugurated a free professorship in 1885. Finally in 1892 he established a chair of anthropology in the faculty for science of the Universidad Central de Madrid.50

By reason of the IV International Americanist Congress celebrated in 1881, an important exhibition of the objects coming from the New World was organized, this being the second one after the one exposed in the Real Jardín Botánico. Nevertheless, due to various difficulties and the limited knowledge acquired in those days about the ancient history of America, it was difficult to assign the objects to their corresponding cultures or ethnic groups, and the lack of geographic information precluded comparisons with already classified pieces in other museums.

Another significant event of that time related with the Americanist concerns, was the first official historic (and not religious) celebration of the discovery of America: the fourth centennial of 1892.51 Dozens of chronicles were edited for the first time, several exhibitions were organized, besides important congresses and scientific meetings.52 Also numerous Latin American countries participated in this commemoration with a huge number of objects, coming both from public property and from private collections. The reaction provoked in the Spanish society by this centennial reflects the different attitude of the people that existed in those days towards America. Besides the critical voices who pointed out the violence and injustice committed during the conquest of America, there were numerous defences of the civilizing work undertaken by Spain in the New World. Some were obsessed with the revitalization of the Spanish colonialization, and some maintained a rather nationalist position and in spite of the intellectual and political efforts to take up again the Americanist concerns on a new basis, they continued to see America basically as a problem and not as an assimilable cultural area.53

In the midst of this process of institutionalization of scientific Americanism there was also a decisive political development that produced a major change in the national self-consciousness of Spain: that was the independence of the last Spanish colonies, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. As a consequence of this loss the Spanish society suffered a painful disinterest regarding America. The intellectuals and the writers of this country constituted what later would be called the Generación del 98, a critical movement that searched in society the causes of this colonial decadency in the midst of the epoch of major English and French imperialism.

One consequence of this political incidence was the duality of the scientific interest in America from 1898 onward: on one hand, rather from the left wing of society, there was a feeling of shame about what had happened in the former colonies and they preferred to forget about this experience, and on the other hand, people situated more in the right wing, continued to see America as something glorious, where the merits of Spain were to be highlighted. In the following years, and particularly with the beginning of World War I, this duality was intensified, which resulted in the fact that in Spain, until the end of the 1920s, there was no progress in the field of American anthropology.

Looking at this panorama of activities and problems relating to the development of anthropology and more precisely to the Americanism of the second half of the
nineteenth century, the question about the contribution of this period of time to the approach towards this scientific branch emerges. It is certain that the years between 1868 and 1936 were the most unstable period in Spanish politics and that these circumstances naturally had their impact on the development of sciences in general – and even more on those concerning social aspects. This became evident in the inability to establish a scientific programme. Nonetheless, in spite of these difficulties, along these years the foundation was prepared for modern Spanish anthropology. The earlier mentioned ensemble of expeditions, travels, exhibits, congresses, creation of institutions, etc. facilitated the birth of anthropology as a modern science in the second half of the nineteenth century. The objects gathered in prior expeditions not only served to enrich the collections, but also they were now studied in detail in the newly established research centres of the museums and universities. This was the context in which scientific Americanism emerged, distinguishing itself from prior scientific travels through a more theoretic basis, in connection with concrete approaches to the problems as well as through different ideological currents.

**FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

From its first contact with the western world the American continent became a magnificent scenario where under varying circumstances in different periods of time, Spain conducted important research projects and studies. Due to the role this country played in the process of the conquest as well as the scientific discovery of the *New World*, Americanism in its anthropological or historical facets is an integral part of its own past and not a mere scientific or scholarly field as could be said for some other countries. Therefore, the history of Americanist anthropology in Spain should be studied depending on the changes, struggles and ideological comings and goings of the last 500 years. For these reasons, the present article demonstrates the connections between the particular approach of the research and the contemporary philosophical background in each period of time.

It can be asserted that numerous interesting anthropological studies in America were already conducted shortly after the conquest, in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The motivation for those researchers to carry out their scientific activities might have been curiosity, ambition, ardour for adventures, love for the fellow human being or simply compliance with their duties, since many were devoted to the missionary work or employed in other ways for the conquering government. In any event, through their general observations and annotations, their interest in other societies, their study of the native languages (which led to the first dictionaries), and finally the fact that they lived long periods of time among the Indians, the basis for modern fieldwork was set.

The activities and the mentality of the Spanish traveler of the eighteenth century cannot be compared with the Americanist work undertaken by the writers of the sixteenth century. As already mentioned, these were basically travelers who spent only a short time with the populations they visited. What motivated them was more a general curiosity for the American world and less a particular interest for its cultures; rather, this was considered as another integral part of the foreign natural landscape, such as the minerals or the plants. Also in the cabinets of curiosities, the Indians were not of interest as representatives of their particular cultural heritage, but
rather their belongings as well as their products were shown as rare objects, due to
the collectionist eagerness that was predominant in that society.

From the second half of the nineteenth century and through the Comisión Científica
al Pacífico, finally the interest for American cultures was resurrected, an interest that
in a way shows similarities with that of the first naturalist of the sixteenth century,
although, as a matter of course in the nineteenth century, according to the general
tendencies of this epoch, there was less speculative background and more of a
scientific approach.

In conclusion, it can be said that as a result of all these research projects and studies
in the field of American anthropology from the time of the discovery until our days –
independently of the concrete intentions of each epoch – the Spanish Americanism is
based on a rich tradition. The historical conditions for this process were the encounter
and establishment of connections between the two hemispheres of the world, studied
in the scope of Atlantic History. From the sixteenth century, this country contributed
considerably to the development of empirical practices. The Spanish Crown used the
knowledge of natural history to create its Atlantic empire, and American ethnography
and anthropology to control and administer these territories. In the process of
establishing a long-distance empire, Spain provided a paradigmatic case to explore the
relations between politics and knowledge – and particularly the interconnection of
both, as the case of the development of Spanish Americanism during the history
shows. Thus, its contribution to the scientific exploration of the far side of the Atlantic
was shaped by the experience of being pioneers in this endeavour; Spaniards writing
the history of the New World with their unique approach, interest and conditions
constitute a relevant branch of Atlantic History.

NOTES

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Rebok, ‘Americanismo, ciencia e ideología: La actividad americanista española a través de
from Félix Jiménez Villalba, subdirector at the Museo de América in Madrid, was of utmost
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1 Among the works that reflect on the Spanish Atlantic are: J. Cañizares-Esguerra, Nature,
Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian New World,
Spanish-American Empire and the Early Scientific Revolution, Austin: University of Texas
Press, 2006; Daniela Bleichmar, et al. (eds), Science in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires,
2 Barrera-Osorio, op.cit., p. 128.
3 M. M. Marzal, Historia de la antropología indigenista: México y Perú, Barcelona:
4 Ibid., p. 21.
The encomienda system was a trusteeship labour system that was employed by the Spanish Crown on the native population during the colonization of the New World.


Alcina Franch, op. cit., pp. 189–90.

Already in the year 1511 an official position had been created with the title *Cronista de Indias del Rey*, whose work can be compared with the one of a librarian in our days.


A good analysis of Oviedo’s work is found in: Barrera-Osorio, op. cit., pp. 104–12.

For more information please see Rebok, op. cit., pp. 101–3.


For more details on diverse campaigns to gather information see ibid., chapter ‘Circuits of information. Reports from the New World’.


Ibid., p. 9.


Alcina Franch, op. cit., p. 192.


Alcina Franch, op. cit., p. 195.


Alcina Franch, op. cit., p. 223.


38. For a good analysis about Muñoz’s work, the creation of the archive and the difficulties he had to face publishing his *Historia del Nuevo Mundo* see ibidem, pp. 190–203.

39. Also known as the Peninsular War.


41. F. Fabra y Soldevila, *Filosofía de la legislación natural, fundada en la antropología o en el conocimiento de la naturaleza del hombre y de sus relaciones con los demas seres*, Madrid: Imprenta del Colegio de SordoMudos, 1838.


44. M. Almagro, *Breve descripción de los viajes hechos en América por la Comisión Científica enviada por el Gobierno de S. M. C. durante los años de 1862 a 1866*, Madrid: M. Rivadeneyra, 1866.


52 Ibid., pp. 24–25.

53 Gonzalez Alcantud, op. cit., p. 19.


55 Barrera-Osorio, op. cit., p. 133.